

INSPIRATION, INERRANCY, AND THE OT CANON: THE PLACE OF TEXTUAL UPDATING IN AN INERRANT VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

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For good reason, there are often strong emotions attached to the issues of inspiration, inerrancy, the autographa, and the canon. This article does not seek to overturn a conservative or evangelical understanding of the biblical doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy. I wholeheartedly endorse the commonly held evangelical view of both theological concepts and do not question that God superintended the entire process of inscripturation with the result that the OT Scriptures were God-breathed. Those Scriptures are without error, infallible, and fully reliable. The article proposes a biblically based idea that fits within a firm and enthusiastic belief in inspiration and inerrancy. I seek to show that some commonly used definitions of key terms, especially "autographa" and "canonicity," are defined primarily from a NT perspective and do not give sufficient attention to some of the realities of the OT text. Thus minor adjustments must be made in how scholars articulate various aspects of the doctrine of Scripture.

After laying a brief theological foundation and drawing attention to some features unique to the OT that figure into understanding the process of its inscripturation, the present article delineates some issues related to the concept of textual updating and examines several possible examples of inspired textual updating. After considering some ways in which evangelicals relate this idea of textual updating to a belief in inerrancy, I will survey several past and present proponents of the view proposed here. Finally, the paper will address a few of the objections that have been or could be raised against this proposal.

I. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION: BASIC DEFINITIONS (INSPIRATION, INERRANCY, AND CANON)

Millard Erickson defines inspiration as "that supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit upon the Scripture writers which rendered their writings an accurate record of the revelation or which resulted in what they wrote actually being the Word of God."¹ The apostle Paul affirmed that "all

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¹ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983) 199. Charles Hodge affirms that inspiration was "an influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of certain select men, which

Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim 3:16), and Peter wrote that "prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet 1:21). The "inspiration" or "spiration" of the Scriptures, that is, the fact that they are God-breathed, emphasizes "the divine source and initiative rather than human genius or creativity."² God's involvement in the process of inscripturation, that period of time in which the entirety of the Scriptures came into being, demonstrates that those Scriptures ultimately come from him.

While inspiration primarily concerns the quality of the finished product rather than the process of inscripturation, the divine-human authorship of the Scriptures raises the tension as to how those Scriptures came into being. Most scholars contend that the Holy Spirit superintended the biblical writers throughout the process of inscripturation. Whether it concerns a biblical book or books whose author is stated (like the Pentateuch) or a book or books that went through a longer period of composition and could have involved more than one writer (like Samuel, Kings, and the Psalms), the reality of the biblical doctrine of inspiration guarantees the accuracy and infallibility of the biblical book until it reaches its final stage of composition.

Building on the concept of inspiration, the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy states: "We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture."³ This brings up the question, "What constitutes an autograph or the autographa?" In general, scholars use the term "autographa" to refer to the first or original copies of the biblical documents, that is, the material that the author actually wrote himself.⁴ Its basic definition normally connotes the idea of the *original writing* of a biblical book. According to the customary definition in theological discussions, "autographa" refers to an unchanging form of text whereby the original document is identical to the final canonical form of a given OT biblical book. In light of this understanding of the concept of the "autographa" and owing to the significant role it plays in the inerrancy debate, the writings designated

rendered them the organs of God for the infallible communication of His mind and will. They were in such a sense the organs of God that what they said, God said" (*Systematic Theology* [New York: Scribner, Armstrong, and Co., 1872] 1:154). B. B. Warfield proposed that "the Bible is the Word of God in such a sense that its words, though written by men and bearing indelibly impressed upon them the marks of their human origin, were written, nevertheless, under such an influence of the Holy Ghost as to be also the words of God, the adequate expression of His mind and will. It has always recognized that this conception of co-authorship implies that the Spirit's superintendence extends to the choice of the words used by the human authors (verbal inspiration), and preserves its product from everything inconsistent with a divine authorship—thus securing, among other things, that entire truthfulness which is everywhere presupposed in and asserted for Scripture by the Biblical writers (inerrancy)" (*The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* [ed. S. Craig; Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1948] 173).

² David S. Dockery, "The Divine-Human Authorship of Inspired Scripture," in *Authority and Inspiration: A Baptist Perspective* (ed. Duane Garrett and Richard Melick, Jr.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 20.

³ Article X; the entire statement is included as an appendix in *Inerrancy* (ed. N. Geisler; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) 493–502.

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 96.

as autographa would not seem capable of being in flux or susceptible to change.

The "canon" of Scripture involves "the list of all the books that belong in the Bible"⁵ or "the list of books that are reckoned as Holy Scriptures . . . reckoned as supremely authoritative for belief and conduct."⁶ Theologically, inspiration serves as the foundation for the canonicity of a biblical book. In other words, God's activity determines canonicity. As E. J. Young points out, "That which determines the canonicity of a book, therefore, is the fact that the book is inspired of God. Hence a distinction is properly made between the authority which the OT books possess as divinely inspired, and the recognition of that authority on the part of Israel."⁷ Practically, God's people recognized this canonicity primarily by virtue of the identity of the prophetic spokesman through whom the book was given.⁸ Once a book was recognized as canonical, God's people sought to safeguard that portion of sacred Scripture. During the thousand years or so of OT compositional history a number of written works—22 or 24 according to the Jewish canon and 39 books according to the Protestant canon—gained canonical status.

II. SOME UNIQUE FEATURES OF THE OT CANON

Unlike the NT books which were composed and compiled over approximately a sixty-year period, the books of the OT canon were composed and compiled during a period of about a thousand years, assuming an early date for the Exodus and the close of the canon around 400 BC. During that millennium, there were multitudes of linguistic, cultural, and geographic changes, to name only a few. The potential for various significant changes of this kind gives rise to the question, "Did this long compositional history and the many changes in the world of the Bible impact the process of completion of the OT canon?"

In the following discussion I contend that the time span between the initial composition of certain biblical books and the close of the OT canon occasioned the need for various editorial revisions, although on a relatively small scale. The relationship between textual updating and inspiration and canonicity may be summarized in five propositions:

1. The customary concept of the OT canon is locked in too tightly with the original or initial form of a biblical book. In light of the various editorial

⁵ Ibid. 54.

⁶ F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments* (rev. ed.; New York: Revell, 1963) 95.

⁷ E. J. Young, "The Canon of the Old Testament," in *Revelation and the Bible* (ed. Carl F. H. Henry; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958) 156. Cf. René Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (trans. H. Needham; Chicago: Moody, 1969) 159–62.

⁸ This is the primary criterion identified by R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Scriptures* (Greenville, SC: A Press, 1995) 154–77. F. F. Bruce (*The Canon of Scripture* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988] 255–69) and N. Geisler and W. Nix (*A General Introduction to the Bible: Revised and Expanded* [Chicago: Moody, 1986] 221–34) offer other criteria for recognizing a given book's canonicity.

revisions that seem to be present in the text of the OT (see the survey below), I suggest that we differentiate between the preliminary and final canonical form of a biblical book.⁹ By the word “preliminary,” I am not suggesting a deficient or lacking canonical form, but a canonical status that *has not yet been finalized*. During the entire period in which God was giving his Word to mankind, the people of God regarded a given biblical book as canonical (see figure #1). In other words, throughout the composition history of the OT, the God-breathed nature of each biblical book gave that book canonical status in the eyes of the believing community.

2. In light of the doctrine of biblical inspiration, God guarantees the accuracy of everything involved in the process of inscripturation. I picture inscripturation as the umbrella that describes the whole process by which God provided his Word through his prophetic spokesmen. This paper seeks to show that the initial composition of a biblical book *and* any editorial revisions of a biblical book before the finalization of the OT canon are part of God-breathed Scripture (see figure 1). Their inerrancy, canonicity, and “autograph-like” status derive entirely from divine inspiration.

3. In light of the unchanging nature of the autographa (according to standard theological definitions), I prefer to reserve the term “autographa” (which refers to the “original” writing according to its basic definition) in the technical sense for the final form of the OT Scriptures, the text-form transmitted by the scribes (after the close of the OT canon) without any divinely endorsed content changes.

4. The close of the OT canon, that is, the time when no more biblical books were being composed and God’s revelation of his will for humanity had ceased (as it relates to the OT) functions as the dividing line between inspired editorial activity and uninspired scribal activity (see figure 2). Modernizations, explanatory glosses, and any similar phenomena can be described as inspired editorial activity only if they are part of the compositional history of the OT, that is, before the close of the OT canon. In other words, editorial updating that took place prior to the close of the canon belongs to the process of inscripturation and is part of the inspired, inerrant text of Scripture. Any updating that takes place after that juncture belongs to the domain of textual criticism and represents a variant from the autographa.

5. In light of the fact that recognition of canonicity is integrally connected to prophetic authorship, my assumption is that only recognized individuals, that is, prophetic figures whose adjustment of the biblical text would have been accepted by the Israelite community of faith, would have been able to participate in this “updating” process.

⁹ R. D. Bergen calls my “preliminary canonical form” “precanonical text” (*1, 2 Samuel* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996] 31).

FIGURE 1

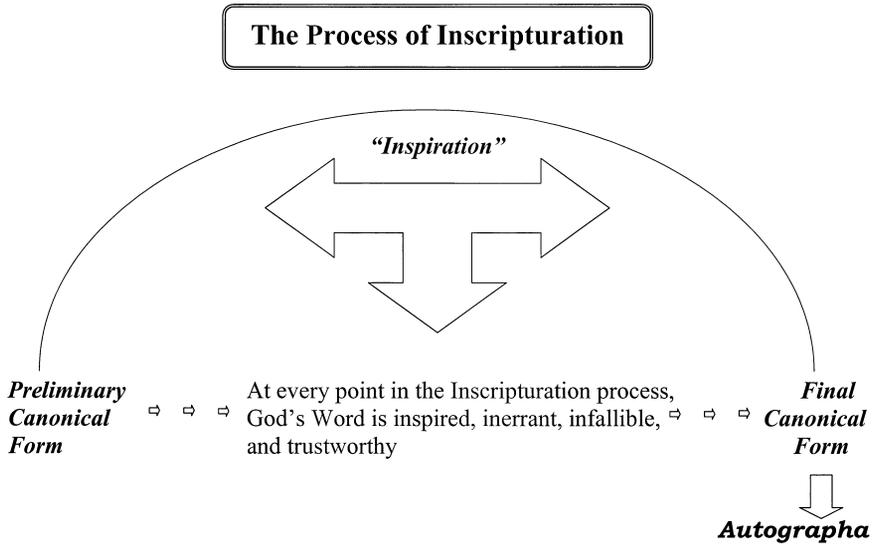
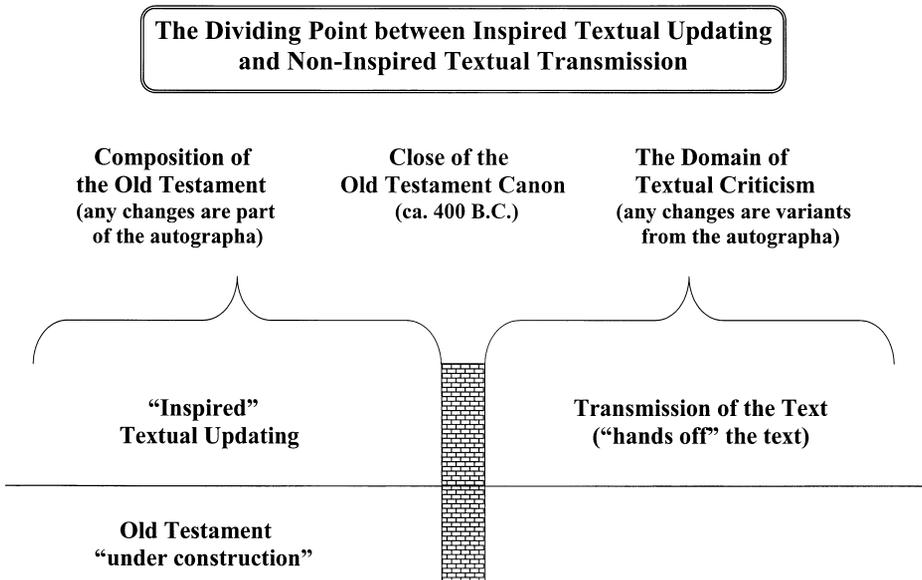


FIGURE 2



Here is the essential refinement proposed by this paper. Within the canonical process, and subsequent to the initial writing of a biblical book or books, a God-chosen individual or prophetic figure under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit could adjust, revise, or update pre-existing biblical material in order to make a given Scripture passage understandable to succeeding generations. Those revisions, which occurred within the compositional history of the OT, are also inspired and inerrant.

III. POSSIBLE EXAMPLES OF INSPIRED TEXTUAL UPDATING

Since we do not possess texts from that early period that can evidence any textual updating that took place during the compositional process, we are limited to the biblical text available to us today. The present section of the paper considers the composition of certain biblical books that have no specified author and surveys various specific biblical passages that constitute examples of textual updating. It will also briefly touch on the issue of the development of the Hebrew language.

1. *The example of biblical books that were composed over a relatively long period of time.* Beckwith points out that the concept of canonicity was not merely punctiliar but also part of a process. For example, when the Psalter was composed over a number of years, individual psalms were gathered into collections that were then gathered into books and eventually brought together into the entire Psalter. At all points along the way, an individual psalm had canonical status as part of the OT Scriptures.¹⁰ The books of Kings could have been composed over a long period of time and might have involved more than one historian/writer.¹¹ If more than one writer/compiler participated in the composition of the books of Kings, each unnamed prophetic figure delivered to the next writer an authoritative piece. These books that were compiled over a period of time and underwent editorial reshaping do not violate a conservative understanding of the inspiration of the Scriptures. The book of Proverbs is primarily Solomonic, but has “pieces” added by someone after Solomon (e.g. other Solomonic proverbs copied by officials of King Hezekiah, chs. 25–29; words of Agur, ch. 30; words of King Lemuel, ch. 31). In each case, an unnamed figure added these words to the book of Proverbs. This writer contends that the children of Israel would have regarded the proverbs of Solomon as canonical before and after the other sections of proverbial material were added.

2. *Specific biblical passages.*

a. *Deut 34:1–12.* Unger (and most OT scholars) points to the narration of Moses’ death, burial, and final tribute to his prophetic ministry in Deut

¹⁰ R. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985) 68.

¹¹ The books of the Kings cover a time period from the end of King David’s life until the time of King Jehoiachin’s release from Babylonian prison (ca. 550 BC).

34:1–12 as “an obvious post-Mosaic addition.”¹² Gleason Archer concludes that the final chapter of Deuteronomy is “demonstrably post-Mosaic.”¹³ An unnamed prophetic figure added ch. 34 sometime after Moses completed his work on the Pentateuch. Both prior to and after the addition of ch. 34, the Pentateuch was fully inspired, authoritative, and inerrant.¹⁴

b. *Gen 14:14*. The place name “Dan” often appears in the historical books as a reference to the northernmost point of the Promised Land (Judg 18:29; 20:1; 1 Kgs 12:29–30; 15:20; etc.) and is part of the common geographical expression, “from Dan to Beersheba” (1 Sam 3:20; 2 Sam 3:10; 17:11; 24:2, 15; 1 Kgs 4:25). It is customarily identified with Tell el Qadi. This ancient city was known as Laish in the Egyptian execration texts and Mari texts.¹⁵ The city of Dan received its name in the settlement period when the Danite tribe migrated north and conquered the city of Laish (Gen 14:14)/Leshem (Josh 19:47–48). Consequently, it appears that this place did not receive the name of Dan until after the Mosaic period (Judg 18:29).¹⁶

Several scholars argue that this mention of Dan is indeed Mosaic. Wood points to a city named Dan-jaan, mentioned in 2 Sam 24:6, which he locates in Gilead.¹⁷ Archer points out that the place name “Dan” appears as early as the second Egyptian dynasty¹⁸ (which ended ca. 2700 BC).¹⁹ Three facts argue against the Mosaic authorship of this place name. In the first place, the presence of a place name in ancient Egyptian literature does not demonstrate that the name Dan in Genesis 14 is Mosaic. It simply indicates that the place name of Dan was attested in pre-Mosaic times. Secondly, simply because a city named Dan existed in David’s day does not mean that it existed in Abraham’s time. Finally, the precise location of this Dan-jaan is unknown. A number of scholars equate it with Israelite Dan, located at the northern extremity of Israel’s boundaries.²⁰

¹² Merrill F. Unger, *Introductory Guide to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1951) 239. He also cites Exod 11:3 and Num 12:3 as possible post-Mosaic glosses since they praise Moses in such a manner that Moses might not have written them (ibid.).

¹³ Gleason Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (updated and rev. ed.; Chicago: Moody, 1994) 276.

¹⁴ Some readers of an earlier form of this paper regard Deuteronomy 34 as Mosaic and reject this passage as potential evidence for the thesis of the present article. These individuals recognize that to grant post-Mosaic status to chapter 34 opens the door to the very issue with which this paper deals. The many scholars who accept the post-Mosaic composition of Deuteronomy 34 must consider how that conclusion fits with their understanding of bibliography.

¹⁵ N. Sarna, *Genesis* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1989) 108.

¹⁶ At the very least, this migration took place some time after Joshua allocated the land to the tribes in ca. 1399 BC.

¹⁷ Leon Wood, *A Survey of Israel’s History* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 40; cf. H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1942) 1.459. Wood (p. 40) does add that a later scribe might have substituted “Dan” for the city’s older, less familiar, name in the interest of clarity.

¹⁸ Archer, *Survey* 228.

¹⁹ James K. Hoffmeier, “Egyptians,” in *Peoples of the Old Testament World* (ed. A. Hoerth, G. Mattingly, and E. Yamauchi; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 255–56.

²⁰ A. Anderson, *2 Samuel* (Dallas: Word, 1989) 285; Robert Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel* 476; P. K. McCarter, Jr., *II Samuel* (New York: Doubleday, 1984) 510; Ronald Youngblood, “1, 2 Samuel,” in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 3.1098.

However, Gen 14:14 mentions Dan as the ending point of the first phase of Abram's pursuit of Lot's captors. From Dan, Abraham and his men divided into two groups and pursued the enemy as far as the region to the north of Damascus. We may assume that Moses originally wrote "Laish," which was later changed to Dan when that place name was changed.²¹ The geographical parameter of "Gilead as far as Dan" in Deut 34:1 and the placement of the blessing for the tribe of Dan (Deut 33:22) after the blessings promised to Zebulon, Issachar, Gad and before the blessings promised to Asher (all northern tribes) suggests a similar updating.

There are five other examples of scribal glosses in Genesis 14 where an updated place name is given instead of an outdated one.²² This updating of the onomastic entries indicates the antiquity of the source document and was done to make the text intelligible to the reader. Although this updating could have been done by Moses, most scholars regard these examples as post-Mosaic additions.²³

c. *Gen 11:28, 31*. This passage records Abraham's place of origin as "Ur of the Chaldees."²⁴ The annals of Ashurnasirpal II contain the first documentary evidence concerning the presence of Chaldeans in southern Babylon.²⁵ Although well established when they first appear on the historical scene, there is no written record of the early history of the Chaldeans documenting their rise to power in southern Babylonia.²⁶ The Chaldeans did not become contenders for the Babylonian throne until the middle of the

²¹ G. Ch. Aalders, *Genesis* (trans. W. Heynem; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975) 1.288; John D. Davis, *Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975) 181; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *A History of Israel* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998) 86; Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1967) 15–16, 178; J. Ridderbos, *Deuteronomy* (trans. E. van der Maas; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 315; D. J. Wiseman, "Abraham Reassessed," in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives* (ed. A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman; Leicester, U.K.: InterVarsity, 1980) 141; Ronald Youngblood, *The Book of Genesis: An Introductory Commentary* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) 156.

²² 14:2: "Bela (that is, Zoar)"; 14:3: "the valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea)"; 14:7: "Enmishpat (that is, Kadesh)"; 14:8: "Bela (that is, Zoar)"; 14:17: "the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley)."

²³ Duane Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) 86; Davis, *Paradise* 166; Merrill F. Unger, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954) 116–17.

²⁴ The Hebrew term for "Chaldees/Chaldean" is כַּשְׁדִּימ (kasdim). The shift from the Hebrew form to the form that serves as the basis for the English translation (*kaldu*) was part of a common phonetic shift of the sibilant (ש/s) to a lamed (ל/l) when it was followed by a dental (ד/d). A. R. Millard, "Daniel 1–6 and History," *EQ* 49 (1977) 70–71; cf. W. von Soden, *Grundriss der akkadischen Grammatik* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969) §30g.

²⁵ The annals refer to the Chaldeans in passing in relationship to the Assyrian campaign of 878 BC. J. A. Brinkman, *A Political History of Post-Kassite Babylonia, 1158–722 B.C.* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1968) 260. The annals of Shalmaneser III preserve the earliest description of Chaldean tribes (in 850 BC). J. A. Brinkman, "Merodach-Baladan II," in *Studies Presented to A. Leo Oppenheim* (ed. R. D. Biggs and J. A. Brinkman; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964) 8.

²⁶ J. A. Brinkman, "Babylonia c. 1000–748 BC," in *Cambridge Ancient History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 3/2.287.

eighth century BC.²⁷ Consequently, the expression “of the Chaldees” could represent a scribal gloss supplied to distinguish Abraham’s Ur from other cities carrying the same name.²⁸

d. *The expression “until this day.”* The expression “until today,” “until this day,” “as is the case today” is the translation of three different Hebrew expressions: *‘ad hayyôm hazzeh,*²⁹ *kayyôm hazzeh,*³⁰ or *k^ehayyôm hazzeh.*³¹ It often occurs to direct the attention of the audience to an event whose impact is still obvious. For example, Moses could remind the children of Israel that Egypt was still in shambles at the time of the Israelite conquest of Canaan (Deut 11:4; cf. 4:20; 29:4). Moses constantly reminded the children of Israel that they had witnessed or were witnessing the things of which he spoke (Deut 1:19; 2:30; 11:1–19). In addition to this usage of the phrase “until this day,” which does not carry any chronological or compositional implications, eight occurrences may represent a post-Mosaic editorial note (Gen 26:33; 32:32 [HB v. 33]; 47:26; Deut 2:22; 3:14; 10:8; 29:28 [HB v. 27]; 34:6). The following section briefly considers the three most promising examples. Deut 34:6, part of a post-Mosaic section, affirms that the location of Moses’ grave is unknown “until today.” Deut 29:28 [HB v. 27] occurs in the midst of the proposed answer to the question by the surrounding nations concerning God’s future judgment of His chosen nation. Consequently, the expression “as it is this day” in reference to Israel’s experience of exile could simply be part of that proposed answer with no implication of a post-Mosaic date of composition or could have been inserted by a later writer for special emphasis to the exilic or post-exilic community.³² Finally, the statement that Bashan was called Havoth Jair “to this day” in honor of Jair the son of Manasseh who was influential in the conquest of that region (Deut 3:14)

²⁷ Bill T. Arnold, “Babylonians,” in *Peoples of the Old Testament World* (ed. A. Hoerth, G. Matt- ingly, and E. Yamauchi; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 57.

²⁸ Bill T. Arnold, *Encountering the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 78; U. Cas- suto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part Two* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1964) 272; Davis, *Paradise* 166; Alfred Hoerth, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 59; Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 26, n. 13; H. W. F. Saggs, “Ur of the Chaldees: A Problem of Identification,” *Iraq* 22 (1960) 200–209; Unger, *Archaeology* 108; Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* (Dallas: Word, 1994) 272. Those who reject the idea that this reference to the Chaldeans represents a later editorial inser- tion contend that the phonetic shift (*kašdīm* > *kaldu*), which occurred in the mid-second millen- nium BC, fits Mosaic authorship. Also, Abraham’s nephew Kesed may have been the ancestor of the Chaldeans (*kašdīm*; a connection rejected by D. Wiseman, “Chaldea; Chaldeans; Chaldees,” *ISBE* 1.630).

²⁹ This phrase (עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה) occurs 84 times in the OT (cf. Brevard Childs, “A Study of the For- mula, ‘Until This Day,’” *JBL* 82 [1963] 280). It occurs 12 times in the Pentateuch (Gen 26:33; 32:32 [HB v. 33]; 47:26; 48:15; Exod. 10:6; Num. 22:30; Deut 2:22; 3:14; 10:8; 11:4; 29:3; 34:6).

³⁰ This phrase (כַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה) occurs 24 times in the OT and 7 times in the Pentateuch (Gen 50:20; Deut 2:30; 4:20, 38; 8:18; 10:15; 29:28 [HB v. 27]).

³¹ This expression (כַּדְּהוּם הַזֶּה) occurs 6 times in the OT and 2 times in the Pentateuch (Gen 39: 11; Deut 6:24).

³² Both Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976) 360 and Merrill, *Kingdom* 385 regard both alternatives as worthy of consideration.

would make little sense in the time of Moses when that region was first taken over by Israel. This phrase suggests that passage of some time. According to the chronology of this period before the Conquest of Canaan, Moses arrived at the plains of Moab approximately three months before Joshua led the children of Israel across the Jordan River. In that brief time frame, Moses wrote the bulk of the book of Deuteronomy, he died, Israel mourned for him for thirty days, and preparations were made for the conquest. This hardly leaves time for Jair to become memorialized “until this day” as the great conqueror of Bashan.

e. *Deut 2:10–12*. Deuteronomy 2–3 contains at least two possible examples of inspired textual updating. In a lengthy parenthesis (2:10–12), the writer provides details concerning the indigenous population of Moab and Edom and describes the circumstances surrounding their being driven out of that region. Scholars have understood “the land” in the expression in v. 12, “just as Israel did in the land the Lord gave them as their possession,” to refer to one of three places: the Transjordan region, Canaan itself, or Canaan and Transjordan. According to those who equate “the land” with the Transjordan region, Moses wrote this statement, referring to the Israelite occupation of the Transjordan region that had already occurred.³³ Other scholars who identify “the land” in verse 12 as Canaan or Canaan and Transjordan regard vv. 10–12 as an anachronistic reference to Israel’s conquest of the promised land, that is, the land on the west side of the Jordan River.³⁴ Although some scholars contend that this indicates that the “final composition” of Deuteronomy took place long after the time of Moses,³⁵ it is also conceivable that this statement was a post-Mosaic inspired editorial addition that would not warrant speaking of a “final composition” of Deuteronomy long after his death.³⁶

f. *Deut 3:8–11*. This passage concludes the account of Israel’s conquest of the Transjordan with a summary of Israel’s defeat of Sihon and Og. Verse 11 states that Og’s immense bed (13 feet long and 6 feet wide) “is still in Rabbah of the Ammonites.” Ridderbos identifies this statement as a post-Mosaic gloss, perhaps from the time of David when Rabbah was the capital city of Amman, a place where such antiquities like Og’s bed would likely be stored for display.³⁷ Recording the location of Og’s bed would have made little sense coming from Moses, one of Og’s contemporaries.

g. *Gen 36:31*. The following statement introduces a list of Edomite kings in Gen 36:31–39: “Now these are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom

³³ J. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary* (London: InterVarsity, 1974) 92.

³⁴ Craigie, *Deuteronomy* 110–11; Ridderbos, *Deuteronomy* 22, 70; M. H. Segal, *The Pentateuch: Its Composition and Its Authorship and Other Biblical Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967) 95; Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996) 26.

³⁵ D. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1–11* (Dallas: Word, 1991) 42.

³⁶ M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11* (New York: Doubleday, 1991) 163; cf. E. Merrill, *Deuteronomy* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994) 94.

³⁷ Ridderbos, *Deuteronomy* 75–76; cf. Merrill, *Deuteronomy* 106.

before any king reigned over the sons of Israel.” Various scholars regard this entire section as Mosaic. They contend that Moses’ knowledge of the eventual rule of kings over Israel would provide the natural occasion for the reference to a king reigning over Israel.³⁸ In light of the promise to Jacob that a king would come out of his loins (Gen 35:11), Hertz contends that Moses would have naturally told the Israelites that their history was not yet complete, that is, that they would yet have a king, after relating a list of Edomite rulers.³⁹

Several scholars posit that the entire section was composed sometime after the reign of Saul. For example, Hamilton writes that regardless of whether v. 31 simply describes the timing of the reign of these Edomite kings (pre-Saul) or these kings reigned in Edom before any Israelite king (e.g. David) reigned over Edom, v. 31 indicates that “this particular king list is either a post-Saul or post-David composition inserted into the genealogies of Esau and Seir.”⁴⁰ Sarna argues that the contextual function of this insertion (i.e. the reason for its insertion at this point) is that Saul’s war against the Edomites (1 Sam 14:47) represented the beginning of the fulfillment of the elder serving the younger (cf. Gen 27:40).⁴¹

A third option limits the post-Mosaic addition to the phrase, “before any king reigned over the sons of Israel.” Some scholars allow for the possibility that either this phrase or the entire section is post-Mosaic.⁴² Although the Mosaic awareness of kingship and the contextual reference to the promise of a king demands consideration, the face-value meaning of the phrase in question suggests a post-Mosaic date of composition for this expression.

h. *Gen 15:2b*. In Genesis 15 Abram is speaking with God concerning his wife’s barrenness as it relates to God’s promise of an heir. He appears to concoct an *ad hoc* solution that would entail Abram and Sarah adopting Eliezer, their chief servant, and making him their heir. The last part of Gen 15:2 has caused numerous Hebrew scholars great consternation.⁴³ In the first part of v. 2 Abram pleads, “Lord God, what will you give me, seeing I

³⁸ Leupold, *Genesis* 2.945. Archer (*Survey* 163, n. 13) contends that since “only the secondary line of Esau had achieved royal status, it was appropriate for a covenant-conscious author in the fifteenth century to note the fact that the posterity of Jacob had not yet attained to that dignity.”

³⁹ J. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (2d ed.; London: Soncino, 1962) 133.

⁴⁰ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990) 399–400. Cf. G. Aalders, *Genesis* 2.177; Garrett, *Rethinking* 92; Sarna, *Genesis* 252; Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* 339; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985) 565.

⁴¹ Sarna, *Genesis* 252. Along a similar vein, Terence Fretheim suggests that this list of eight non-dynastic kings of Edom predate Israel’s entry into Canaan (cf. Num. 20:14; Judg 11:17) and continue down to the time of the United Monarchy, at which time David conquered the Edomites (cf. 2 Sam 8:13–14; 1 Kgs 11:14–17); “The Book of Genesis,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible* [ed. Leander E. Keck et al.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1994] 1.590).

⁴² Kidner, *Genesis* 15–16, 178; Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988) 587; John Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 2.224; Youngblood, *Genesis* 241.

⁴³ Hamilton (*Genesis* 421–22) provides a helpful overview of several of the interpretive options regarding this verse. Westermann adds another possibility not mentioned by Hamilton, that the final portion of Gen 15:2 is corrupt and cannot be translated (Westermann, *Genesis 12–36* 219).

go childless. . . .” Hamilton translates the last section of this verse as follows: “and have as my heir the son of Meshek (that is, Damascus), Eliezer?”⁴⁴ According to Hamilton, the phrase *hû’ dammešeq* (הוּא דַמְשֵׁק) is an evident gloss to explain to a later generation that *mešeq* (מֶשֶׁק) is another name for *dammešeq* (דַמְשֵׁק) or Damascus.⁴⁵

i. *Conclusion.* These eight examples of textual updating suggest that the original form of a biblical book was not transmitted absolutely unchanged from the time of its original composition. Although limited in scope, important changes took place from the time of a biblical book’s initial composition to the time when it reached its final canonical form. Those changes were “maintenance changes,” done to make a given text more intelligible to a later generation of readers. Once again, I contend that these changes were made by a prophetic figure and are part of the process of inscripturation.

3. *The normal development/evolution of a language.* Although I realize that the issue of the development of the Hebrew language continues to be debated, the evolution of the English language provides an analogy. The following poem dates from the latter half of the sixteenth century AD, around four hundred years prior to the present time:

Summer is icumen in:
 Lhude sing cuccu!
 Groweth sed, and bloweth med,
 and springth the wude nu—
 Sing cuccu!
 Awe bleteth after lomb;
 Lhouth after calve cu;
 Balluc sterteth bucke verteth
 Murie sing cuccu!
 Cuccu, cuccu, well singes thus, cuccu:
 Ne swike thu naver nu.
 Sing cuccu, nu, sing cuccu!
 Sing cuccu, sing cuccu, nu!⁴⁶

Over a period of four centuries, the English language experienced enough development that the spelling, grammar, and syntax of the seventeenth century would demand significant updating to make this poem intelligible for the reader in the twenty-first century. Building on that analogy, consider some basic developments in the Hebrew language.

⁴⁴ Hamilton, *Genesis* 417, 420.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 422; cf. W. F. Albright, “Abram the Hebrew: A New Archaeological Interpretation,” *BASOR* 163 (1961) 47; M. F. Unger, “Some Comments on the Text of Genesis 15:2, 3,” *JBL* 72 (1953) 49–50; *idem*, *Israel and the Arameans of Damascus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957) 114, n. 22; F. M. Cross, “The Stele Dedicated to Melcarth by Ben-hadad,” *BASOR* 205 (1972) 40.

⁴⁶ B. Grebanier *et al.*, *English Literature and Its Backgrounds* (New York: Hold, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963) 65.

a. *Script changes.* Based on epigraphic evidence it appears that, in its earliest stages, the text of biblical books was written in the proto-Canaanite alphabet, a pictographic alphabet.⁴⁷ In the tenth or ninth centuries BC an early Hebrew script, sometimes called Phoenician,⁴⁸ developed from the proto-Canaanite script used before that time. Any biblical books written or copied up through the time of the exile would have been written in this early Hebrew script. At some stage during the Second Temple period, a gradual transition occurred from the Hebrew script to the Aramaic script, from which a script developed that is exclusive to the Jews and was called the square script.⁴⁹ No early fragments of the biblical text have been discovered in the early Hebrew script.⁵⁰

b. *The use of vowels to indicate case and verbal conjugation.* The Amarna correspondence, Ugaritic texts, and other epigraphic evidence suggest that before the Amarna period (ca. 1350 BC) Hebrew possessed final short vowels which would have differentiated nominal cases as well as distinguishing between various verbal conjugations.⁵¹ During the last centuries of the second millennium (by about 1100 BC), the case system disappeared. Only a few remnants of these early case endings still survive in the HB (largely in names).⁵² Waltke also contends that short vowels that distinguished between the two alleged prefix conjugations were dropped at the same time.⁵³

c. *The use of vowel letters.* Once again, epigraphic evidence suggests that the Hebrew texts would have gone from a phonetic consonantism (only consonants represented) to a writing system that employed alphabet letters to objectively indicate the presence of vowels.⁵⁴ At first, final vowel letters appeared; eventually medial vowel letters occurred in Aramaic, Moabite, and Hebrew texts after the ninth century BC.⁵⁵

d. *Conclusion.* An acceptance of widespread, sweeping developments in the Hebrew language does not constitute the backbone of evidence in favor of inspired textual updating. However, this paper does conjecture that over the 1,000 years of OT compositional history, enough changes took place to

⁴⁷ W. Albright, *The Proto-Sinaitic Inscriptions and Their Decipherment* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1969) 5–9; B. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990) 17.

⁴⁸ Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction* 5–9.

⁴⁹ E. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 219. The square script is called by some the "Assyrian script" in light of the fact that its ancestor, the Aramaic script, was in use in the Assyrian empire.

⁵⁰ Fragments of 11–14 biblical texts written in a later form of the "early Hebrew script," called paleo-Hebrew, have been discovered at Qumran (Tov, *Textual Criticism* 220). These were written at the same time as the square script was in use in most circles.

⁵¹ Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction* 17, §1.5.2f; 126, §8.1c.

⁵² *Ibid.* 127, §8.2.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 469, §29.4j.

⁵⁴ Ellis R. Brotzman, *Old Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) 40.

⁵⁵ Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction* 17–18, §1.5.2h.

occasion the need for linguistic updating that went beyond merely changing the script and involved adjustments in word choice and word order.⁵⁶ The possibility of this kind of change does not fit within a view that rejects any inspired textual updating. As Garrett argues regarding the book of Genesis, although Genesis is written in standard Hebrew, “there is no reason to think that there could not have been any revisions to keep up with semantic developments in the Hebrew language.”⁵⁷

The analogy of certain “anonymous” biblical books that were composed over a long period of time and involved multiple writers/compiler, the examples of several passages that contain modernizations, and the basic idea of linguistic development suggest that textual updating of the biblical text had to take place between the time of a book’s initial composition and the time when the OT canon reached its final form. The question at hand is this: “How should one relate the possibility of textual updating to an inerrant view of Scripture?”

IV. POSSIBLE WAYS TO RELATE TEXTUAL UPDATING TO A BELIEF IN INERRANCY

The present section surveys two primary ways of relating the concept of textual updating to a belief in inerrancy. With regard to these alternatives I have utilized similar paragraphs with key differences to highlight each position’s similarity to and difference from the other positions.

1. *Traditional conservative argument.* Using the Pentateuch as an example, Moses wrote it during his lifetime, and that original copy was the autograph and inspired. Any later additions were not inspired but were simply scribal glosses added to clarify terms that were becoming obsolete. These glosses may be true and correct but were not written as inspired of God.

For example, with regard to the possible editorial addition in Deut 2:12 (which was discussed above), Geisler and Nix conclude: “Even if they are later additions, they may possibly be uninspired changes that are subject to the same textual debate as Mark 16:19–20 and John 7:53–8:11.”⁵⁸ If, indeed, one concludes that our present Hebrew text of the OT contains geographical, historical, or linguistic updates, those additions must be regarded as secondary textual variants from the original (and inspired) text.

2. *Proposed conservative argument (inspired textual updating).* Using the Pentateuch as an example, Moses wrote it during his lifetime, and that original copy was the preliminary canonical form of those biblical books and inspired. Any later additions (prior to the finalization of the OT canon) were

⁵⁶ Brotzman (*OT Criticism* 41), following others, suggests that a major revision of Hebrew grammar took place around 1350 BC. This grammatical revision, however, did not change the content of the Old Testament (*ibid.* 42).

⁵⁷ Garrett, *Rethinking* 85.

⁵⁸ Geisler and Nix, *Introduction* 252.

also inspired and not simply scribal glosses, added to clarify terms that were becoming obsolete. These glosses were true and correct as well as being written as inspired Scripture.

V. SELECTED PROPONENTS OF INSPIRED TEXTUAL UPDATING

This overview of proponents is selective and limited. There are many scholars who refer to different kinds of examples of textual updating in various circumstances,⁵⁹ but the individuals included in this section relate their view of textual updating to their belief in inspiration and inerrancy.

1. *Robert Dick Wilson.* In delineating the position of the conservatives (as contrasted with the radicals), Robert Dick Wilson affirms that “the Pentateuch as it stands is historical and from the time of Moses; and that Moses was its real author though it may have been revised and edited by later redactors, *the additions being just as much inspired and as true as the rest.*”⁶⁰

2. *E. J. Young.* For E. J. Young, who served as the editor for the above volume by Wilson, an acceptance of the essential Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch does not exclude the idea that “certain few minor additions . . . were inserted into the Pentateuch under divine inspiration by a later editor.”⁶¹ Young contends that even though “there may have been later minor additions and even revisions” under the umbrella of divine inscripturation, Moses was the fundamental or real author of the Pentateuch and that “substantially and essentially . . . it is the product of Moses.”⁶² Young also writes, “When we affirm that Moses wrote or that he was the author of the Pentateuch, we do not mean that he himself necessarily wrote every word.”⁶³

3. *Merrill F. Unger.* After critiquing the documentary hypothesis or source criticism, Unger seeks to define the Mosaic unity of the Pentateuch by means of two statements. First of all, he affirms that “[t]he Mosaic unity of the Pentateuch means that it is one continuous work, the product of a single writer.”⁶⁴ Under this heading he also concludes that a belief in the Mosaic unity of the Pentateuch “does not necessarily preclude the possibility of later redactions of the whole work, so as to render it imperative to

⁵⁹ The above material that considers various evidences of inspired textual updating provides examples of a number of scholars not included in the following listing of scholars who try to connect their acceptance of inspired editorial glosses with their view of inspiration and inerrancy.

⁶⁰ Robert Dick Wilson, *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Sunday School Times, 1926) 11; emphasis mine.

⁶¹ E. J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1949) 33.

⁶² *Ibid.* 45.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 51.

⁶⁴ Unger, *Introductory Guide* 237.

hold that Moses wrote with his own hand or dictated to amanuenses all and everything contained in it.”⁶⁵ Secondly, Unger suggests that “[t]he Mosaic unity of the Pentateuch may admit post-Mosaic additions or changes which do not affect the authenticity or integrity of the text.”⁶⁶ In that regard he contends the following:

It is not inconsonant with the Mosaic authenticity and integrity of the Pentateuch to grant later redactions of the whole work and to allow that, during the course of the centuries of the transmission of the text, certain modifications were introduced into the work, such as additions after the death of Moses, modernization of archaic expressions and place names, marginal glosses or explanatory scribal insertions, which eventually crept into the text, and textual errors due to inadvertent mistakes of copyists. The latter constitutes the legitimate domain of scholarly criticism.⁶⁷

Unger distinguishes between textual variants that were caused by copyists and belong to the domain of textual criticism and modernizations and glosses that crept into the text as part of the inscripturation process.

After considering various potential examples of post-Mosaic additions or changes, Unger states that a belief in Mosaic unity and authenticity does not preclude the possibility that an inspired redactor could have made additions that would not have conflicted with the Mosaic unity of the work. He also affirms that a later editor could have effected minor changes (e.g. modernization of place names) in order to make something comprehensible to a later generation.⁶⁸

4. *Bruce Waltke.* Waltke suggests that the problem of explaining the conventional definition of the original autographa “is occasioned by the phenomenon that books of the Bible seem to have gone through an editorial revision after coming from the mouth of an inspired spokesman.”⁶⁹ After considering some examples of intentional editorial activity, Waltke concludes: “If this be so, then the notion of an original autograph should also take account of later inspired editorial activity. From this perspective it is important to distinguish inspired scribal activity from noninspired scribal changes introduced into the text.”⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Ibid. 238.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 239.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 240. Geisler and Nix, however, contend that Unger “flatly rejected the notion that later non-Mosaic additions were made on the Pentateuch by redactors, inspired or not” (Geisler and Nix, *Introduction* 251, n. 32; citing Unger, *Introductory Guide* 231–32). They also affirm that, concerning this concept of inspired editorial activity, Unger wrote, “the difficulties involved [in such a view] are inseparable” and that “some may ‘fondly dream’ that such a view is plausible, but only in vain” (Geisler and Nix, 251, n. 32). In point of fact, Unger’s negative comments are directed toward the JEDP theory (Unger, *Introductory Guide* 231–32), and the suggestion that Unger flatly rejected the notion of inspired editorial activity ignores his clear statements later on in the volume (ibid. 238–40).

⁶⁹ Bruce K. Waltke, “Historical Grammatical Problems,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible* (ed. E. Radmacher and R. Preus; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 78.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 79.

5. *Ronald Youngblood*. After arguing that the statement about Israelite kings in Gen 36:31 seems to imply a later editorial touch (considered above), Youngblood affirms that

such editorial updating to help later readers should not alarm or even surprise us. Our doctrine of inspiration is not affected at all by such observations. The same God who inspired the original author (or authors, in the case of a book like Proverbs) of an OT book also inspired its compilers and editors (if any). The final product, the completed Word of God, is just as inspired and infallible and authoritative as each individual word and verse and chapter and book that entered into its compilation.⁷¹

6. *Herbert Wolf*. After dealing with several examples of post-Mosaic additions, Wolf points out that the possible post-Mosaic additions in the Pentateuch are relatively minor.⁷² He goes on to affirm that the work of individuals who added to or modified the work of Moses was superintended by the same Holy Spirit whose ministry superintended all writers of Scripture. Any changes made by Joshua, Samuel, Ezra, or anyone else were prompted by the Holy Spirit and conveyed exactly what he intended (2 Pet 1:21).

7. *Duane Garrett*. In his book *Rethinking Genesis*, Garrett contends that “the assertion that Moses is the principal author of the present text of Genesis need not mean that it came from his hand exactly as we have it now.”⁷³ Garrett also affirms that “the main reason such a redaction would have taken place was not to substantially change the book in any way, but rather to make it more intelligible for a later generation of readers.”⁷⁴

VI. ANSWERS TO OBJECTIONS RAISED AGAINST INSPIRED EDITORIAL ACTIVITY (PRIOR TO THE COMPLETION OF THE CANON)

In their response to this suggestion that “inspired redactors” made changes in the writings of earlier biblical writers, Geisler and Nix title this suggestion “the redactional canon theory.”⁷⁵

⁷¹ Youngblood, *Genesis* 241.

⁷² Herbert Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Chicago: Moody, 1991) 60.

⁷³ Garrett, *Rethinking* 85. In a similar way, Dillard and Longman refer to “later canonical additions” or post-Mosaic additions in the book of Genesis that fit within a conservative position concerning the authorship of the Pentateuch that accepts the “essential authorship” of Moses (*Introduction to the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994] 40).

⁷⁴ Garrett, *Rethinking* 85–86. Some other proponents of inspired textual updating are Charles Pfeiffer (*The Book of Genesis: A Study Manual* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958] 7) and J. Ridderbos (*Deuteronomy* 22).

⁷⁵ Geisler and Nix, *Introduction* 250. They cite six supportive arguments offered by proponents of this “redactional canon theory”: the addition of Deuteronomy 34 after Moses’ death, the parenthetical editorial statements in Deuteronomy 2–3 (see above), the compositional history of Psalms and Proverbs, the two textual versions of Jeremiah, and the Chronicler’s use of prior prophetic records (*ibid.* 250–51). Geisler and Nix affirm that none of these arguments provide compelling

The following discussion⁷⁶ centers on four issues raised by critics of the idea of inspired textual updating: Deut 4:2's mandate against adding to God's Word; the argument that the idea of inspired textual updating makes inspiration man-centered rather than God-centered; the notion that this approach threatens wide-scale redactional activity; and the charge that this proposal violates the customary definitions of "inspiration" and "autographa."

1. *Deut 4:2: a mandate against adding to God's word.* How does the admonition of Deut 4:2 cohere with the idea of inspired textual updating? This admonition that nothing be added to or subtracted from the covenant (cf. 12:32; Rev 22:18–19) emphasizes the divine origination of and responsibility for the covenant.⁷⁷ In a unilateral arrangement of this type it is the sovereign alone who can set the terms of the covenant.⁷⁸ Only that which Yahweh prescribes and all that Yahweh prescribes is normative and binding. The vassal's responsibility was to accept the covenant stipulations as given and to make every effort to keep them.⁷⁹ Since this revealed covenant is sacred (as part of the canonical Scriptures), "no one has the authority to alter it in any way, or even to supplement it, unless he shares the prophetic gift of its original author, Moses."⁸⁰

Although various scholars regard this as a divine commandment with regard to the canonical writings of both testaments, in the immediate context the divine mandate in Deut 4:2 (cf. 12:32 [HB 13:1]) relates to the law which Moses was about to present to the children of Israel. Craigie contends that the injunction refers to the essence of the law rather than the letter of the law in light of the fact that the wording of the law in Deuteronomy 5 differs at several points from its wording in Exodus 20.⁸¹ Nevertheless, the essence of the law is clear and the same in both chapters. The meaning or sense of these laws and not their exact wording was at stake. The covenant-treaty stipulations Moses gave Israel lacked nothing. He prohibited any-

evidence for the existence of any inspired editorial activity after the original writing of a biblical book. For Geisler and Nix's response to the possibility of non-Mosaic editorial statements in Deuteronomy 2–3, see their comments under the above section entitled, "Possible ways to relate textual updating to a belief in inerrancy."

⁷⁶ Geisler and Nix serve as a reference point in this discussion since they have argued against this position in print.

⁷⁷ Merrill, *Kingdom* 115.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Prohibitions of this kind are attested throughout ancient Near Eastern law and covenant texts. For example, the Vassal-treaties of Esarhaddon (lines 410–13) state, "(You swear that) you will not alter (it) [the covenant text], you will not consign (it) to the fire nor throw (it) into the water, nor [bury (it)] in the earth nor destroy it by any cunning device, nor make [(it) disappear], nor sweep it way" (D. J. Wiseman, *The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon* [London: British School of Archaeology, 1958] 60; cf. the epilogue of the Lipit-Ishtar lawcode, J. Pritchard, ed., *ANET* (3d ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969) 161; M. Kline, *The Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1963) 43.

⁸⁰ Beckwith, *OT Canon* 134.

⁸¹ Craigie, *Deuteronomy* 130; cf. Beckwith, *OT Canon* 134.

thing that would adulterate, contradict, or render ineffective these divine requirements.⁸²

The placement of the almost identical injunctions in Deut 4:2 and 12:32 [HB 13:1] affirms the covenantal context of this warning. The mandate in Deut 4:2 introduces a section of verses that exhort Israel to obey all of God's commands. Deut 12:32 concludes the general stipulation section in which Moses calls Israel to worship their God in total and absolute allegiance. Only what the Lord has spoken and all that he has spoken is incumbent upon them.

Similar warnings found in Prov 30:6 and Rev 22:18–19 doubtless draw on Deut 4:2 for their significance. Each of these injunctions seeks to guard the integrity of God's revelation.⁸³ The warnings are against willful tampering or distortion of the message of God's servant.⁸⁴ These passages do not prohibit textual updating by a prophetic figure that makes the message of a given passage more intelligible to a later generation of readers.⁸⁵ Rather, they emphasize the fact that God's word is sufficient or complete. The book of Deuteronomy needed no additional rules or stipulations, and none of those given through Moses were superfluous.⁸⁶

2. *This approach makes inspiration man-centered rather than God-centered.* Geisler and Nix suggest that the acceptance of any inspired editorial activity after the original composition of a biblical book makes inspiration man-centered rather than God-centered and violates the traditional conservative understanding of the autographa as fixed documents that do not change after the time of their initial composition.⁸⁷ In response, the whole point of this discussion is to understand better the biblical doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy as it relates to the OT Scriptures. Theological definitions should draw on biblical evidence rather than stifle it. The presence of geographical modernizations alone seems to demand that we re-evaluate the customary articulations of the definition of "autographa"⁸⁸ and "canon." It also suggests that evangelicals should regard inspiration as text-oriented as well as applicable to the entire process of inscripturation, guaranteeing the accuracy of any inspired editorial additions or changes made before the OT canon reaches completion. The suggestions offered in this paper do not contest the fact that divine inspiration determines canonicity, authority, and infallibility. The Holy Spirit's work of inspiration guarantees a biblical book's inerrancy at any and every point in time in biblical history.

⁸² Earl S. Kalland, "Deuteronomy," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 3.42.

⁸³ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995) 513.

⁸⁴ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977) 395.

⁸⁵ Contra Geisler and Nix, *Introduction* 253.

⁸⁶ Kalland, "Deuteronomy" 3.42.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 253–54.

⁸⁸ If someone grants the existence of geographical modernizations but regards them as non-inspired changes, he must deal with the existence of non-inspired material in the autographa with no means possible of recovering the inerrant text at that point.

3. *This approach threatens wide-scale redactional activity.* Geisler and Nix incorrectly associate the idea of inspired editorial updating (between the time of a book's original composition and the completion of the OT canon) with the views of errantists who articulate the doctrine of inspiration in an entirely different fashion than that proposed in this article. They also liken the concept of inspired editorial updating proposed in this article with wide-scale redactional activity before and after the close of the OT canon.⁸⁹ They quote I. Howard Marshall who notes that "the weakness of *the view* (emphasis mine) is that it locates inspiration as an activity in the process of composition of the Bible and does not really tackle the issue of the inspiredness of the resulting book."⁹⁰ However, Marshall's comments are directed toward the view of Paul Achtemeier who posits that the believing community produced the Scriptures. After this community received traditions concerning what God has done, it tried to understand and apply those traditions to its current situation, and then it reformulated those traditions to address that situation.⁹¹ Marshall's telling critique is not directed toward an inerrancy position that recognizes the presence of relatively narrow-scale inspired editorial activity in the inscripturation process that ends with the completion of the OT canon.

In similar fashion, Geisler and Nix incorrectly quote various scholars who allegedly oppose the suggestion of inspired editorial activity.⁹² According to a footnote, Geisler and Nix suggest that Ken Barker registered "strong disagreement" with Waltke's position on inspired editorial activity in his written response to Waltke's essay.⁹³ To the contrary, Barker's primary complaint with Waltke's essay was not directed against his suggestion that some inspired editorial activity occurred during the OT's compositional history, but was related to Waltke's approving reference to the presence of the J and P sources in Genesis 1 and 2.⁹⁴ It is in the second response to Waltke's essay that Alan MacRae registers "strong disagreement" with Waltke.⁹⁵ Once again, however, MacRae's "strong disagreement" concerns Waltke's approving reference to sources in Genesis 1–2.⁹⁶ MacRae never makes mention of the issue of inspired editorial updating, let alone registering any "strong disagreement" with it.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 254.

⁹⁰ I. Howard Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1982) 38.

⁹¹ P. Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture: Problems and Proposals* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980) 114–18; cf. Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration* 37–38.

⁹² Geisler and Nix, *Introduction* 251.

⁹³ Ibid. 251, n. 31.

⁹⁴ K. Barker, "A Response to Historical Grammatical Problems," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible* 136. In a phone conversation with Dr. Barker, he confirmed his acceptance of "inspired editorial glosses." In his recent commentary on Micah, he allows for a later editor collecting and organizing the messages of Micah (Kenneth L. Barker and Waylon Bailey, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998] 31).

⁹⁵ A. MacRae, "A Response to Historical Grammatical Problems," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible* 145.

⁹⁶ MacRae devotes eight pages of his eighteen-page response to that one issue (ibid. 145–52).

Although the above “straw man” arguments are misdirected, the question, “Where do you draw the line once you allow for any textual updating?” deserves attention. What guidelines prevent a person from going beyond small-scale textual updating to the practice of a more thoroughgoing form of redactional activity? As with historical issues, the bipolar terms, minimalist and maximalist, express the two extremes of this issue. As a minimalist, I am limited by that which the text of Scripture suggests. I am not advocating a wide-scale editorial reworking of the text that is driven by an aberrant theological agenda.

4. *This approach violates the customary definitions of “inspiration” and “autographa.”* Finally, most critics of the thesis of this article unrelentingly adhere to the customary definitions of “inspiration,” “canonicity,” and “autographa.” Those who reject the concept of inspired editorial updating must deal with evidence cited above in one of two ways.

First of all, some scholars insist that any updating of biblical texts belongs to the realm of textual criticism rather than the domain of canon.⁹⁷ In other words, if there is compelling evidence that a given name was added after the completion of a certain biblical book (e.g. a post-Mosaic addition to the Pentateuch), that addition represents a textual variant. What proponents of this suggestion do not seem to realize is that if all the various modernizations are non-inspired scribal changes, we need to get behind those changes somehow in order to unearth the autographa upon which we can base our study of the OT text. I know of no Hebrew text, English translation, or commentary that excises the various modernizations that appear in the Hebrew OT or questions their integrity or accuracy.

Second, some scholars posit that a biblical writer could have written the correct place name in advance of the time of its usage. Although this is possible, it means that the audience of that biblical book would not have understood the writer’s intention in that specific passage for decades if not centuries (as in the case of Gen 14:14 where the name “Dan” appears to have been added about 100–150 years after the death of Moses).

Whether any theological or exegetical proposal represents a positive refinement or a negative retrogression demands legitimate attention. However, definitional critiques alone, that is, the suggestion that a given proposal is wrong because it does not fit within traditional definitions is not compelling by itself. The biblical scholar must decide which definition best handles the evidence at hand.

VII. CONCLUSION

In the context of an enthusiastic acceptance of the biblical doctrine of inerrancy, I am proposing that we need to give careful attention to the realities of the compositional history of the OT as we define and explain our understanding of “autographa” and the development of the OT canon. In light of

⁹⁷ Geisler and Nix, *Introduction* 253–55.

the geographical and linguistic changes that occurred over the 1,000 years covered by the composition of the OT books and completion of the OT canon, I would argue that the textual updating, though limited in scale, that occurs at various points in OT books is not part of mere scribal activity after the completion of the autographa of a given book or set of books, but of the inscripturation process that results in God-breathed Scripture. At every point of the inscripturation process, a given biblical book is autograph-like, fully inspired, and inerrant.

Let me emphasize that the almost exclusive NT foundation for our concepts of “autographa” and “canon” does not take into account realities of the OT text and serves as the occasion for this paper. My proposal is first and foremost definitional, that is, I am suggesting that in the context of a high view of Scripture we adjust or refine our definition of certain key theological terms in light of the compelling OT evidence.

Here are the basic refinements to our articulation of the concept of the autographa and canonicity proposed by this paper. I would view a given biblical book before the completion of the canon as a *preliminary* canonical form of that biblical book. Once the OT canon reaches completion,⁹⁸ every OT book is in its *final* canonical form. Since that form of a biblical book is susceptible to change (though on a relatively small scale), I prefer not to call the *preliminary* form the “autographa” in the technical sense. Rather, I would describe the *final* canonical form of a biblical book as the autographa. Any changes introduced to a biblical book before the close of the canon are regarded as “inspired editorial updates.” After the close of the OT canon, any changes introduced to the biblical text are variants from that text and are not inspired textual updates. Finally, I assume that a prophetic figure (having credibility in the Israelite community) introduced these modernizations into a given biblical text.

Although some of these ideas have been suggested elsewhere, evangelicals need to take them into consideration in our presentation of theology, bibliology in particular, and prepare our students for these challenges.

God’s Word is a great treasure that merits the greatest care and attention. I am not the first to propose the above refinements to our understanding of the autographa and canonicity nor am I unaware of some potential abuses of this proposal. However, my desire to articulate accurately my understanding of the truths of Scripture to others motivates me to deal with the realities of the biblical text. I am firmly convinced that these refinements exalt and maintain a high view of Scripture.

⁹⁸ OT scholars have long debated the issue of when the OT canon reaches completion. Settling that issue is not the purpose of this article. Nevertheless, the completion of the OT canon serves as a culminating benchmark for the compositional history of the OT.