

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE
AND CLASSIFICATION OF DIALECT VARIATION
IN BIBLICAL HEBREW

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by
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ABSTRACT

The following is a study of dialectal variations in the Masoretic text and classification of selected variations. Introductory material includes discussion of the use of "dialect" for regional, chronological, and stylistic distinctives.

This study is presented in two parts. Part one presents a case for the usage of dialect variation by writers and personalities in the Hebrew Bible. Part two offers analysis of current approaches to the classification of variants into chronological, regional, and stylistic distinctives.

Part one begins with an investigation of the Torah, presenting dialectal evidence from Genesis and Deuteronomy relating to vocabulary, geography, and tribal differences. Evidence from the Prophets consists of pronunciation, morphology, and semantic changes from the Former Prophets, as well as dialectal peculiarities from selected Latter Prophets. Features from the Writings relate to vocabulary, syntax, and poetic practices.

Part two begins with a discussion of chronologically distinctive features in Biblical Hebrew. Following this is an analysis of regional features in Biblical Hebrew and

inscriptional evidence. Discussion regarding the classification of colloquial Hebrew and style-switching closes part two.

A summary and final remarks conclude the dissertation. Included in this is a discussion of the benefits of this study for biblical exegesis.

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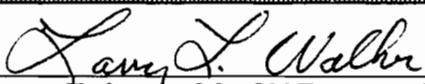
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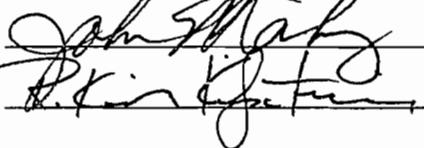
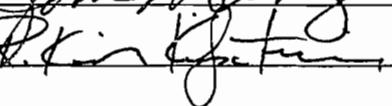
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Thesis Statement

The Hebrew Bible, in its present form, preserves vestigial evidence of variant dialects in Biblical Hebrew. One must concede that scribes made orthographic modifications throughout the early stages of the text, but the common assertion of leveling the text into a single dialect (similar to the Uthman recension of the Qur'an) is without merit. Dialectal forms are present in the text, and they may be useful as a criterion for identifying the chronology and provenance of a text.

Impetus

This study finds its impetus in two main issues: (1) a concern for the practical use of Biblical Hebrew for more than simple word studies and (2) a passion for the employment of Hebrew knowledge for faithful exegesis and exposition of the Old Testament. Examination of dialect variation in Biblical Hebrew, while largely overlooked by scholars, offers the potential to enhance greatly the exegete's understanding of the text and message of the Hebrew Bible.

Problems

As with other fields relating to the Old Testament, scholars face a variety of problems when launching into the field of biblical dialectology. While some scholars are satisfied discussing the laborious arguments of various scribal traditions, redactive reconstruction, and Masoretic leveling, other scholars face problems in seeking to discover variations of dialect in the canonical text. Three major obstacles in identifying these variations are: the limits of Bible translations in delineating dialectal variants, the limitations within the scope of individual Old Testament scholars, and the lack of a consistent definition of dialects within Semitic studies.

Limitations of Bible Translations

According to Ernst Würthwein, the Samaritan Pentateuch¹ is considered to be of great value, holding special prominence as "a second Hebrew recension."² In connection with dialect references and variations, this version is of more aid than the Septuagint.³ Its brevity,

¹This study employs the text of August Feiher von Gall's *Der Hebräische Pentateuch der Samaritaner* (Giessen, Germany: Töpelmann, 1918).

²Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Biblia Hebraica*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 45.

³*Septuaginta*, ed. Alfred Rahlfs (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979) [hereafter, LXX].

unfortunately, lessens the potential help that one might gain from it.

One of the most obvious examples of dialect variation is found in Judges 12:6, where the Gileadites used the שְׁבָלַת test to identify Ephraimites, who failed the test by responding with סְׁבָלַת.⁴ The LXX, however, missed this dialectal interchange. Rather than attempting to spell out (transliterate) the terms, the translation for שְׁבָלַת was Σύνθημα; and סְׁבָלַת was left untranslated. The specific sense of the passage was, therefore, lost.⁵

Another clear demonstration of dialect variation is found in Deuteronomy 3:9, where the Sidonians call Mount Hermon שֵׂרִין and the Ammonites call it שְׁנִיר. Targum Onkelos translated the name טוֹר תָּלָא (mountain of snow) for שְׁנִיר.⁶ Once again, the sense of dialectal interchange was lost.

Limited Scope of Hebrew Scholars

A second problem encountered in the search for Hebrew dialect variations is the limited scope of some scholars. More specifically, a singular focus on one aspect

⁴Unless otherwise indicated, all Hebrew citations are from *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, ed. Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1977).

⁵Judges 12:6a reads: καὶ εἶπαν αὐτοῖς Εἰπατε δὴ Σύνθημα· καὶ οὐ κατηύθυναν τοῦ λαλῆσαι οὔτως; "and they said to him, Now say Sunthema; and he did not pronounce it so."

⁶The Pentateuch according to Targum Onkelos, vol. 1 of *The Bible in Aramaic: Based on Old Manuscripts and Printed Texts*, ed. Alexander Sperber (Leiden: Brill, 1959).

of the language may lead to a lack of familiarity with a crucial issue. To appraise adequately the language of the Old Testament, several matters must be taken into consideration: (1) the Hebrew text itself (phonology, morphology, and syntax), (2) the historical context of the passages in question, (3) Hebrew epigraphy which may bear on the findings, (4) comparative Semitic lexicography, and (5) the witness of early Bible versions. Using all five criteria for linguistic study, the scholar achieves a more balanced perspective than limiting his field of vision to one issue.

Definition and Examples of Dialect

Definition

In general, scholars who discuss Hebrew dialectology do so without defining the term "dialect." David Crystal's definition is helpful in establishing the parameters of the term for this study. According to him, "dialect" refers to

a regionally or socially distinctive VARIETY of a language, identified by a particular set of WORDS and GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURES . . . is also sometimes applied to the linguistically distinct historical stages through which a language has passed . . . has further been used to refer to the distinctive language of a particular professional group [author's emphasis].⁷

For this study, therefore, the term "dialect variation" refers to variations related to historical, regional, and

⁷David Crystal, *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1985), s.v. "dialect(-al, -ology)."

stylistic matters. In this sense, the term replaces such other terms as strata, layers, and stages.

Bruce Waltke and Michael O'Connor wrote that the "lines dividing variation, dialect, and language are fuzzy, because accumulated variations lead to dialects, and divergent dialects lead to languages."⁸ In this regard, the present study assumes that variants are indicative of divergent dialects. Rather than concur with Joshua Blau's assessment that each is a "presupposed pseudo-correct feature that alludes to an alleged dialectal phenomenon,"⁹ this writer intends to allow the text to speak for itself.

Examples

One example of a Canaanite language which developed a distinctive pattern of dialects is Phoenician. Stanislav Segert wrote: "As may be expected, there are diachronic and geographical differences in a language used for a long time in a widespread area."¹⁰ Epigraphic evidence indicates that the Byblian dialect recorded on the Ahiram sarcophagus was markedly distinct from that of the Karatepe inscriptions,

⁸Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 60.

⁹Joshua Blau, *On Pseudo-Corrections in Some Semitic Languages* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1970), 23.

¹⁰Stanislav Segert, *A Grammar of Phoenician and Punic* (Munich: Beck, 1976), 27. One example is the infixed *t* stem of the verb, found only in the Byblian Ahiram inscription.

which in turn differed greatly from the Punic inscriptions of Carthage. These three are not only geographically distinct, but also chronologically distinct. In both vocabulary and syntax, they are distinct enough to be recognized as three distinct dialects yet common enough to be categorized as being members of the Phoenician family.¹¹

Another Canaanite example comes from the earlier Ugaritic, though it must be recognized that not all Semitic scholars consider this to be Canaanite. According to Moshe Held, there were features which distinguished the more ancient Ba'al Epic from the later Keret Epic.¹² Held also believed that careful study of the language of Ras Shamra yielded other linguistic facts: "The lexicon of the ritual and economic texts differs in many essentials from the lexicon of the epics."¹³ In both chronology and genre, differences in form and function delineate Ugaritic dialects.

Wolfram von Soden consistently used *dialect* to refer to geographical and chronological variations in Akkadian. Both Assyrian and Babylonian are dialectal branches of the

¹¹For distinctions in definition between language and dialect, see Crystal, *A Dictionary*, s.v. "dialect(-al, -ology)."

¹²Moshe Held, "Hebrew *ma'gāl*: A Study in Lexical Parallelism," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 6 (1974): 113.

¹³Held, "*mhs/mhš* in Ugaritic and Other Semitic Languages (A Study of Comparative Lexicography)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 79 (1959): 174.

Akkadian language, and their various chronological subdivisions are also known as dialects.¹⁴ A careful look at von Soden's work points to another dialectal division, that is, stylistic.¹⁵ Following the perspective of von Soden, then, the classification of dialectal variants includes distinctives of time, place, and style.

Significance

History of Previous Studies

Throughout the history of Hebrew Bible studies, many grammarians, lexicographers, and theologians have taken the position that Biblical Hebrew is not a monolithic entity. Indeed, various methods have been employed to distinguish forms of Biblical Hebrew by means of identifying variations in vocabulary, syntax, or genre. According to Hans Bauer and Pontus Leander, "*Das Hebräische ist Demnach keine einheitliche Sprache, sondern eine richtige Michsprache.*"¹⁶ Since their assessment of Biblical

¹⁴Wolfram von Soden, *Grundriß der Akkadischen Grammatik*, Analecta Orientalia, nos. 33/47 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), 2-4; with Wolfgang Röllig, *Das Akkadische Syllabar*, Analecta Orientalia, no. 42 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1976).

¹⁵Von Soden's references to the "hymnal-epic dialect" refer to a specialized vocabulary employed in poetic literature. See citation in Held, "*mhs/mhš*," 175, n. 106.

¹⁶Hans Bauer and Pontus Leander, *Historische Grammatik der hebräischen Sprache des Alten Testamentes* (Halle: Nachdruck der Ausgabe, 1922; reprint, Hildesheim: Olms, 1965), 19 (writer's translation: "Hebrew is, therefore, not a uniform language but is actually a

Hebrew as a "*Michsprache*," other writers have written about the lack of evenness in the language.

Edward Ullendorff, another scholar who recognized the lack of uniformity in Hebrew, questioned the use of the term "Biblical Hebrew."¹⁷ Those who question traditional dating and authorship of the Old Testament often cite distinctions of vocabulary and style as marks of scribal traditions. The more conservative view recognizes that variations within the text may be attributed to dialect.¹⁸

Until recently, however, dialect study in Biblical Hebrew was awaiting pursuit. Ullendorff wrote:

Some serious work ought to be undertaken, in the light of modern linguistic notions, on the question of dialects and colloquialisms in the Old Testament. . . . We must now endeavor to shed more light on dialect geography and the influence of social stratification.¹⁹

In the last two decades, this call has been answered primarily by one man, Gary Rendsburg. Since writing his New York University dissertation on colloquialisms in

language mix").

¹⁷Ullendorff has previously and recently queried about the accuracy of the term. See *Is "Biblical Hebrew" a Language?* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1977) and "Could Isaiah Understand the *Ha'arets* Newspaper?" in *Language, Theology, and the Bible: Essays in Honour of James Barr*, ed. Samuel E. Balentine and John Barton, 120-34 (esp. 120-21) (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).

¹⁸Larry L. Walker, "Biblical Languages," in *The Origin of the Bible*, ed. Philip Wesley Comfort, 211-31 [esp. 213] (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1992).

¹⁹Edward Ullendorff, "The Knowledge of Languages in the Old Testament," in *Is "Biblical Hebrew" a Language?* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1977), 47.

Biblical Hebrew, Rendsburg has written more than anyone else in this field of dialectal studies.²⁰ Randall Garr has also added valuable information to this field, though in a more general sense (general, that is, to Hebrew dialectology).²¹ Along with these two men, others have recently published material regarding dialectal variations.²²

While Ullendorff and Werner Weinberg have aptly (and independently) demonstrated the awareness of linguistic variation by biblical writers,²³ no comprehensive study has been done to document types of dialect variations as they relate to exegesis. Furthermore, though scholars have discussed dialect classification in Biblical Hebrew in summary fashion,²⁴ none offers a comprehensive view of the

²⁰His 1980 dissertation has recently been published: Gary A. Rendsburg, *Diglossia in Ancient Hebrew*, AOS, no. 72 (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1990).

²¹W. Randall Garr, *Dialect Geography in Syria-Palestine, 1000-586 B.C.E.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985).

²²Among the scholars are James R. Davila, "Qoheleth and Northern Hebrew," *MAARAV* 5-6 (Spring 1990): 69-87; and Mark F. Rooker, "The Diachronic Study of Biblical Hebrew," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 14 (1988): 199-214.

²³Ullendorff, "Knowledge of Languages," 37-47; also Werner Weinberg, "Language Consciousness in the OT," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 92 (1980): 185-204.

²⁴See especially Rendsburg, *Linguistic Evidence for the Northern Origin of Selected Psalms*, SBL Monograph, no. 43 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 1-17; and "The Strata of Biblical Hebrew," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 17 (1991): 81-99.

proposals and an analysis of each. The intent of this study is to pursue both avenues.

Contribution of This Study

This study is an attempt to develop a different approach to the field of Hebrew dialectology. Rather than focus solely on the phonology, orthography, and morphology of words for their linguistic value, the intent here is to identify the various types of dialectal variants and their effects on the exegesis and exposition of the text. In addition, the discussion of various classifications is meant to serve as a tool to display how dialectology relates to other aspects of Old Testament studies.

Methodology

In essence, the method of the research is (1) to examine the internal biblical evidence for the expression of dialect variation in ancient Hebrew and (2) to analyze recent proposals for the classification of dialectal variations in Biblical Hebrew. The first concerns selected Hebrew passages relating to the discussion of dialectal studies. The latter analyzes selected proposals which incorporate such Old Testament concerns as chronology, provenance, and style into their discussions.

Organization

This study of dialect variations and their classification is thus presented in two major sections.

Part one presents a case for the verifiable usage of dialect variation by the writers and personalities of the Hebrew Bible. This case is presented in chapters two through four.

Chapter two presents dialectal evidence from the Pentateuch, with examples from Genesis and Deuteronomy. The evidence presented relates to vocabulary, geography, tradition, and tribal differences. Distinctive terms such as לְשׁוֹן and נָבָח are discussed. Certain causes of dialect formation are also addressed: specifically, isolation and contact with other cultures. Examples of terms and toponyms which reflect dialect are also analyzed.

Chapter three presents evidence from the Prophets. Included in this section are the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings) and the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve). Pronunciation, morphology, and semantics are dialectal evidences presented from the Former Prophets. Ezekiel, Amos, Hosea, Nahum, and Habakkuk are selected representatives of the Latter Prophets which display evidence of dialect preservation.

Chapter four presents evidence from the Writings, which includes the remaining poetic literature, as well as the wisdom literature, Ruth, and the postexilic prose of Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah, and the Chronicles. Discussion in this section is related to vocabulary, syntax, and poetic practices in the Ancient Near East. The issue of Hebrew national identity after the Exile is a factor relating to dialect discussed in regard to the books of Esther and

Ezra-Nehemiah.

Part two is a presentation of the three major classifications of dialectal variants: chronological, regional, stylistic. As the research indicates, the nature of dialect variations precludes precise classification, so overlaps occur. Along with a synopsis of each classification proposal, an analysis of methodologies and conclusions is given.

Chapter five is a discussion of proposals which identify time periods in Biblical Hebrew. The twofold assumption of S. R. Driver²⁵ is mentioned, the threefold approach of E. Y. Kutscher²⁶ is examined, and the more specific, recent proposals of David Robertson²⁷ and Robert Polzin are analyzed.²⁸ The issue of archaism is of particular importance in the dating of passages, and discussion of this issue closes the chapter.

Chapter six presents and analyzes the current debate on distinguishing Judahite, Israelite, and other

²⁵S[amuel] R[olles] Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1902), xxiv.

²⁶E[duard] Y[echezkull] Kutscher, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, ed. Raphael Kutscher (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 12.

²⁷David A[lan] Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence in Dating Early Hebrew Poetry*, SBL Dissertation Series, no. 3 (Missoula, Mont.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1972).

²⁸Robert Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew: Toward an Historical Typology of Biblical Hebrew Prose*, Harvard Semitic Monographs, no. 29 (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976).

regional dialects of Biblical Hebrew by means of dialect analysis of Biblical Hebrew and epigraphic evidence. A recent National Association of Professors of Hebrew panel discussion²⁹ along with published materials by Rendsburg and others are of primary significance to this chapter.

Chapter seven analyzes proposals for distinctions between formal and colloquial Hebrew found in the text. The social and economic barriers involved in these distinct dialects, as well as similar occurrences in other languages, are discussed. Again, Rendsburg's work is a focal concern. This chapter also addresses the issue of style-switching.³⁰ Since this area relates to compositional criticism, discussion is presented for a clear contrast between general vocabulary changes for rhetorical purposes and the intentional variation of the word for stylistic reasons.

A summary and final conclusions are found in chapter eight. Along with an overview of the material

²⁹The panel discussion was entitled: "Dialectology in Biblical Hebrew: A North Israelite Dialect?" Chicago: National Association of Professors of Hebrew, 20 November 1994 (typewritten, from audio tape). Panelists included James R. Davila, Daniel C. Fredericks, and Stephen A. Kaufman, with additional comments from Gary A. Rendsburg.

³⁰See Stephen A. Kaufman, "The Classification of the North West Semitic Dialects of the Biblical Period and Some Implications Thereof," in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress on Jewish Studies: Hebrew and Aramaic Languages*, ed. Moshe Bar-Asher, 41-57 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988); and Rendsburg, "Kabbîr in Biblical Hebrew: Evidence for Style-Switching and Addressee-Switching in the Hebrew Bible," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 112, no. 4 (1992): 649-51.

covered, a discussion of the benefits of this study for biblical exegesis is presented.

PART I

MAKING A CASE FOR DIALECT VARIATIONS

IN THE HEBREW TEXT

CHAPTER TWO
EVIDENCE FOR DIALECTS IN THE LAW

When considering the issue of dialects, one must be aware of both the causes and the substance of distinction in a particular dialect. A primary cause, discussed below, is the separation between groups which can cause them to develop subtle differences in their manner of speaking. Another reason for variations in dialect is the influence of cultures upon one another. Thus, one must recognize the internal and the external factors which lead to distinctive dialects and, in this case, the factors bearing on dialects in Biblical Hebrew.

Percy J. Wiseman perceived peculiarities of sections of Genesis which show a kinship between the Hebrew accounts and other ancient texts, suggesting the influence of foreign language and culture upon the initial record of the accounts.¹ The similarity of Akkadian, for example, with the early sections of Genesis points to a common cultural heritage in Mesopotamia, according to Wiseman. In a similar sense, the Joseph Cycle bears the marks of Egyptian language and culture, thus testifying that the writer was intimately

¹P[ercy] J. Wiseman, *Ancient Records and the Structure of Genesis: A Case for Literary Unity*, ed. Donald J. Wiseman (Nashville: Nelson, 1985), 74-85.

acquainted with the manners and customs of Egypt. Jesse Boyd wrote that familiarity with Egyptian culture is also evident in the remainder of the Pentateuch.²

The text which includes the Jacobean blessings recorded in Genesis 49 indicates an influence of Aramaic on the speech of Jacob. Aramaic peculiarities in Jacob's vocabulary, which have been discussed by Stanley Gervitz and others,³ were a result of his bilingual upbringing and his twenty years of service to Laban in Aram. As a result of his immersion in the language, his ideolect, while foundationally Hebrew, showed signs of Aramaic influence. These sections are the principal issues regarding Genesis in this chapter.

Onomastic studies are also helpful in delineating dialect transitions. Using two examples from Deuteronomy, this writer argues that toponyms may be employed as evidence of dialect variation.

Testimony from Early Genesis

As one begins a study of biblical dialectology, questions arise concerning the field and its relationship to early Genesis. First, what role does orthography play in

²Jesse L. Boyd III, "An Example of the Influence of Egyptian on the Development of the Hebrew Language during the Second Millennium B.C.," in *A Tribute to Gleason Archer*, ed. Walter Kaiser and Ronald Youngblood; 191-95 (Chicago: Moody, 1986).

³Stanley Gervitz, "Naphtali in 'Blessing of Jacob,'" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 (1984): 513-21; and Gary A. Rendsburg, "Israelian Hebrew Features in Genesis 49," *MAARAV* 8 (Gervitz Festschrift, 1992): 161-70.

this discussion of dialect variation? Second, is the Hebrew of Genesis significantly different from the rest of the Pentateuch? Third, are there dialect variations in this early section (Gen. 1-11) of the Hebrew Bible?

Regarding the first question, Werner Weinberg and James Barr concurred that neither *plene* nor defective orthography are to be understood as distinctions of dialect.⁴ Frank Moore Cross and David Noel Freedman argued that epigraphic material points to strict standards of orthography. Furthermore, they considered the spelling in the Hebrew text to be "a mixture of orthographic forms from every stage in the history of Hebrew spelling."⁵ Barr focused on the Hebrew Bible itself, concluding:

I do not doubt that dialect variations of a substantial kind may have existed at the times when the books originated. But I find no serious evidence of them in the spellings of the Masoretic text. . . . The same kinds of spelling variations are found in all books and all sources [author's emphasis].⁶

While these scholars disagree on many points concerning the Hebrew language, they concur that spelling variations are not generally a factor in dialectal studies.

⁴Werner Weinberg, *The History of Hebrew Plene Spelling* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1985), 4-7; and James Barr, *The Variable Spellings of the Hebrew Bible*, Schweich Lectures 1986 (Oxford: The British Academy, 1989), 20-21, 194. Barr wrote: "The whole tradition of seeking to correlate spelling with dialect . . . may well be mistaken" (20-21).

⁵Frank Moore Cross, Jr. and David Noel Freedman, *Early Hebrew Orthography: A Study of the Epigraphic Evidence*, AOS, no. 36 (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1952; reprint, 1990), 59.

⁶Barr, *Variable Spellings*, 201.

Second, concentrations of distinct vocabulary may be found. Specific cognate parallels are the focus of the first section. These forms often lead scholars to assume that the Hebrews took existing cosmological stories and adapted them for themselves. Neither the theological nor the linguistic evidence, however, supports these assumptions. Regarding the rules of grammar and syntax, however, there are no major differences between Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch.

Finally, while early Genesis does not yield dialect variations *per se*, terminology used in Genesis 10 and 11 seems to indicate that the Hebrews may have used terms to distinguish between language and dialect. Not only are separate terms employed (**לְוִיָּה** and **נָבָעַת**), but also the terms are used in different contexts. The Table of Nations and the Tower of Babel sections address these distinctions.

Similarities to Akkadian Forms

Since the discovery of the Akkadian accounts of origins and the ancient world, many scholars have assumed that the Hebrews adapted their record of cosmic creation and civilization from the Assyrians and Babylonians. This study presents the position that, while there are seeming similarities, the contrasts between the accounts outweigh the comparisons. In this section, the primary question is this, Does the linguistic evidence indicate the use of Akkadian forms in early Genesis?

Similar Syntax

The Mesopotamian creation epic known as *Enuma Eliš* (henceforth *EE*) has been given consideration when the Hebrew account of Genesis 1 is discussed. Speiser, for example, pointed to syntactical parallels between the first nine lines of *EE* and Genesis 1:1-3.⁷ In his view, both passages followed this pattern: temporal dependent clause(s), parenthetical clause(s), and then main clause.

According to his premise, Genesis 1:1 is to be taken as a dependent clause. בְּרֵאשֶׁת would have to read בְּרָאשִׁית in order to be definite and stand as an independent clause. Speiser took verse two, which stands verbless, as a parenthical clause leading into the main clause in Genesis 1:3. The syntax of *EE* Tablet 1, lines 1-9 was then equated syntactically with the first three verses in Genesis. Lines 1-2 are dependent ("when"), lines 3-8 are parenthetical ("at which time"), and line 9 is the main clause ("then").⁸

Speiser's conclusions are speculative and highly debatable. E. J. Young pointed out that Ibn Ezra had also taken the position that Genesis 1:1 was a dependent clause. Furthermore, he stated that the threefold clause construction was not original with Speiser, but with Hermann Gunkel. Rather than concurring with this view,

⁷E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, in *The Anchor Bible*, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), 12.

⁸Speiser, *Genesis*, 12.

however, Young pointed out that

the construct followed by a finite verb is a genuine Semitic usage.⁷

There are numerous biblical examples of this construction. Cf. Lev. 14:46; I Sam. 5:9; 25:15; Ps. 16:3; 58:9; 81:6; Isa. 29:1; Hos. 1:2. As the following examples will show, the construct in Babylonian may also be followed by a finite verb. a-wa-at iq-bu-ú, "The word which he has spoken," *Code of Hammurabi*, col Va:62.⁸

In another work, Young pointed out that the translator's approach to this verse reflects his view of the creation account. The scholar who takes Genesis 1 to be an adaptation of *EE* will simply take Genesis 1:1-3 to have identical syntax. On the other hand, the one who believes that the Old Testament teaches absolute creation (*ex nihilo*) will understand Genesis 1:1 to be an independent clause. J. Wash Watts also disagreed with Speiser, explaining that Genesis 1:1-3 is to be understood in "temporal sequence,"¹⁰ that is, in sequential time.

Similar Style

While studying Akkadian literature, this writer has discovered an abundance of paronomasia (wordplay) in the texts of Mesopotamia. In the hurispicy texts (liver omens)

⁹Edward J[oseph] Young, *Studies in Genesis One*, in International Library of Philosophy and Theology: Biblical and Theological Studies, ed. J. Marcellus Kik (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964), 3.

¹⁰J[ames] Wash[ington] Watts, *A Survey of Syntax in the Hebrew Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964; reprint, South Pasadena, Calif.: Jameson Press, 1978), 109. See especially his discussion on the waw consecutive.

of the *bārû*,¹¹ in the legal documentation (Code of Hammurabi),¹² in the primeval epics (Gilgamesh, Enuma Elish),¹³ and in correspondence (Amarna Letters),¹⁴ every genre of Akkadian writing contains wordplay. Speiser has pointed out that Genesis 2:5 holds a paronomastic combination: ܒܼܼܼܼܼ and ܼܼܼܼܼܼ.¹⁵ Prior to this point in the text, ܼܼܼܼ was the term used for land or ground.

Similar Vocabulary

Several etymological parallels are often cited between EE and early Genesis as evidence for Hebrew adaptation of the Akkadian account.¹⁶ The following table presents some of the more recognizable cognate forms to

¹¹Ivan Starr, *The Rituals of the Diviner*, Bibliotheaca Mesopotamica, no. 12 (Malibu, Calif.: Undena, 1983), 9-10.

¹²The end of Law 11 reads *idki iddak*, from the roots *deku* "to utter" and *dâku* "to kill," respectively.

¹³Gilgamesh xi.26 and 27 have *zêru* "to hate" and *zer* "seed;" EE v.3 reads *mîsrata umassir* "he divided the regions."

¹⁴EA 256.14,15 begin *an-nu-u* and *al-lu-u*, respectively.

¹⁵Speiser, *Genesis*, 16. A significant article on this subject is A. Guillaume, "Paronomasia in the Old Testament," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 9 (1964): 282-90. See also William Wilson, *Old Testament Word Studies* [originally: *The Bible Student's Guide to the More Correct Understanding of the English Translation of the Old Testament by Referring to the Original Hebrew*, 2d ed.] (London: Macmillan & Co., 1870; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1978), 561.

¹⁶As evident in the discussion below, this writer denies the idea that the monotheistic Hebrews borrowed an account from the polytheistic Babylonians or anyone else.

which scholars refer.

Table 1.--Etymologically Parallel Cosmological Terms

Akkadian	Translation	Hebrew
šamu	heaven(s)	שָׁמַיִם
erṣetu	earth, ground	אָרֶץ
Ti'āmat	deep	תְהוֹם
mû	waters	מֵים
ilu	God/gods	אֱלֹהִים
banû	to create	בָּנָה ¹⁷

Sources: *The Seven Tablets of Creation (or, The Babylonian and Assyrian Legends concerning the Creation of the World and Mankind)*, ed. Leonard W. King (London: Luzac, 1902; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1976); and *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, ed. Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1977).

As with all cosmological accounts, there are parallels in the references to the various elements involved in the creation process. Although the vocabulary is audibly similar, the substance of the EE account distinctly differs from the opening lines of the Genesis creation account:

1. When above the heaven [šamu] had not (yet) been named,
2. (And) below the earth [erṣetu] had not (yet) been called by name;
3. (When) Apsu primeval, their begetter,
4. Mummu, (and) Ti'amat, she who gave birth to them all,
5. (Still) mingled their waters [mû] together,
6. And no pasture land had been formed (and) not (even) a reed marsh was to be seen;
7. When none of the (other) gods [ilu] had been brought into being,
8. (When) they had not (yet) been called by their

¹⁷ בָּנָה is only used once, in regard to Eve (Gen. 2:22). The Hebrew root meaning "to create" is בָּרַא.

name(s, and their) destinies had not (yet) been fixed,
 9. (At that time) were the gods created [banû] within
¹⁸ them.

Apart from the obvious opposing views of the eternity of God/gods, there are two particular features which are similar, yet certainly not identical.

First, Hebrew מָתֵהַן is a generic term for "the deep," which is neither defined nor used frequently. Contrasting this is Ti'amat, the creatrix goddess who embodies the primeval salt water depths (with Apsu embodying fresh water). She figures prominently in the Babylonian creation account, particularly after the murder of the begetter god Apsu. The etymological parallel between מָתֵהַן and Ti'amat is apparent; yet, their semantic ranges are polar opposites.

The other lexical form of note is the Akkadian verb *banû*, which is translated "create." Scholars may argue for an etymological tie between this term and the Hebrew נָתַן (with a liquid interchange), but that is not the issue of this discussion. *Banû* is the primary verb used for creative activity in *EE*, employed throughout the hundreds of lines of text. Young discovered, however, that this Akkadian verb does not elicit *ex nihilo* creation: "It is certain that no doctrine of absolute creation is to be found in it."¹⁹

Etymologically cognate to this term in Hebrew is

¹⁸Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of Creation*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1972), 18. Parenthetical additions are from Heidel, but Akkadian vocabulary is provided by the present author.

¹⁹Young, *Genesis One*, 17.

בָּנָה, which is used only once in the Genesis account (2:22). In contrast, the terms אֶבְרָא,²⁰ אֶצְרָא,²¹ and נַפְשׁוּ²² are employed for a total of nineteen times in Genesis 1 and 2. One must, therefore, recognize that while a linguistic parallel to *banû* and other Akkadian cognate forms exist in early Genesis, the linguistic similarities do not substantiate the concept that the Hebrews borrowed from the Akkadian accounts.

A better solution to the cognate vocabulary may be the assertion of a common prototype creation account from Mesopotamia, which antedated both the Hebrew and the Akkadian accounts. This position has been proposed by Howard Vos:

It seems best to hold that both came from a common inheritance. The various races of mankind possessed a knowledge of the events of creation. Among some of the peoples the narrative became more polluted than among others. The Genesis record represents the purest of these various accounts--one preserved by God Himself. It should be remembered that both *Enuma Elish* and the Genesis account come from the same area--an area where civilization began, according to Genesis and the conclusions of archaeology. Possibly Abraham brought a creation with him from Ur to Canaan. If so, it was then passed on from father to son until Moses recorded it in the [B]ook of Genesis.²³

Vos suggested that a record was supernaturally preserved, but he did not suggest that any written Hebrew accounts

²⁰Genesis 1:1,21,27 (three times); also 2:3,4.

²¹Genesis 2:7,8, and 19.

²²Genesis 1:7,16,25,26,31; 2:2,3,4,18.

²³Howard F. Vos, *Genesis and Archaeology* (Chicago: Moody, 1963), 16.

antedated Moses. His position was that an oral Mesopotamian precursor to Genesis and EE would allow for both linguistic parallels and theological polarity, as the Hebrews were monotheistic and the Babylonians practiced polytheism.

With the separation of one group from another after the Babel incident (Gen. 11), various perversions of the Creation and Flood accounts arose. Genesis 12 speaks of Abram following the one true God, while those he left behind continued in their polytheistic practices.

Wiseman's proposal that there was Mesopotamian influence on the language of early Genesis is not borne out by the arguments of liberal scholarship.²⁴ Familiarity with ancient Mesopotamian cities may be an issue which points to authentically early accounts, but the evidence does in no way substantiate the claims that the Hebrews borrowed from the religious archives of Babylonia or Assyria.

Table of the Nations

The first references to language (or possibly to dialect) are found in Genesis 10, the passage which is often referred to as the Table of Nations. The descendants of Noah are distinguished by the four common factors of territory, clan, nation, and language:

(1) "(From these the maritime peoples spread out into their territories by their clans within their nations, each

²⁴In comparison, see Stephen A. Kaufman, *The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic*, *Astyriological Studies*, no. 19 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1974), 27-29, where he discusses Akkadian loanwords in West Semitic.

with its own language)" (Gen. 10:5, NIV).²⁵

(2) "These are the sons of Ham by their clans and languages, in their territories and nations" (Gen. 10:20).

(3) "These are the sons of Shem by their clans and languages, in their territories and nations" (Gen. 10:31).

These verses seem to indicate that growth of their families and possessions led to migration. As a result of this expansion, these clans were further separated by family leadership (clans), natural boundaries (territories), and eventually peculiarities of speech (languages). While the full implications of Genesis 10:5,20, and 31 did not occur until after the confusion of language (Gen. 11), separation into family units was likely to have occurred in the region surrounding Babel.

The word translated "language(s)" above is **לֹשׁוֹן**, which is known to have a variety of meanings (see table 2 below). In this particular context, the linguistic evidence indicates that a better translation might be "dialect."

Table 2.--Semantic Parallels

Akkadian <i>lisānu</i>	Ugaritic <i>lšn</i>	Hebrew לֹשׁוֹן
tongue	tongue	tongue
language, dialect	language, dialect (?)	language, dialect
bay, wedge, etc.	---	bay, wedge, etc.

Sources: *Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of*

²⁵Unless otherwise noted, all English Bible references are taken from the New International Version.

the University of Chicago, vol. 9, L, 1977; Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, *Analecta Orientalia*, no. 38 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), and Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, trans. Samuel Prideaux Tragelles (London: Bagster, 1847; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979).

An indicator which suggests that these three verses speak of dialects is the use of the term **לְשׁוֹן**. In the early books of the Hebrew Bible, **לְשׁוֹן** (dialect) is distinguished from the term **לָשׂוֹן** (language), which is employed in Genesis chapter 11. This is the assessment of S. R. Hirsch:

There would be a definite difference between the **לָשׂוֹן** of the later event [Tower of Babel] and the **לְשׁוֹן** of what is related here. **לָשׂוֹן** would designate the language, French, German, etc., but **לְשׁוֹן** the way of pronouncing, the dialect.²⁶

Although dialect encompasses more than differences in pronunciation (discussed below), Hirsch's assessment of the term distinctions in Genesis 10 and 11 is a helpful illustration of the dynamics of the terms.²⁷

One may argue, with limited certainty, that whenever **לְשׁוֹן** is employed in conjunction with a specified people group or **מִשְׁנֶה**, its intended meaning is "dialect." Examples of this combination are found throughout the Hebrew Bible:

- (1) Pentateuch: Genesis 10:5 (descendants of Japheth),

²⁶S[amson] R[aphael] Hirsch, *The Pentateuch: Translated and Explained*, trans. Isaac Levy, 2d ed. (London: Isaac Levy, 1963), 197.

²⁷Modern Hebrew does not seem to distinguish between the two terms. The Hebrew New Testament, for instance, employs **לָשׂוֹן** three times for **διαλέκτω** (Acts 1:19; 2:6,8); elsewhere, it renders **לְשׁוֹן עַבְרִית** for **'Εβραιδὶ διαλέκτω** (Acts 21:40; 22:2; 26:14).

10:20 (descendants of Ham), 10:31 (descendants of Shem);

(2) Prophets: Isaiah 33:19 (an undesignated people);
Ezekiel 3:5,6 (an undesignated people);

(3) Writings: Esther 1:22; 3:12; 8:9 (people groups throughout the empire); Nehemiah 13:24 (Ashdodite and the Canaanite people groups).

The stance on this issue is not dogmatic, but the contexts seem to imply something beyond simply "language."²⁸ While the same idea may hold true when **לְשׁוֹן** is used with **גַּם** (Deut. 28:49; Jer. 5:15; and Zech. 8:23), this possibility has yet to be confirmed.²⁹

Translators throughout the centuries have been forced to grapple with the difficulty of a proper rendering of **לְשׁוֹן**. The LXX (*γλῶσσα*, then *χεῖλος* and *φωνὴ*) and the Vulgate (*lingua*, then *labius* and *sermonum*), for instance, distinguish **לְשׁוֹן** from **שָׁפֶחֶת** and **דִּבְרִים** (in Gen. 10:5; 11:1). All the extant Targums, however, offer **לִשְׁנָה**--a common Aramaic term meaning "language"³⁰--for both **לְשׁוֹן** and **שָׁפֶחֶת**. The Authorized Version distinguished "tongue" in Genesis 10 from

²⁸A similar inference is made regarding Revelation 5:9 and 7:9, where the term for "tongue" or "language" (*γλῶσσα*) is employed.

²⁹A similar possibility exists in the Aramaic section of Daniel with **שָׁפֶחֶת** plus **עַל**: Dan. 3:4,7,29; 4:1; 5:19; 6:25; and 7:14.

³⁰Marcus Jastrow, ed., *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (London: Luzac, 1903; reprint, New York: Judaica Press, 1971), s.v. "**לִשְׁנָה**." Interestingly enough, he cited *Baba Kamma* (*Talmud*) 6b, in which the term is used to refer to the Jerusalem dialect.

"language" in Genesis 11, but the New American Standard and the New International Version render both terms as "language." Likewise, modern European translations equate the two terms: German (*Sprache*), French (*langue*), Spanish (*idioma*), and Portuguese (*língua*). While Hirsch's concept does have an appeal, the issue remains unresolved.

Tower of Babel

Genesis 11:1 sets the stage for the Tower of Babel incident: "And all the earth was [of] one language, one [set of] words" (author's translation). Although there may have been minor distinctions of pronunciation among the descendants of Noah, there was but one universal language. According to Rashi, that language was Hebrew: "תֹּוֹן נָקְרָעַ."³¹ Targum Jonathan adds this commentary: "In the holy language spake they, that by which the world had been created at the beginning."³² Regarding this study, however, the original language at Babel need not be identified. The fact remains that **תֹּוֹן** is used five times in Genesis 11 to refer to the universal language spoken prior to the confusion of the languages. Isaiah 19:18 employs the term in a similar way, where **תֹּוֹן**, used in construct, relates to a region rather

³¹Abraham ben Isaiah and Benjamin Sharfman, *Genesis*, vol. 1 of *The Pentateuch and Rashi's Commentary: A Linear Translation into English* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: S. S. & R. Publ., 1949), 97.

³²*The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch with Fragments of the Jerusalem Targum*, ed. J[ohn] W[esley] Etheridge (n.p., 1862; reprint, New York: Ktav, 1968), 189.

than a people: שְׁבָתִים כְּנֻעַן. In this regard, the term is here distinguished from the term לְשׂוֹן, which seems to relate to individual tribes or people groups.

הַשְׁבָּתִים enjoys a similar semantic range as לְשׂוֹן in related Semitic languages and in Egyptian as well. While Egyptian is not generally considered to be a Semitic language,³³ the parallel uses of Egyptian špt and השְׁבָתִים are remarkable. Note the comparison of Akkadian, Ugaritic, Hebrew, Egyptian, and Arabic cognate forms in table 3.

Table 3.--Semantic Range of Cognates

Akkadian šaptu	Ugaritic šp(t)	Hebrew שְׁבָתִים	Egyptian ³⁴ špt	Arabic šft
lip	lip	lip	lip	lip
edge	---	edge	edge	edge
rim	---	rim	[rim]	rim
shore, bank	---	shore, bank	shore, bank	---
---	---	language	---	word

Sources: *Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, vol. 17, Š, 1991; Joseph Aistleitner, *Wörterbuch der ugaritischen Sprache* (Berlin: Akademie, 1974); *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, ed. Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1977), Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 3d ed. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957), and Hans Wehr, *Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. Milton Cowan (Ithaca, N.Y.: Spoken Language Service, 1976).

³³See Abd el-Mohsen Bakir, *Notes on Middle Egyptian Grammar*, vol. 1 *An Introduction to the Egyptian Language*, 2d rev. ed. (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1984), ix.

³⁴Egyptian trade with Mesopotamia resulted in Akkadian loanwords. For more details, see William W. Hallo, "Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Literature" in W. Gunther Plaut, *Genesis*, vol. 1 of *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1974), xxxii.

While Arabic *šft* does not translate as "language," the fact that it occasionally means "word" suggests a similar concept to language, namely, an expression from the lips.

In Genesis 11:1-9, there is but one translation for *תֹּבֶד*: "language," though some translations make the second use in 11:7 to read "speech." Taking the verse to contain hendiadys, *תֹּבֶד* is defined as "language" by *דִּבְרִים*.³⁵

Testimony from the Patriarchal Period

Much of Genesis is silent regarding dialectal and linguistic distinctives, but Genesis 41 and 42 provide insight into Egyptian cultural and linguistic contacts which influenced Biblical Hebrew. Abraham, unlike the sons of Jacob, needed no interpreter.

One possibility is that Abraham was well-educated and could speak Sumerian, Aramaic, Canaanite, and Egyptian without the aid of an interpreter. This is similar to the testimony of the Sumerian King Shulgi:

I know the language of the Amorites as well as the Sumerian. When these foreigners come to me bringing presents from the mountains I answer them in Amorite. I know the language of the Elamites as well as the Sumerian. When they come to me bringing offerings from Elam, I answer them in Elamite. . . . To administer in the proper way the laws of Sumer I can answer in five languages.³⁶

Another option is that the Hebrew Bible is simply silent

³⁵The term *דִּבְרִים* is generally translated "words," but in some contexts warrants the translation "language" or "speech" (Gen. 11:1; Jer. 5:15; Ps. 19:4; and Est. 9:24).

³⁶Shulgi Hymns, tablet 2075.

regarding Abraham's use of an interpreter, with no perceived need to indicate one way or the other.

Less enigmatic is Jacob's ability to communicate with Laban, though Jacob's mother tongue was Hebrew and Laban's was Aramaic. More than likely, Jacob and Esau grew up in a bilingual home, assuming that Isaac spoke Hebrew (or some early form thereof) and Rebecca spoke Aramaic. In such a case, Jacob's speech was influenced by his association with various family members.

This fact is clearly illustrated in Genesis 31:47, which presents the infiltration of the first blatantly foreign phrase into the text: יְגַנֵּךְ לְהִרְאָתָּךְ. A reasonable inference is that an early form of Aramaic influenced the ideolect of Jacob, which becomes evident later in the text. As discussed later in this chapter, this Aramaic influence was borne out in the blessings of Jacob to his sons in Genesis 49. A similar inference may be drawn from Egyptian language and culture in the Joseph Cycle.

Testimony from the Joseph Cycle

In a recent article, Kenneth Kitchen published his findings on the comparative historical information between the patriarchal material and contemporary extrabiblical sources.³⁷ One of the premises of his discussion is the

³⁷This information had been presented in formal papers at a Near East Archaeological Society seminar of the Evangelical Theological Society and an Egyptian seminar of the Society of Biblical Literature meetings in Chicago, November 1994.

price of slaves at the time of Joseph's servitude (Gen. 39:28) as compared to other slave prices listed in the Old Testament (Exod. 21:32 and 2 Kings 15:20):

In each case, the Biblical slave price fits the general period to which it relates. If all these figures were invented [as Wellhausen suggested] during the Exile (sixth century B.C.) or in the Persian period by some fiction writer, why isn't the price for Joseph 90 or 100 shekels, the cost of a slave at the time when the story was supposedly written?³⁸

Some may argue that this section of Genesis bore the archaizing marks of later Old Testament writers, but this position would not fully answer his claims. Furthermore, Kitchen's comparative analysis of treaty forms clearly indicates a parallel structure between the treaties of patriarchal Genesis and contemporary Hittite treaties.³⁹

Other internal information which suggests that the writer was intimately acquainted with Egyptian culture includes the following verses:

- (1) So they served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians, who ate with him, by themselves; because the Egyptians could not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is loathsome to the Egyptians [Gen. 43:32, NASB];
- (2) "And it shall come about when Pharaoh calls you and says, "What is your occupation?" that you shall say "Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth until now, both we and our fathers," that you may live in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is loathsome to the Egyptians" [Gen. 46:33-34, NASB].

The biblical writer was familiar with Egyptian

³⁸Kenneth A. Kitchen, "The Patriarchal Age: Myth or History?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 21, no. 2 (March/April 1995), 52; explanatory note was added from the context of the discussion.

³⁹Kitchen, "Patriarchal Age," 54-55.

cultural attitudes concerning these matters; thus, he had the ability to provide these insights. These facts, along with the evidence below, point to an Egyptian cultural and linguistic influence upon the language of the Joseph Cycle.

A Word about Pharaoh's Men

Following the successful interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph received the highest position in Egypt, second only to the king himself. Pharaoh adorned him with linen garments, an elaborate necklace of honor, the royal seal, set in a signet ring, and the provision of a royal chariot (Gen. 41:39-43). Then Pharaoh's men spoke a word which has proved enigmatic to biblical scholars. In Genesis 41:43, at issue is the proper understanding of **בָּשָׂר**.

Over the centuries, there have been five basic explanations for this term: (1) an Egyptian word meaning "servant"; (2) an Egyptian word meaning "attention"; (3) an Assyrian title; (4) a Hebrew word relating to "knee"; and (5) a compound Hebrew word used as a title. A definitive identification of this one word might help to bolster Wiseman's claims.

Maximilian Ellenbogen has identified **בָּשָׂר** as a loanword from Egyptian, meaning "servant."⁴⁰ Based on the term *b3k* and a convoluted discussion of the interchange between Egyptian *ʒ* and Hebrew *ח*, Ellenbogen explained that

⁴⁰Maximilian Ellenbogen, *Foreign Words in the Old Testament: Their Origin and Etymology* (London: Luzac, 1962), 3-5.

אָבְרָקָק refers not to Joseph, but to those who cried out to him.⁴¹ In his estimation, the term should be translated "servant."

In 1903, W. Spiegelberg suggested that the term should be translated "attention," based on Egyptian 'br.k.⁴² Lambdin was suspicious of this approach,⁴³ as was James Breasted.⁴⁴ Both scholars, though, took this to be Egyptian in origin. While the thought is tempting to find Pharaoh's courtiers speaking Egyptian in the Hebrew Bible, Ellenbogen's explanation must be weighed against the other options.

Another approach is to identify **אָבְרָקָק** as an Akkadian loanword from *abarakku*, meaning "temple steward" or some similar title.⁴⁵ Primary consideration was rejected on the grounds of possible late infiltration of Akkadian into the Pentateuch. Upon further review, however, Mesopotamian linguistic influence is less of an enigma. As mentioned previously, Egyptian language must have been affected by

⁴¹For more on this term, see Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1962), s.v. **אָבְרָקָק**.

⁴²W. Spiegelberg, "Abrek," *OLz* (1903): 317-21.

⁴³Thomas O. Lambdin, "Egyptian Loan Words in the Old Testament," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 73 (1953): 145-55, esp. 145, 146. He was particularly wary of the use of Coptic as the basis for the discussion.

⁴⁴James H. Breasted, Review of Spiegelberg's *Ägyptologische Randglossen zum Alten Testament*, in *American Journal of Semitic Literature* 21 (1905): 248.

⁴⁵Plaut, *Genesis*, 398.

communications with Mesopotamia. Therefore, even if Ellenbogen's assessment is correct, that does not preclude that the term אָבֶרְךָ originated from the Akkadian *abarakku*.

Option four is to suggest that אָבֶרְךָ is based on the Hebrew word בָּרַךְ, meaning "knee." In this option, the cry is for all to "bow the knee" in submission to the position of Joseph.⁴⁶ This seems to fit the subject matter in the following verse: "Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Though I am Pharaoh, yet without your permission no one shall raise his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt'" (Gen. 41:44).

The last position is that the term is actually a compound Hebrew title meaning "father of the king." Rashi's commentary offers precious insight into the controversy over this term:

(אָבֶרְךָ is to be interpreted) as the Targum renders it: He is the father (אָבִ) (counselor) of the king (לְךָ). לְךָ in the Aramaic language means "king." . . . And in the Aggadah Rabbi Judah interpreted: אָבֶרְךָ, this refers to Joseph, for he was a father (elder) אָבִ in wisdom although young (לְךָ) in years. Rabbi Jose son of Durmascith said to him, "How long will you pervert for us the Scriptures? אָבֶרְךָ denotes only 'knees' (בָּרְכִים), for everyone entered and went out by his permission.⁴⁷

Though this survey of the writers of Jewish traditional law provides a history of interpretation for this term, it does not posit a clear solution. Option five is not a likely candidate, since Hebrew has an aversion to compound words. Once again, there is no definitive answer to this problem.

⁴⁶This position would be the most direct fulfillment of Joseph's dream in Genesis 37:9-10.

⁴⁷Ben Isaiah, *Rashi*, 413-14.

The strong possibility exists, however, that the word in question is Egyptian in origin.

Several other Egyptian words, specifically names, are mentioned in close proximity to this term. Genesis 41:45 records the renaming of Joseph to Zaphenath-Paneah. His wife Asenath is mentioned by name, as is his father-in-law Potiphera. Familiarity with Egyptian customs, language, and names are clearly demonstrated in this passage. As such, a reasonable conclusion is that שָׁפֵןְתַּהֲנֵא comes to the Hebrew text by way of Egyptian.⁴⁸ This suggests that other Egyptian loanwords have made their way into the text, either by *verbatim* borrowing or as dialectal variants.⁴⁹

A Reunion with Brothers

Years had passed since Joseph's brothers plotted to kill him, after which they chose to trade him off for a bit of wealth. In isolation from his family, Joseph was blessed by פָּנָא. He had been transformed from a piece of merchandise in the slave trade of Ishmaelites to the chief servant of the captain of Pharaoh's guard. Joseph had proved his piety, moving from the position of an accused rapist to the chief prisoner in Pharaoh's prison. Then the abundant blessing came when he was given a place of royal honor as the prime minister of Egypt. His life could hardly be better.

⁴⁸The data for the possible origin of the term in Mesopotamia is inconclusive.

⁴⁹Lambdin, "Egyptian Loan Words," 145-55.

Along with administering the affairs of state, Joseph married the daughter of a priest; and she bore him two sons. Then came the drought and the subsequent famine.

Genesis 42 records that on their first trip from Canaan, ten of Joseph's eleven brothers went to Egypt to buy food supplies for their extended family. When Joseph saw them, he immediately recognized them (Gen. 42:7); but they did not know him. He was an Egyptian of prominence, and he spoke to them through an interpreter (Gen. 42:23). At this point, the commentary of Targum Onkelos adds an interesting insight.

According to this Targum, the interpreter in this exchange was Joseph's own son Manasseh.⁵⁰ Though he was culturally an Egyptian, Joseph taught his sons the ways of **מִצְרַיִם**. He evidently taught them to be bilingual, which would prove beneficial for the family. Perhaps this aptitude in Egyptian had an influence on the tribal dialect of their descendants when they later settled in Canaan and the Transjordan. Dialectal studies in this area have not advanced to the point of distinguishing individual tribes, nor is there sufficient evidence to support any such claims.

Testimony from the Jacobean Blessings

Having laid a foundation for Hebrew terminology and outside influence on the language, the attention of the case turns now to Genesis 49. This passage records the blessings

⁵⁰Targums of Onkelos, 189.

given by Jacob to each of his sons. In recent years, scholars have identified features within particular blessings as "northernisms." Specifically, these northernisms have been located in blessings of three sons whose descendants later inhabited northern Canaan.⁵¹

Blessing upon Issachar

Genesis 49:14-15 records the fifth blessing of Jacob upon Leah's son Issachar. In the opening of the blessing, Israel uses the term **מַלְיָה**, meaning "bone." Rendsburg contended that this term occurs "only in northern compositions,"⁵² suggesting that this term is a dialectal variant originating from Israelite Hebrew. The term is associated with the Aramaic term **אֲמַלְיָה**, which Jastrow identified as the common term for "bone."⁵³ The Hebrew term for bone is **מֵלֶךְ**, which corresponds with the Arabic root **ـَمـَـلـَـ**. This might have been indicative of the southern term for "bone," but Aistleitner has identified **ـَمـَـلـَـ** as a Ugaritic term for bones (collective).⁵⁴ Furthermore, the term **esemtu** is commonly used in Akkadian to mean bone.⁵⁵ The only

⁵¹For instance, see Gervitz, "Naphtali," 513-21 (see n. 3); and Rendsburg, "Genesis 49," 161-70.

⁵²Specifically, his references are Proverbs 17:22; 25:15; and Job 40:18; Rendsburg, "Genesis 49," 163.

⁵³Jastrow, *Dictionary*, s.v. "**מַלְיָה, אֲמַלְיָה**."

⁵⁴Joseph Aistleitner, *Wörterbuch der ugaritischen Sprache* (Berlin: Akademie, 1974), s.v. "**ـَمـَـلـَـ**."

⁵⁵*Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, vol. 4, *E*, s.v. "**esemtu**."

assertion which can be made is that the blessing contains a term unique to Aramaic. While some may regard this as proof of its lateness, the term is more likely indicative of Jacob's intimate knowledge of Aramaic.

Another isogloss of consequence in this blessing comes from verse fifteen: the term **הַמְּשֻׁלָּח**. Of the thirty times that the term occurs in the Hebrew, more than twenty have been identified as being located in Israelite contexts. This term has cognates in Phoenician and Ugaritic: **םְשֻׁלָּח** and **n̄m**, respectively.⁵⁶ Rendsburg has, therefore, concluded:

Thus, as was the case with *gerem* above, the data from the cognate languages and the distribution of this root in the Bible serve as converging lines of evidence to adduce the fact that *n̄m* "good" was an IH [Israelian Hebrew] feature.⁵⁷

Ugaritic employed terms cognate to both **םְשֻׁלָּח** and **בָּרֶךְ**. That fact lessens the likelihood that Rendsburg's conclusion was correct. Modern Hebrew differentiates the terms semantically, which may also be true in Biblical Hebrew.⁵⁸

Blessing upon Naphtali
Naphtali, second son of Rachel's servant Bilhah, has

⁵⁶Stanislav Segert, *A Grammar of Phoenician and Punic*, (Munich: Beck, 1976), 295 (also **אֲ**, 290); and Aistleitner, *Wörterbuch*, s.v. "*n̄m*" (tb was also used). Phoenician did not employ final forms for *k*, *m*, *n*, *p*, or *s*, nor did it use written vowel pointing.

⁵⁷Rendsburg, "Genesis 49," 164.

⁵⁸**םְשֻׁלָּח** has been defined as "to be lovely, pleasant;" Ben Yehuda's *Pocket English-Hebrew Hebrew-English Dictionary*, ed. Ehud ben-Yehuda and David Weinstein (New York: Washington Square Press, 1951), s.v. "**םְשֻׁלָּח**."

the shortest of the blessings, which is recorded in Genesis 49:21. Two significant words have been identified for the northern provenance: אֶמְרֵי שָׂפָר.

Scholars familiar with the Akkadian extaspicy texts know that *immeru(m)* was the sacrificial sheep used in omen reading rituals in Mesopotamia.⁵⁹ While modern translators have not reached a consensus as to the meaning of אֶמְרֵי, Gervitz has concluded that it is tied to Akkadian and is to be translated "lambs."⁶⁰ Rendsburg took this as northern evidence:

The present usage in v. 21 is the only occurrence of this word in the Bible. Thus, 'immār, the presumed singular absolute of 'imrē, is the IH word for "lamb," in opposition to kebeš/kešeb, the JH or standard biblical vocable. It is noteworthy that cognates to this latter word are to the south, e.g., Arabic *kabs*, South Arabian *kabs*. Probably we are to reckon with two Proto-Semitic words for "lamb," a northern lexeme 'mr and a southern lexeme kbš. The meeting ground for these two words was the land of Canaan, with the Bible attesting to both.⁶¹

While his discussion of the language distribution is well-articulated, his position on the origin of the blessing is a matter of debate. If the word actually were a northernism, that would not conclusively prove the northern origin of the

⁵⁹See Kaspar K. Riemschneider, *An Akkadian Grammar*, trans. Thomas A. Caldwell, John N. Oswalt, and John F. X. Sheehan (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 1975), II:12; see also Ivan Starr, *Rituals of the Diviner*, *Bibliotheca Mesopotamica*, no. 12 (Malibu, Calif.: Undena, 1983).

⁶⁰Gervitz, "Naphtali," 515 (see n. 3 for initial reference).

⁶¹Rendsburg, "Genesis 49," 165.

poem after the conquest of Canaan.⁶²

Regarding Rendsburg's discussion of שְׁפָרַת, he pled deference to the proposal that it, too, was related to Akkadian *supūru*, meaning "sheepfold."⁶³ In contrast, he took the term to mean "beauty," corresponding to its cognate in inscriptional Aramaic (Sefire), Biblical Aramaic (Daniel), and later forms of the Hebrew language.⁶⁴

Blessing upon Joseph

Genesis 48:12-20 presents the account of Jacob blessing the sons of Joseph. In Genesis 49:22-26, however, Israel's blessing is specifically for Joseph. In verses twenty three and twenty four, the syntactical form "double plural" is employed זָרְעֵי יִצְחָק, בָּנְלֵי נָצָר, "archers" and زָרְעֵי יְהֹוָה, "steady hands"). Robert Polzin has suggested that this syntax is evidence of Late Biblical Hebrew, but texts from the Deir 'Alla inscription (I:5, p^{el}t. 'lhn "works of the gods")⁶⁵ and possibly Sefire (1, IV:41, וָנֶשֶׁי רַבּוֹה [בָּנוֹה] "wives of his nobles"; 2, B:13, [. . .] בָּנֵי בָּנָיו] "sons of my sons") with

⁶²As a point of clarification, the issue of regional provenance discussed here is to be distinguished from historical-critical arguments for the distinction of provenance regarding so-called J and E documents.

⁶³See this translation in Francis I. Andersen, *The Hebrew Verbless Clause in the Pentateuch* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), 44, and 123, n.5.

⁶⁴Rendsburg, "Genesis 49," 166.

⁶⁵Jo Ann Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Allā, Harvard Semitic Monographs*, no. 31 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1984), 25.

textual clarification⁶⁶ indicate that this was common north-Canaanite syntax centuries earlier than Polzin seemed to concede.

Rendsburg's argument is that the epigraphic evidence suggests northern provenance.⁶⁷ The question then raised is, Are there inscriptions from the south which follow this pattern of plural construct/plural absolute? Jerusalem's Siloam Inscription does not follow the pattern, nor does the Moabite Stone (line 21--*חמת ויערן*--is questionable).⁶⁸ As the evidence now stands, there is nothing which can either confirm or deny Rendsburg's assertion.

A Response to the Proposals

The present writer proposes an alternative position to the idea that Genesis 49 is the product of redaction. One would do well to review the linguistic background of Jacob: (1) his grandfather Abraham emigrated from Mesopotamia and had been known as a wandering Aramean; (2) Jacob's mother Rebecca was originally from the area of

⁶⁶Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire*, Biblia et Orientalia, no. 19 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967), 16, 82.

⁶⁷Rendsburg, "Genesis 49," 168-69.

⁶⁸This writer concurs with Kent Jackson--"The Language of the Mesha^c Inscription," in *Studies in the Mesha^c Inscription and Moab*, ed. Andrew Dearman, 96-130 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 97--for the translation of *מִבְנָה* (line 8) as "days of his son." This is contrasted with "days of his sons" by André Lemaire, "'House of David' Restored in Moabite Inscription," *Biblical Archaeology Review* (May/June 1994): 33.

Aram; and (3) he had spent twenty years in Aram, communicating with his uncle Laban and his wives Leah and Rachel whose native tongue was Aramaic. Rather than proposing a variety of poems composed subsequent to the conquest of Canaan, it is more feasible to recognize that Jacob's idiolect was shaded by his intimacy with northern grammar and syntax.

Testimony concerning Rephaites

Within Deuteronomy 2 are two references to the people known as the Rephaites. The Hebrews called them Rephaites, but others knew them by different names:

(1) "Like the Anakites, they too were considered Rephaites, but the Moabites called them Emites" (Deut. 2:11).

(2) "That too was considered a land of the Rephaites, who used to live there; but the Ammonites called them Zamzummites" (Deut. 2:20).

These verses demonstrate that a single people group could be known by multiple names (see Gen. 14:5). Regarding this Rephaite naming, Ullendorff has written:

References to the languages of Israel's Canaanite predecessors and neighbours can be counted on the fingers of one hand: In Deuteronomy ii.11 we are told that the Moabites called the giants *Emim*; similarly, the Ammonites (Deut. ii.20) named them *Zamzummim*--both expressions which throw little or no light on their respective languages.⁶⁹

With the limited information available from the Moabite and

⁶⁹Ullendorff, "Knowledge of Languages," 44.

Ammonite languages, nothing but speculative etymologies can come from the names alone. The verses do demonstrate, however, that the Hebrews were aware of onomastic distinctions, which later figure into the dialectal discussion, particularly in the Prophets.

Testimony about Mount Hermon

As the reader has just seen, previous texts in Deuteronomy delineate onomastic differences. Alexander Sperber used this approach (morphological differences in names) to suggest that canonical Biblical Hebrew is the offspring of two other Hebrew dialects.⁷⁰ While this study does not seek to pursue the line of testimony to the extent of Sperber, the fact remains that Deuteronomy 3:9 provides evidence for dialect variation based on toponyms.⁷¹

Secondary Name in Other Dialects

Since the evidence of name variations for Mount Hermon begins with outside dialects, that is a natural place to begin this inquiry. Deuteronomy 3:9 records that the Sidonians called Mount Hermon **תַּרְןִיָּה**, while the Amorites called it **תַּרְעֵיר**. Obviously the Sidonians, who were

⁷⁰Alexander Sperber, *A Historical Grammar of Biblical Hebrew: A Presentation of Problems with Suggestions to their Solution* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 105-296. Note the nearly two hundred pages given to the subject.

⁷¹See *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), s.v. "Toponyms and Toponymy," by Ernst Axel Knauf. He proposed that the "continuous process of linguistic change" was demonstrated by phonological, morphological, lexical and semantic adaptation of place names over the course of time.

Phoenician, and the Amorites, who were Canaanite, did not speak Biblical Hebrew *per se*. Two facts, however, touch the discussion of dialect variations in Hebrew: (1) variations in the dialects of other Canaanites affect any discussion of variants in Biblical Hebrew; and (2) the fact that these distinctives have been preserved in the Hebrew Bible makes them significant to any dialectal discussion of the text.

In the case of these two groups, the dialectal variations are a result of simple metathesis (inversion of the second and third radicals). One must assume that in the history of Canaanite communication, one group inverted the transmission or pronunciation and thereafter held to that form of the word. As seen later in other examples, metathesis and consonantal interchange can be more than philological enigmata; they may be dialectal variants.⁷²

Secondary Name in "Standard Hebrew"

With the evidence presented in Deuteronomy 3:9, the original form of Mount Hermon's secondary name is still at large. Does the "standard Hebrew" form in Deuteronomy provide more insight into this question of origin and etymology? At first glance, Deuteronomy 4:48 seems to give an unbiased answer; the verse ends שַׁיִן הָאֵרֶמְן. If this rendering is correct, the question then arises, Where did the נ come from in the forms שְׁגִיר and שְׁרִין? Some have

⁷²As discussed later, Barr was not altogether convinced of a metathesis/dialect correlation; James Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 96-101.

suggested that Deuteronomy 4:48 is simply misspelled and should be emended to שְׁרֵן (following the Syriac).⁷³

Most references in the Hebrew text mention Mount Hermon by this primary name. First Chronicles 5:23, like the previous mentioned verses, employs a secondary name for Hermon. More specifically, there are three names employed in this verse for the same place: Lord (בָּעֵל) Hermon, Mount (הַר) Hermon, and סְנִיר. The fact that *Senir* is used here, along with Song of Songs 4:8 and Ezekiel 27:5, might lead the Bible reader to assume that it is the secondary name of preference. This is simply not the case.

Further investigation reveals that Sirion is used in Psalm 29:6 and Jeremiah 18:14, which suggests that neither *Senir* nor *Sirion* enjoyed greater prominence among the tribes of Israel. A reference to the toponym *Sirion* is present in monumental Egyptian. Shmuel Ahituv cited the word *Sarianu*, recorded in hieroglyphic form, as a reference to the site known elsewhere as *Sirion*.⁷⁴

This chapter was intended to provide foundational evidence for dialectal variation in the Pentateuch. As a result of physical separation from familiar surroundings and the presence of external influences, dialects emerged

⁷³James Hastings, ed. *Dictionary of the Bible*, rev. ed., ed. Frederick C. Grant and H. H. Rowley (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), s.v. "Sion." Though the LXX reads Σηών and the Vulgate reads *Sion*, the Syriac reading is taken by these scholars to be the authoritative one.

⁷⁴Shmuel Ahituv, *Canaanite Toponyms in Ancient Egyptian Documents* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1984), 178.

within Hebrew which became more evident during the times of the conquest of Canaan and the later monarchies.

CHAPTER THREE

EVIDENCE FOR DIALECTS IN THE PROPHETS

This chapter offers a multifaceted approach to the presence of dialect variation in the Prophets. Following the order of the Hebrew Bible, this section includes the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings) and the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve). The clustering of archaic language features, pronunciational differences, semantic distinctions, and regionalisms are but some of the dividing lines between standard Hebrew and dialectal Hebrew found in this literature.

From the Former Prophets, evidence indicates the presence of an archaic dialect preserved in the poetry of Judges 5. Furthermore, Judges 12 records a dialectal change in pronunciation, which is also preserved in the spelling of two words in 12:6. First Samuel 9 reveals the existence of at least three terms for the prophet, with an explanation of chronological changes in semantics. Following this is the account in 2 Kings 18 of the specific distinction of languages. These are the foci of the first section.

Section two surveys a managerie of dialectal examples from the Latter Prophets. Ezekiel's language is a premier example of a book of dialectal contrasts, with

borrowings from foreign languages, and Hebrew which was clearly in transition.¹ Particular attention is given to the northern writing prophets--Amos and Hosea--and the specific features which suggest a northern origin. Nahum's origin as a Galilean is also briefly discussed. The mythopoetic dialect of Habakkuk (similar to Job) is also the object of analysis. Each of the selected passages in this chapter offers a unique contribution to the evidence for dialects in the Prophets.

Testimony from the Former Prophets

From the Song of Deborah

Some scholars take the position that Judges 5 is the most ancient passage in the Hebrew text.² Others take the position that the poem is of an intermediary developmental stage. David Robertson has taken the position that this poem may indeed be ancient but is antedated by Exodus 15.³

The clustering of archaic forms was the basis for Robertson's analysis. If a cluster of archaic terms occurred in the proximity of standard forms, this was considered archaizing. In essence, the biblical writer was

¹See Mark F. Rooker, *Biblical Hebrew in Transition: The Language of the Book of Ezekiel*, JSOT Suppl., no. 90 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1990).

²Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, revised ed. 1969), 173.

³David A. Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence in Dating Early Hebrew Poetry*, SBL Dissertation Series, no. 3 (Missoula, Mont.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1972), 154.

attempting to make the song look older than its actual age. Should the cluster stand alone, however, the passage was considered genuinely archaic. Using this approach, which may be somewhat oversimplified here, only Exodus 15 was deemed to be authentically ancient. Robertson's conclusion left considerable doubt, seemingly even to him, as to the effectiveness of his methodology. Chapter six presents his study in more detail regarding chronological classification of dialects and dialectal features.

Because of the antiquity of this particular poem, C. F. Burney considered the preserved text to be faulty and in need of emendation:

When confronted by difficulties of such character [beyond remedy] there are three courses which are open to the translator. He may endeavour to force the meaning out of \mathfrak{M} as it stands, in defiance of the ordinary rules which govern Hebrew philology; he may abandon the passage as hopeless, and leave a lacuna in his translation; or he may seek, by the aid of the ancient Versions, or (in default of such aid) by means of reasonable conjecture, so to emend the text that it may satisfy at once the demands of the Hebrew language and the requirements of the context.⁴

At best, this attitude may be seen as a noble gesture to offer aid to an ailing text, but it fails to recognize that not all philological problems can be solved. One must not overlook his reference to "ordinary rules," which the reader knows are not always followed, even in Classical Hebrew.

Robertson listed several features which he

⁴C. F. Burney, *The Book of Judges with Introduction and Notes, and Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Book of Kings*, Prolegomenon by William F. Albright, in The Library of Biblical Studies, ed. Harry M. Orlinsky, 2 vol. in 1 (New York: Ktav, 1970), I:102.

considered to exemplify ancient Canaanite poetry. One of the features he did not list was the relative pronoun **וְ** (Judges 5:7; 6:17; 7:12; 8:26), which scholars agree is a dialectal variant of **וְיָהּוּ**. Generally, this variant is taken to be a northernism, a poetic form, a late form, or any combination of the above. Robertson verified this fact but added that "no good reason can be adduced why it may not have been characteristic of the dialect of northern Israel from very early times."⁵ More discussion of the variety of relative pronouns is provided in chapter five.

From the Time of Jephthah

The previously mentioned incident between the Ephraimites and the Gileadites in Judges 12 is probably the text most often used in the introduction of dialectal discussions. Beyond the initial element of the specific words in focus, other issues are brought to light as the text is more carefully analyzed.

Differences in Pronunciation

Probably the most common assumption regarding dialects is that they are all based on differences in pronunciation. Henry Higgins, the fictional dialectician of George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, distinguished English dialects by studying pronunciation.⁶ Much of the current

⁵Robertson, *Early Hebrew Poetry*, 62.

⁶George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion* (Mettituck, N.Y.: Amereon, 1950).

work in American English dialectology relates to pronunciation. As Stephen Kaufman has pointed out, this holds true for some branches of Arabic dialectology.⁷

With this presupposition comes the relevant question, How does one prove pronunciation differences in a literary context? The first answer is to explain that not all dialectal differences have to do with pronunciation alone. More importantly, though, a study of Judges 12:6 gives a clear answer of a literary record of the differences.

The difference recorded in Judges 12:6 is between סְבִלָה and שְׁבִלָה. Perhaps the author wanted to make a clear distinction, thus choosing not to spell the Ephraimite response שְׁבִלָת. There would have been no distinction in pre-Masoretic writing (אַלְוָא for both שְׁבִלָת and שְׁבִיל) unless the second was spelled with a samekh (אַלְמָא). Whatever the case, the record portrays a group of people who were unable to pronounce שְׁבִלָת. As Burney has written:

The error in pronunciation was clearly due to dialectal peculiarity and not to inattention; it being most unlikely that the Ephraimites would fail through carelessness if they realized (as they must have done) that it was a matter of life and death whether they satisfied the test or not.⁸

Their dialect had no ו form, and the Gileadites knew this. In a way, it was comparable to the New Testament writers

⁷Stephen A. Kaufman, Panel Discussion: "Biblical Hebrew Dialectology: A North Israelite Dialect?" National Association of Professors of Hebrew. Chicago, 20 November 1994, typewritten notes.

⁸Burney, I:328.

recording Hebrew names; there is no **וּ** sound in Greek. As a result of this known inability, the term was used as a password, without which no one was allowed to cross the ford.

An issue which arises from the discussion is the nature of consonantal interchange and its place in identifying regional dialects. Does consonant switching follow particular patterns? Is this interchange always an indicator of dialect variation? These are the issues of the following section.

Implications for Other Forms

Consonantal interchanges follow specific patterns. Sibilants interchange with sibilants, dentals with dentals, liquids with liquids, labials with labials, and occasionally, gutterals with gutterals. This interrelationship is common among Canaanite languages, as Zellig Harris and others have pointed out.⁹

Some biblical examples of liquid interchanges include: Nebuchadnezzar/Nebuchadrezzar, אֲלָמָנוֹת/**אַלְמָנוֹת** (palaces), נִשְׁכָה/**לִשְׁכָה** (room), and מִזְרָחָת/**מִזְרָחוֹת** (zodiac).¹⁰

⁹Zellig S. Harris, *Development of the Canaanite Dialects: An Investigation in Linguistic History*, AOS, no. 16 (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1939; reprint, Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus, 1978), 33-41; see also, Carl Brockelmann, *Grundriß der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen I* (Berlin: Reuther and Reichard, 1908), §84.

¹⁰See Aloysius Fitzgerald, "The Interchange of *L*, *N*, and *R* in Biblical Hebrew," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97, no. 4 (1978): 481-88.

Others are not evident until later translations, as in Genesis 18:20, where the guttural interchange $\text{ם}/\text{ג}$ becomes clear in the LXX: עֲמָרָה/*Τομορρας*.¹¹ Suggested interchange emendations are debatable, such as Dahood's labial interchange, emending the root in the text from נַעַל to פָּעַל in Ecclesiastes 8:8 and Proverbs 3:27.¹²

Stanley Rosenbaum's recent monograph has brought light to sibilant interchanges in the writing of Amos, a northern prophet:

Amos is tantalizingly inconsistent, as in the two spellings of "Damascus" (דָמָס in chapter 1 and in 5:27, but דָמָא in 3:12), and the two spellings--or are they two different words?-- צְבָא in 4:1 and צְבָא in 6:11. But this very inconsistency speaks for the essential authenticity of the present text of Amos.¹³

More of his comments are discussed in the section regarding the Latter Prophets, but this reference clearly indicates other forms of sibilant interchange in the Hebrew Bible.

One demonstrably dialectal example from Judges 12:6 is, by no means, conclusive proof that there was widespread dialect variation occurring as reflected by consonantal interchange in ancient Hebrew. This should prove to be sufficient evidence that interchange may, at times, be

¹¹Two other examples of this $\text{ם}/\text{ג}$ (γ) interchange are the personal name רְשָׁוָאֵל/*Ραγονηλ* (Exod. 2:18) and the toponym גְּנָזָר/*Γάζα*. See E. Y. Kutscher, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, ed. Raphael Kutscher (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982), 18.

¹²Mitchell Dahood, "Qoheleth and Northwest Semitic Philology," *Biblica* 43 (1962): 362.

¹³Stanley N. Rosenbaum, *Amos of Israel: A New Interpretation* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer, 1989), 90.

attributed to dialectal differences. Research which has already been done should be the impetus for future study in this field. As Ullendorff has written:

Detailed research based on modern linguistic notions will undoubtedly be able to recover dialectal forms and colloquialisms. . . . Dialect geography, the influence of social stratification on Biblical Hebrew, the pronunciation of Hebrew by the Samaritans . . . aspects of the Dead Sea documents, and other pre-Massoretic materials may well place the study of Hebrew on a different basis altogether.¹⁴

Each supposed dialectal variant must be viewed according to its regional, chronological, or stylistic context before a verdict can be reached.

From 1 Samuel

First Samuel 9:9 provides a glimpse into semantic distinctions in ancient Hebrew and an explanation of the chronological usage of terms for the office of prophet, though some scholars take this verse to be a marginal gloss.¹⁵ The present writer, however, regards this as a key verse--both chronologically and semantically--that there were differences within the language.

Differences in Semantics

As time passes, changes occur in language which must be explained to a new generation. A contemporary

¹⁴Edward Ullendorff, "Biblical Languages," in *Is "Biblical Hebrew" a Language?* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1977), 31.

¹⁵Henry Preserved Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel*, in *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1899), 61.

example is the Authorized (King James) Version.

Elizabethan English has given way to the less-refined modern American English. Many of the terms used in the 1611 publication carry much different meanings today. The term "ass," for example, has an entirely different semantic range than it did under the reign of the Tudors; thus, the proper term used today is "donkey."

In the case of 1 Samuel 9:9, the term נָבָה had been generally replaced by נָבִיא. Smith wrote, "The rarity of the word led the scribe to insert this verse as an explanation."¹⁶ He further asserted that the term נָבִיא refers to "a clairvoyant to whom one may come for the discovery of lost articles."¹⁷ The difficulty with this explanatory verse is that נָבִיא is found as early as Genesis 20:7, whereas this is the first reference to נָבָה in the Old Testament. Perhaps there was information known to the writer but unknown to the modern reader. In any event, the writer distinguished between the older and the newer terms.

Implications for Other Terms

נָבָה and נָבִיא were not the only terms which referred to prophetic office. Throughout the course of the Old Testament, several others are used. In order of appearance in the Hebrew Bible, the following is a list of all pertinent terms: נָבִיא ("prophet," Gen. 20:7), אֵישׁ־אֱלֹהִים

¹⁶Smith, *Samuel*, 61, n.9.

¹⁷Smith, *Samuel*, 62, n.9.

("man of God," Deut. 33:1), רְאֵה ("seer," 1 Sam. 9:9), חָזֵה ("vizier" or "seer," 2 Sam. 24:11), אִישׁ־רוּחַ ("man of the Spirit," Hos. 9:7), and מֶלֶךְ־אֱלֹהִים ("messengers of God," 2 Chron. 36:16). To this list, Raymond Van Leeuwen has added חָכָם ("wise man") and נָבָן ("discerning one").¹⁸ One might also include variations on the theme "prophet": prophetess (Exod. 15:20), company of the prophets (1 Sam. 10:5), and son of the prophets (1 Kings 20:35).

These terms seem to indicate a progression of this particular office (נָבִיא) from a supernatural calling, to an instructed class, to a position based on lineage. The company of prophets was joined by Saul (1 Sam. 10:10). The text does not indicate that Saul was called to be a prophet; rather, he was to join in the assembly receiving instruction. Although a number of the writing prophets often cited their lineage as a sign of spiritual heritage (Isa. 1:1; Jer. 1:1; Zech. 1:1), Amos seems to indicate that there may have been a stigma attached to the term "son of a prophet" (Amos 7:14).

Research indicates that there are distinctions made when speaking of the various prophet groups, but the words seem somewhat interchangeable. Note the clustering of these terms in the following verses:

- (1) "Before David got up the next morning, the word of the LORD had come to Gad the prophet [נָבִיא], David's

¹⁸Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "The Sage in the Prophetic Literature," in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue, 295-306 (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 301-2.

seer [הָנֵן]" (2 Sam. 24:11).

(2) "As for the events of King David's reign, from beginning to end, they are written in the records of Samuel the seer [הָנֵן], the records of Nathan the prophet [הָבָבֶל], and the records of Gad the seer [הָנֵן]" (1 Chron. 29:29).

(3) "They say to the seers [הָנֵן], 'See no more visions!' and to the prophets [הָנֵן], 'Give us no more visions of what is right'" (Isa. 30:10).

(4) "Then Amaziah said to Amos, 'Get out, you seer [הָנֵן]! . . . Amos answered Amaziah, 'I was neither a prophet [הָבָבֶל] nor a prophet's son'" (Amos 7:12, 14).

Distinct terminology was used by the Hebrew writers to refer to those holding prophetic office. Whether these terms refer to separate offices is unclear, but the use of them in series seems to suggest they were more than cosmetic distinctions.

With the existence of two different terms for seer, רָאֵה and הָנֵן, another question arises, Are these terms distinctly regional? The answer is no, because the verb הָנֵן and the substantive הָנֵן are broadly distributed among the prophetic texts.

The finding of this section is as follows: though particular terms may occur more frequently in certain time periods (as 1 Sam. 9:9 indicates), there is no reason to assume exclusivity to a particular time period. As Baruch Levine has demonstrated, words that appear in one period may, in fact, be vestiges of ancient forms. Examples that he analyzed in his dissertation include דָקַת, מְתִינִים, חֲרָגָם, and מְלֹונָג.¹⁹ Each of these marriage terms occur in Mishnaic

¹⁹Baruch Levine, "Survivals of Ancient Canaanite in the Mishnah," Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1962 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Dissertation Services). Mishnaic words will appear without vowel pointing in this study.

Hebrew but not in Biblical Hebrew. Comparative linguistics revealed that these same forms were also found in Ugaritic. In this manner, he confirmed that absolute statements on the dating of terms are unwise.²⁰

Once again, the differences recognized by the writer in 1 Samuel 9:9 indicate an understanding of a language in flux. Though this example does not demonstrate dialect variation as such, it provides evidence of vocabulary distinguishable by the writer.

From the Record of Kings

According to Burney, the Kings narratives regarding the northern kingdom of Israel include: 1 Kings 17-19; 20; 21; 22:1-38; 2 Kings 1:2-17a; 2:1-18, 19-22, 23-25; 3:4-27; 4:1-7, 8-37, 38-41, 42-44; 5; 6:1-7, 8-23, 24-33; 7; 8:1-6, 7-15; 9:1-10, 28; 13:14-19, 20, 21; (14:8-14).²¹ He further provided the reader with peculiarities of the northern dialect of Israel.

One specific issue which Burney did not discuss, but others have elsewhere, is the names of specific languages and dialects. In particular, what conclusions may be drawn from the reference to Hebrew and Aramaic in the parallel

²⁰S. R. Driver had a proclivity for assigning words as exclusively late. See Samuel Rolles Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, rev. ed. (New York: Scribner's, 1916); also Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1907; reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1983).

²¹Burney, II:207.

passages of 2 Kings 18 and Isaiah 36?

Differences in Language Names

Recognizable for their specific references to the languages, the verses in focus read as follows:

- (1) Then Eliakim son of Hilkiah, and Shebna and Joah said to the field commander, "Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, since we understand it. Don't speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of the people on the wall." . . .
- (2) Then the commander stood and called in Hebrew: "Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria [2 Kings 18:26, 28]!"

The Hebrew text of these two verses is identical to that of Isaiah 36:11 and 13. **יְהוּדִית** is used for Hebrew and **אֲרָמִית** for Aramaic. Why is the term **יְהוּדִית** used for the Hebrew language instead of **עַבְרִית**, and what are the implications for regional Hebrew dialects?

Implications for Regional Hebrew

References to the Hebrew language are scarce in the Old Testament.²² Furthermore, in each context, it is designated as **יְהוּדִית** (with the possible exception of **שְׁפָתָקְנָן** in Isa. 19:18). One question which may arise is this, Is there a comparable term (perhaps **יִשְׂרָאֵלִית**) which designates the regional dialect of the northern kingdom? No, such designation is not found in the text. Neither does the Hebrew Bible ever employ **עַבְרִית** to refer to the Hebrew

²²Other than the parallel passages mentioned here (2 Kings 18:26,28; Isa. 36:11,13; and 2 Chron. 32:18), **יְהוּדִית** is found only in Nehemiah 13:24. As discussed later, Isaiah 19:18 is enigmatic; and Esther 8:9 speaks generally of the script and language of the Jewish population in Persia.

language. Either Israelite Hebrew was never officially recognized, or it was referred to by another name.

The following table illustrates the specific languages or dialects which are specifically named in the Hebrew text.

Table 4.--Specific Languages and Dialects Mentioned

Judahite	יהודיִת	2 Kings 18:26, 28; Isaiah 36:11, 13; 2 Chron. 32:18; Nehemiah 13:24
Aramaic	אֲרָמִית	2 Kings 18:26; Isaiah 36:11; Ezra 4:7; Daniel 2:4
Chaldean	לְשׁוֹן-כָּשָׂדִים	Daniel 1:4
Canaanite	שְׁפַת-כָּנָעֵן	Isaiah 19:18
Ashdodite	אַשְׁדוּדִית	Nehemiah 13:24

Sources: Edward Ullendorff, "The Knowledge of Languages in the Old Testament," in *Is "Biblical Hebrew" a Language?* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1977), 37-47; Werner Weinberg, "Language Consciousness in the OT," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 92 (1980): 185-204; Daniel I. Block, "The Role of Language in Ancient Israelite Perceptions of National Identity," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103, no. 3 (1984): 321-40.

The possibility exists that the northern kingdom may have adopted Aramaic as the official language prior to her fall in 722 B.C. While this cannot be fully substantiated, it would explain the emergence of Aramaic as the *lingua franca* in Canaan, rather than the Akkadian of the Assyrian empire. This could also account for the Aramaizing of Biblical Hebrew as refugees from the north escaped the onslaught of the Assyrians.

Should this theory prove to be correct, then Eliakim and the leaders would have asked the Assyrians to speak in the "Israelite" (Aramaized or northern) dialect, rather than the Judahite familiar to the common people. This idea would not violate the context of the passage. If the theory is incorrect, then this passage pushes back the availability of Aramaic as the standard trade language of the Levant from the sixth to the eighth century B.C.²³

Testimony from the Latter Prophets

The Major and Minor Prophets (as they are known to the English-speaking world) have some of the best evidence of dialect in the entire Hebrew Bible. The language of Ezekiel exhibits Hebrew in transition. Prophecies from Amos and Hosea manifest the presence of Israelite dialect(s) in Biblical Hebrew, and Nahum's northern heritage is displayed in some of his words. Finally, the testimony of Habakkuk 3 points to the use of the mythopoetic dialect.

The Record of Ezekiel

Avi Hurvitz and Mark Rooker have demonstrated the transitional nature of the language of Ezekiel. Hurvitz took his analysis of Ezekiel, compared it to the linguistic features of the so-called P (Priestly) document, and concluded that (though P used similar phraseology) Ezekiel

²³The inscriptions of Tell Dan and Sefire provide evidence for Aramaic literacy in the ninth century B.C.

was a later composition.²⁴

Mark Rooker has provided a comparative look at the diachronic nature of Ezekiel,²⁵ showing forms which are classified as Archaic Biblical Hebrew (ABH) alongside Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH) forms.²⁶ An orthographic example is the Archaic Biblical Hebrew form of David, דָוִיד, which is found in Ezekiel, as is the Late Biblical Hebrew form דָוִיד. Two morphological examples provided were אָנֹכִי and אָלְמַן, which Ezekiel employed with the later forms אָנִי and אָלְמָנוֹת. Rooker further pointed out that one of the syntactic features of Late Biblical Hebrew was the inattention to מֵאַת as the *nota accusativi*. Unfortunately, problems emerge when using specific features to delineate a time period.

Using the examples above, each of the LBH features could be demonstrated in Archaic Biblical Hebrew texts. As discussed previously, scholars concur that orthography is not necessarily a determining factor in the age, region, or other classification of a word. Therefore, the spelling דָוִיד alone would not be indicative of dialectal variation.

²⁴See Avi Hurvitz, *A Linguistic Study of the Relationship between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel: A New Approach to an Old Problem* (Paris: Gabalda, 1982).

²⁵Mark F. Rooker, *Biblical Hebrew in Transition: The Language of the Book of Ezekiel*, JSOT Suppl., no. 90 (Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1990), 66.

²⁶Also see P. M. Joyce, "Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives on Ezekiel," in *Synchronic or Diachronic? A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis*, Oudtestamentische Studiën, no. 32, ed. Johannes C. de Moore, 115-28 (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

With the transmission of the text through the centuries, one could argue that the early scribes were not concerned with *plene writing*, or if the concept actually existed. The inscriptional records of the Mesopotamian scribes demonstrate that they were decidedly inconsistent in their syllabic spelling. Likewise, Egyptian artisans were often more concerned with the space allotted for their writing than the particular spellings of words.²⁷ Although the present evidence does not indicate one way or the other, a similar approach may have been practiced among the Hebrews prior to the Masoretes.

Another difficulty faced in Rooker's choice of examples is the diachronic distinction between the personal pronouns **אָנִי** and **אַנְכִי**. Other scholars use these same forms to argue for southern and northern provenance of individual books or parts of books.²⁸ Taking the assessment of Rooker, that Biblical Hebrew can be classified into two distinct chronological periods, one must assume a dating for Late Biblical Hebrew as sixth century B.C. Since Aramaic had become the *lingua franca* and the regular Aramaic form of the first person singular pronoun is **תָּנוּךְ**, the assumption is that **אָנִי** comes to Hebrew by way of the later Aramaic form. Table five presents the distribution of these terms in prophetic books which are germane to this study.

²⁷Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 3d ed. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957), 549.

²⁸Burney, II:207.

Table 5.--Distribution of Pronouns

Prophet	אֲנָה	אַתָּה
Isaiah	76	19
Jeremiah	35	50
Ezekiel	1	160
Hosea	11	11
Amos	11	1
Micah	1	2

Source: Stanley N. Rosenbaum, *Amos of Israel: A New Interpretation* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer, 1989), 93.

Using this raw data, the task of proving either provenance or date by pronouns is impossible. Additional information from Ugarit demonstrates the employment of both *an* and *ank* in the middle of the second millennium B.C.²⁹ To refer again to Levine's exposition of Mishnaic Hebrew words dating to Ugaritic literature, scholars must be cautious in their pronouncements of date based on linguistic evidence alone.

Late Biblical Hebrew, as recognized by context, may tend to employ more plural forms than Archaic Biblical Hebrew or Standard Biblical Hebrew (as in the case of אֲנָשׁוֹת); but that alone is not conclusive evidence for a late date for a particular passage. The same is true of *nak*, often omitted from poetic writing and the early books.

Prophet to His Own People

Unlike his contemporaries in Babylon, Ezekiel's

²⁹Joseph Aistleitner, *Wörterbuch der ugaritischen Sprache* (Berlin: Akademie, 1974), s.v. "*an*," "*ank*."

prophecies were to the people of Judah and Jerusalem, in a language that he knew: "You are not being sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language, but to the house of Israel" (Ezek. 3:5). This particular commission, which is echoed in 3:6, provides another look at the usage of the terms **שָׁפֵךְ** and **לִשְׁנָה**, respectively. In this instance, the context is unclear whether they are to be distinguished as "language" and "dialect," as is possible in the Pentateuch.

A "Sign" of the Times

In Ezekiel 21, there is a peculiar phrase which can only be understood in its historical context. The king of Babylon was to stop at a fork in the road and seek three signs: casting lots with arrows, consulting the idols, and looking at (or reading) the liver (Ezek. 21:21; 21:27 [in Hebrew]). Ezekiel is the only biblical writer to employ the phrase **רָאָה בַּכְבֵּד**. So, then, what does this phrase mean, and how does it contribute to this discussion of Hebrew in transition?

Among the thousands of tablets found at the excavations of Nineveh were a group commonly known as omen texts. Publications have shown that these tablets often contained several one-line conditional sentences.³⁰ These were texts regarding varying phenomena: the stars, disbursement of oil in water, the state of miscarried

³⁰The classic volume is known as YOS 10: Albert Goetze, *Old Babylonian Omen Texts*, Yale Oriental Series: Babylonian Texts, no. 10 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale, 1947).

animals, and, often, the condition of the internal organs of a sacrificial animal (generally a sheep).³¹

In the texts dealing with animal entrails, the protasis described the position, color, punctures, or other conditions of vital organs at the time of sacrifice.³² Corresponding to this was an apodosis which described coming events, usually relating to political control. One of the most widely practiced forms of omen divining was the reading of the liver (ranging from Babylon, to Megiddo and Boghazkoy).³³ This unique reference (Ezek. 21:27) to liver reading offers a glimpse into Babylonian divination and demonstrates outside influence upon the ideology of Ezekiel.

Ullendorff has recently demonstrated that the features of modern Hebrew would not be understood by Isaiah, though it could be true for Ezekiel as well. The changes in word order, based on exposure to European languages, might make reading it difficult. Furthermore, phrases borrowed from foreign languages (*i.e.*, English) would make some reading nearly impossible. One example he cited seemed to be secondary borrowing of an English idiom:

[Isaiah] would be thoroughly puzzled (as indeed I was,

³¹Erica Reiner, "Fortune Telling in Mesopotamia," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 42, no. 2 (1983): 24.

³²Ivan Starr, *Rituals of the Diviner*, *Bibliotheca Mesopotamica*, no. 12 (Malibu, Calif.: Undena, 1983), 17-23.

³³James Pritchard, *Ancient Near East in Pictures* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969), pct. 594, 595; also Benno Landsberger and Hayim Tadmor, "Fragments of Clay Liver Models from Hazor," *Israel Exploration Journal* 14, no. 4 (1964): 201-18.

though for very different reasons) to encounter the loan translation from English **העולם ואשתו** (**כל**) [Shirah, 38:I] "(all) the world and his wife." For Agnon knew no English, and he must have picked up this idiom from some Israelis in the post-war period when a knowledge of English became fashionable.³⁴

Both in this instance and in the idiom of Ezekiel, external influence helped shape his manner of expression.

The turbulence of Judah's history at the time of Ezekiel is reflected in the transitional nature of his language. Beyond that, specialized vocabulary reflected a greater Mesopotamian influence than during the united and divided monarchies. As the idiom above reflected an understanding of the pagan rituals of the Babylonians, so the vocabulary of Ezekiel reflects a familiarity with Babylonian war terminology. The terms **קַרְקָעָה** (mound), **מִבְשָׁרֶת** (siege shield), **קַרְמָה** (siege ram), **כְּבָשָׂל** (battering ram), and **סַלְחָה** (ramp) carry the same meaning in the Hebrew Bible as they do in Akkadian texts of the era. Furthermore, their rarity indicates that, quite possibly, they are loan words which made their way into Ezekiel's vocabulary.

The Record of the Twelve

Examining the language of all the Minor Prophets might prove to be a fascinating study, especially noting every northernism in the texts (*i.e.*, forms resembling Aramaic, Ugaritic, or Phoenician). This present study,

³⁴Edward Ullendorff, "Could Isaiah Understand the Ha'aretz Newspaper?" in *Language, Theology, and the Bible: Essays in Honour of James Barr*, ed. Samuel E. Balentine and John Barton, 120-34 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 123.

however, focuses on the dialectal features found in the writings of Amos, Hosea, Nahum, and Habakkuk.³⁵ With the exception of the first, which takes chronological priority, the prophets are discussed in order from the Hebrew Bible.

Amos the Herdsman

Amos is introduced without mention of his lineage, though his hometown, Tekoa, is mentioned (Judahite Tekoa is assumed here). From the allusions made through the course of his prophecies and employment the term נזיר in 1:1 (see also 2 Kings 3:4), his vocation was something more substantial than a common shepherd. He was familiar with the outdoors, as his vocabulary indicates (particularly in the context of his rhetorical questions, 3:3-5), yet he was also acquainted with city life (6:1-7). The fact that he was a southerner in the north and an outdoorsman familiar with the city makes analyzing his language difficult.

Skilled in rhetoric, Amos brought the oracles of מִשְׁרָה to Samaria with precision and power. Some deny a cognizant practice of rhetorical style among the Hebrews in the eighth century, relegating it to the more advanced Greeks. The present writer, however, is convinced that Amos had knowledge of some form of rhetoric:

- (1) The judgment oracles of chapters one and two follow a particular rhetorical pattern: the formula "for three transgressions and for four," the naming of the city or

³⁵The first three are noted for northern forms, while the mythopoetry of Habakkuk is the feature of focus.

nation, the specific transgressions of the people, and a judgment of fire.

(2) The whole book structure of the text, as exposed by Paul Noble, accentuates Amos's deliberate organization of his prophecies.³⁶

(3) His use of other devices, such as numerical formulae, rhetorical questions (which call for a negative response), satire, and dialectal wordplay demonstrate his keen sense of verbal expression.

Several writers have recently published their impressions of the wordplay in Amos 8:1-2, the vision of the summer fruit. At issue is the relationship between the words יְמִינָה and יְמִינָה. Rendsburg has written on bilingual wordplay, specifically

Hebrew and Greek, Hebrew and Egyptian, and Hebrew and Assyrian. One can assume that additional examples are to be found not only with these languages, but presumably with others as well, e.g., between Hebrew and Aramaic.³⁷

The examples that he cited came from Proverbs 31:27; Exodus 10:10; and Isaiah 10:8, respectively. He did not, however, mention this obvious example of Hebrew/Aramaic wordplay in Amos 8:2.

The significance of this paronomasia stems from the difference in medial vocalization of diphthongs. The

³⁶Paul R. Noble, "The Literary Structure of Amos: A Thematic Analysis," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 209-26.

³⁷Gary A. Rendsburg, "Bilingual Wordplay in the Bible," *Vetus Testamentum* 38 (1988): 355.

Samaria (or Samaritan) ostraca and other inscriptions reveal that the northern dialect regularly contracted the medial diphthong.

As this study shows in chapter 6, this monophthongization is considered to be an Israelite dialectal feature in the Hebrew Bible. Al Wolters wrote:

Although this point of difference between the Judahite and Israelite dialects of Hebrew is widely recognized,⁴ commentators have generally failed to note its significance for the *gayis/qes* pun in Amos. To my knowledge only E. Y. Kutscher and M. Dahood (each in a passing remark and apparently independently of each other) have connected the wordplay in Amos with its dialectal difference.

⁴See J. C. L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions. Volume 1: Hebrew and Moabite Inscriptions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971) 2,4, 7-8; E. Y. Kutscher, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982) 66, 70,78; W. R. Garr, *Dialect Geography of Syria-Palestine: 1000-586 B.C.E.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985) 38.³⁸

Most scholars are in agreement with this assessment of diphthong and monophthong, but not all (see discussion in chapter six). In the case of this wordplay, one might conclude that this is a matter of intentional style-switching, in which the speaker changes his vocabulary to fit his audience. This concept is also discussed in more detail in the second part of this study.

Besides the issue of dialectal wordplay, other linguistic features in the text of Amos point to dialect variation based on the geographic context of the prophecy.

³⁸Al Wolters, "Wordplay and Dialect in Amos 8:1-2," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31, no. 4 (December 1988): 407.

Carl F. Keil has pointed out that there are features which he seems to classify as colloquialisms:

The prophet's style of composition does indeed betray the former shepherd in the use of certain words, which evidently belonged to the dialect of the common people, --e.g. מִצְיכָה for בְּזַבֵּשׁ (ch. ii. 13), בְּזַבֵּשׁ for בְּזַבֵּשׁ (ch. v. 11), מִצְעָבָה for מִצְעָבָה (ch. vi. 8), מִסְרָף for מִשְׁרָף (ch. vi. 10), יְשַׁקֵּן for יְצַחֵן (ch. vii. 9, 16), נְפָקָה for נְפָקָה (ch. viii. 8).³⁹

Though they seem to be clearly dialectal variants (dealing almost exclusively with sibilant variation), the classification as colloquialisms is difficult to confirm.

In his *International Critical Commentary* volume on Hosea and Amos, William Harper considered the orthographic changes as misspellings, which he accounted to be errors in the text.⁴⁰ Rosenbaum took issue with this approach, pointing out that the name Isaac is spelled פַּנְצֵל in Amos 7:9 and 7:16, the same spelling found in Psalm 105:9 and Jeremiah 33:9. "Surely, these cannot all be dismissed as 'textual errors.' If so, we should have to ask, Why the same error in all four verses?"⁴¹ The solution for this variant, and the others mentioned above, may be that these

³⁹C[arl] F[riedrich] Keil, *Minor Prophets*, vol. 10 of *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, ed. C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, trans. James Martin (Edinburgh: Clark, 1885; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 236.

⁴⁰William Rainey Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea*, of *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1905), cxxxviii.

⁴¹Rosenbaum, *Amos of Israel*, 88-89. Ironically, the reader should note that Rosenbaum's publisher failed to correct spelling errors on page 88 and the first reference on page 89, where the variant פַּנְצֵל is misspelled as פַּנְצֵל.

are dialectal variants, as in the case of Ephraimite סְבִלָּה.

Rosenbaum has proposed that "if Amos' dialect were 'Ephraimite,' that could explain many of the book's anomalies."⁴² This might account for some of the sibilant interchanges (as in Judg. 12:6), such as the softening of the צ to a ש (שְׁמַךְ for שְׁמַחְ) or the changing of the ש to a צ (צְמַרְפָּה for צְמַרְףָ). The problem with this Ephraimite theory is that there is lack of evidence to substantiate its claims. Perhaps with the discovery of more contemporaneous writings, Rosenbaum's proposal may be confirmed.

Along with the morphological changes mentioned above, semantic distinctions regarding the prophetic office emerge again in Amos. This issue is raised again with the confrontation between Amaziah and Amos in 7:12-17. The passage records Amaziah instructing Amos to return to his own land (i.e., Judah) and, in the process, calls Amos a חָזֵק (Amos 7:12). Amos responded by stating that he was neither a נָבִיא nor the son of a נָבִיא (7:14). The immediate context seems to indicate that Amos equated the two terms.

Ziony Zevit disagreed with that assessment, suggesting that there were substantial differences between חָזֵק and נָבִיא.⁴³ The term חָזֵק was often associated with the king, which suggests that it was used of a prophet for hire. A primary example is the prophet Gad, who was

⁴²Rosenbaum, *Amos of Israel*, 89.

⁴³Ziony Zevit, "A Misunderstanding at Bethel: Amos VII 12-17," *Vetus Testamentum* 25, no. 4 (1975): 783-90.

referred to as David's נִזְנִים more than once (2 Sam. 24:11; 1 Chron. 21:9; 2 Chron. 29:25). Heman and Jeduthun (both mentioned in the Psalms) were also known as the king's seers (1 Chron. 25:5 and 2 Chron. 35:15, respectively). For that reason, Zevit has retranslated Amos 7:14 to say "No, I am not a seer! I am a prophet."⁴⁴ The fact that the presence of prophets "is a sign of divine activity (ii 11) and that they, as a group, are privy to the divine plan (iii 7)" makes a denial of the office untenable.⁴⁵ His solution, then, leads to another problem. Does the text suggest that Amos was a prophet and the son of a prophet? If the first נִזְנֵן is a simple denial of the role of royal seer, perhaps the second נִזְנֵן is to be taken in the same way. This end result is less probable than the original premise because the introduction to the book (Amos 1:1) implies that lineage was not a factor to him. While there may be validity to his explanation of נִזְנִים as a royal office, Zevit does not adequately defend his Amos 7:14 translation.

Dialectal variants are demonstrable in the text of Amos, particularly morphologically ones. Following Speiser's suggestion of possible נ/נ interchange in the dialects of Canaan,⁴⁶ Rosenbaum posed an interesting idea with which to

⁴⁴Ziony Zevit, "Expressing Denial in Biblical Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew, and in Amos," *Vetus Testamentum* 39, no. 4 (1979): 508.

⁴⁵Zevit, "Expressing Denial," 509, n. 14.

⁴⁶Ephraim A. Speiser, "The Pronunciation of Hebrew," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 23 (1933): 233-65, esp. 237. Keil's

close this section on Amos. Given the sibilant interchange found elsewhere, and the gutteral interchange proposed here, "is it possible our prophet and Isaiah's father have the same name, might even be the same person?"⁴⁷ Historically, the time would allow for this connection, with Amos called to serve later in life. In addition, the fact that Amos was not the son of a prophet would not preclude his own son from becoming a prophet. Finally, assuming that שָׁמֹעַ is a dialectal rendering of the classical אָמַן, there are no present issues with which to refute such a claim. On the other hand, with such circumstantial evidence, this theory is little more than one scholar's speculation.

Hosea the Prophet

As another prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel, Hosea was affected by his linguistic surroundings. Keil has pointed out that the peculiarities in the language of Hosea intimate his northern origins, in part by

the peculiar style and language of his prophecies, which have here and there an Aramaean colouring (for example, such forms as אֲמַנְאָסֵךְ, ch. iv. 6; חִכִּי (inf.), ch. vi. 9; קִימֹשׁ for קִמְשָׁל, ch. ix. 6; קָנָם for קָנָה, ch. x. 14; תְּרִינְלִי, ch. xi. 3; אָכִיל for אָכֵל, ch. xi. 4.⁴⁸

Willibald Kuhnigk also mentioned several words which he considered to be representative of an Israelite or

reference to מִתְּחִיב for מִתְּחַבֵּב (Amos 6:8) also suggests נ/ע interchange.

⁴⁷Rosenbaum, *Amos of Israel*, 91.

⁴⁸Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 11.

"nördlichen Dialekt"⁴⁹ and leaned heavily upon the previous work of Wilhelm Rudolph and H. S. Nyberg.⁵⁰ Not only does the context of the book suggest Israelite provenance, but also features listed above give evidence that the dialect of the northern kingdom, though not Aramaic, were marked by Aramaic influence.

Hosea states the thrust of his message in chapter four: "Hear the word of the LORD, you Israelites, because the LORD has a charge to bring against you who live in the land" (Hos. 4:1). Another verse, Hosea 7:5, suggests that the prophet was a citizen of the northern kingdom, when he calls Jeroboam II "our king." His constant reference to Bethel as Beth Aven would have been taboo for an outsider. While some scholars may presume that Hosea was a southerner, these verses, along with the dialectal variants, point to the probability that Hosea was an Israelite national.

Unlike the variants found in Amos, Hosea's dialect is more likely to represent a literary form of Israelite Hebrew. First, the fact that Hosea traces his lineage (to Beeri) leads this writer to believe that he may have been the son of a prophet, thus among the upper echelon of Israelite society. Second, the proclamation of judgment on the capital city seems to be refined, whereas Amos presented

⁴⁹Willibald Kuhnigk, *Nordwestsemitische Studien zum Hoseabuch*, Biblia et Orientalia, no. 27 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974), v.

⁵⁰Wilhelm Rudolph, *Hosea*, vol. 13 of *Komentar zum alten Testament* (Guterslow, Germany: n.p., 1966); H. S. Nyberg, *Studien zum Hoseabuche* (Uppsala: n.p., 1935).

rather biting prophecies. Finally, it is possible that the Israelites adopted a form of Aramaic as their official language (discussed previously).

A final note from Hosea regards a term discussed previously, לְשׁוֹן. In Hosea 7:16, the phrase זַעַם לְשׁוֹן has recently been translated as "this gibberish jabber," based on the premise that זַעַם has a semantic range similar to לְעֵגֶל.⁵¹ The issue of dialect and linguistic variation is undeniable in the Book of Hosea.

Nahum the Galilean

At the outset of Nahum's prophecies against Nineveh, the prophet is presented as "the Elkoshite." While scholars agree to disagree about the exact location, the fact that Elkosh was located near the shore of the Sea of Galilee is generally conceded. The location of first century Capernaum, which bears the name of the prophet, seems to have been the traditional location of his home. Wherever the precise location was, it was considerably north of Samaria.

Starting with these facts, Bible students would be rather surprised if northernisms (or Aramaisms) were not discernable in the text of the prophet. Research indicates, however, that the majority of the prophecies are in the

⁵¹Shalom M. Paul, "Hosea 7:16: Gibberish Jabber," *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, ed. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz; 707-712 (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 711.

classic form of the language, rather than in a northern dialect. Keil isolated a few northern features:

The supposed Aramaisms, such as the suffixes in גָּבֹרִים (ch. ii. 4) and מְלָאכָה (ch. ii. 14), and the words גַּזֵּג, to sigh = הַגֵּג (ch. ii. 8), קְהֻר (ch. iii. 2), and פְּלִדָּת (ch. ii. 4), may be accounted for from the Galilean origin of the prophet.⁵²

Kevin Cathcart has added another feature, citing נֶמֶר to be a dialectal form of נֶצֶר.⁵³ He based this on Virolleaud's previous assessments of similar variants in Ugaritic.

Little else is known concerning the life and ministry of this prophet. A possible reason for the dearth of northernisms in his writing may be that "he was born in Galilee during the Assyrian invasions and that he emigrated to Judea, where he lived and prophesied."⁵⁴ This is a reasonable explanation; and until a more plausible argument is provided, the present writer will concur with Keil.

Habakkuk the Poet

Habakkuk 3 is introduced as a prayer from the lips of the prophet. Verse 1, however, reads more like a superscription from the Psalter than a prophecy or a prayer. In addition, verse two records the specific prayer of the prophet, a prayer to remind the children of Israel of יהוה's mighty deeds, as in the time of the hymn's composition

⁵²Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2:3.

⁵³Kevin J. Cathcart, *Nahum in the Light of Northwest Semitic*, *Biblica et Orientalia*, no. 26 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973), 43, n. 46.

⁵⁴Keil, *Minor Prophets*, 2:3.

(assuming its antiquity):

LORD, I have heard of your fame;
 I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD;
 Renew them in our day, in our time make them known;
 in wrath remember mercy (Habak. 3:2).

The hinge pin upon which the previous prophecy and the following poem connect is "in wrath remember mercy."

Habakkuk 2:18-20 contrasts the lifeless idols carved by human hands with the life-giving presence of יהוה. His wrath was to fall upon those who had exchanged the false gods for the true God. In the ancient poem recited by Habakkuk, יהוה is pictured as the Victor over the gods of Canaan:

(1) The direction of His entrance is from the south (Teman, 3:3) and the east (sunrise, 3:4).

(2) Certain substantive pairs are certainly more than common nouns: בְּקָר "pestilence" and בְּשָׁקָר "plague" (3:6, Hebrew), נִירִים "rivers" and יָם "sea" (3:8), and שָׂמֵחַ "sun" and יָמָן "moon" (3:11). These were names of Canaanite deities, only employed as proper nouns in the mythopoetic dialect.⁵⁵ Similar mythic images are found in Job, and the images in both may be indicative of their antiquity.

With these references to the names of false deities, it is likely that this hymn was ancient. Though Robertson's research concluded that classical clustering

⁵⁵The present writer is deeply indebted to Robert Kirk Kilpatrick for the discussion of his previous research on this subject. See his "Against the Gods of Canaan: The Mythopoetical Background of Habakkuk 3," Seminar Paper, Spring 1992, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, Memphis, Tenn., typewritten.

indicated that it was unlikely, the contents of the hymn indicate an early date, though how early must be left for other researchers to determine.

CHAPTER FOUR
EVIDENCE FOR DIALECTS IN THE WRITINGS

By far the most plentiful assortment of dialectal forms to be found in the Hebrew Bible is located in the Writings. This section spans the time from before the united monarchy through the postexilic period. Moreover, it expresses Hebrew which had been shaded by international contacts with Phoenicia, Aram, Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt, and Persia. Regarding genre in the Writings, the types of literature include the hymnopoetic dialect of Psalms, the wisdom structure of Proverbs, the linguistically enigmatic books of Job and Ecclesiastes, and the postexilic prose of Esther and the Chronicles. Following the order in the Hebrew Bible, this chapter presents properties which characterize selected dialectal forms. In addition, where specialized morphology or syntax indicates dialectal variants within a selected book, they are analyzed.

Testimony from the Psalms

Mitchell Dahood's labors on the Psalms stand as a watershed for the linguistic analysis of the book.¹ When it

¹Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms I: 1-50. Translation, Commentary, and Notes*, vol. 16 of *The Anchor Bible*, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965); *Psalms II: 51-100. Translation, Commentary, and Notes*, vol. 17 of *The Anchor*

comes to biblical scholars who have made an impact by their contributions to the field, he stands with a small company of men. Dahood, and others who followed his lead, sought to understand the Bible in the light of its historical context and its linguistic confines, going beyond the Masoretic text to discover the original form. As Brevard Childs has written, however, there is a lack of balance in Dahood's exposition:

In my own judgment, the commentary reflects a major hermeneutical confusion between treating the Psalter as misunderstood vestiges of Ugaritic poetry or as the Scriptures of the church and the synagogue.²

This writer agrees with Child's assessment, but one cannot and must not ignore the work of Dahood.

One of the problems faced with the discussion of the Psalms is the issue of "stock Canaanisms." Some conservative scholars find it difficult to accept that the Old Testament could resemble pagan literature. Using a reference to the New Testament, here is a helpful analogy. Philippians 2:6 records that God revealed Himself in human form. He resembled human beings, all of whom were sinful. His form was like those around him, but his content was completely different. Such is the case with the Psalms. Though they resemble Ugaritic hymnopoetry, the content and object of adoration were completely different.

Bible (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968); *Psalms III: 101-150. Translation, Commentary, and Notes*, vol. 17a of *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970).

²Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Books for Pastor and Teacher* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 61.

Resemblance to Canaanite Poetry

Word pairs shared between Ugaritic and Hebrew poetry have been the topic of much debate during the last fifty years. On one side, Dahood has rewritten Hebrew grammar in the Psalms in accordance with Ugaritic grammar. Other scholars elevated its significance, as exemplified by H. L. Ginsberg: "The Hebrew Bible and the Ugarit texts are to be regarded as one literature."³ Peter Craigie cautioned against the overuse of Ugaritic for Old Testament studies.⁴

Several hundred word pairs are shared between the two languages and have been the object of concentrated study.⁵ The following table illustrates some of these.

Table 6.--Hebrew and Ugaritic Word Pairs

Hebrew	Ugaritic	Translation
רָע//אָח	⁷ ah// <i>r</i> ⁴	brother//friend
שִׁפְטָה//דִין	<i>dyn</i> // <i>tpt</i>	to judge//to try
אַלְמָנָה//יִתּוֹם	<i>ytm</i> // ⁷ <i>almnt</i>	fatherless//widow
שְׂרֵן//לְבָנוֹן	<i>lbnn</i> // <i>šrym</i>	Lebanon//Sirion
קֶדֶךְ//רָאַת	<i>r⁷iš</i> // <i>qdqd</i>	head//skull

Source: Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms III: 101-150. Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, vol. 17a of *The Anchor Bible*, ed.

³H. L. Ginsberg, "The Ugaritic Texts and Textual Criticism," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 62, no. 2 (1943): 109.

⁴Peter C. Craigie, "The Problem of Parallel Word Pairs in Ugaritic and Hebrew Poetry," *Semitics* 5 (1974): 48-58.

⁵See *Ras Shamra Parallels*, 3 vols., *Analecta Orientalia* 49-51, ed. Loren R. Fisher (vols. 1, 2) and Stan Rummel (vol. 3) (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1972-1981).

William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1970), 445-56.

These common forms between the two bodies of literature are provided to illustrate the close affinity that Ugaritic held with this form of Hebrew. This is not, however, to suggest that the Hebrews simply borrowed from the Ugaritic (or other Canaanite) material. Articles which suggest such an approach fail to account adequately for the difference in the two forms of literature.⁶ One is polytheistic cultic literature; the other is inspired Scripture.

Hymnopoetic Dialect

In the introductory chapter of this study, it was stated that one quality by which to denote a dialect is a specialized vocabulary. A single feature, however, cannot be the sole determining factor. With that understanding of the term, these particular word pairs may be recognized as features of the hymnopoetic dialect of Biblical Hebrew.⁷ While this is arguably a category within the genre of poetry, the significance of vocabulary and syntax warrants "dialect" to be the proper classification. Moshe Held's discovery of the identical root parallelism,⁸ for example,

⁶Michael Barré, "A Phoenician Parallel to Psalm 29," *Hebrew Annual Review* 13 (1991): 25-32.

⁷This is in contrast to the "mythopoetic dialect" of Job and "prophetopoetic dialect" of the Latter Prophets.

⁸Moshe Held, "The YQTL-QTL (QTL-YQTL) Sequence of Identical Verbs in Biblical Hebrew and in Ugaritic," in *Studies and Essays in Honor of Abraham A. Neuman*, ed. Moshe Ben-Horin; 281-90 (Leiden: Brill, 1962); and "The Action-

is a distinguishing syntactical feature which seems to be limited to the hymnopoetic dialect.

Dialectal Variants

Abnormal morphological and syntactical forms require close scrutiny. Many of these forms seem to be clustered in particular psalms, which is what prompted Rendsburg to analyze them in a recent monograph.⁹ Dahood did not hesitate to assign the term "dialect" to a particular form, but often gave deference to Ugaritic forms or showed restraint in giving specific analysis:

Pss cxx-cxxxiv teem with dialectal elements still too little understood for emendation. . . . Given the large number of dialectal forms in the Psalter. . . another dialectal form receives comment at v. 16.¹⁰

By contrast, Rendsburg offered conclusions that were often stronger than the facts he presented. He concluded his Psalms monograph, stating: "There are 36 poems in the [B]ook of Psalms wherein linguistic evidence points very clearly to northern provenance."¹¹ Not all scholars have agreed with his assessment.¹²

Result (Factitive-Passive) Sequence of Identical Verbs in Biblical Hebrew and Ugaritic," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84 (1965): 272-82.

⁹Gary A. Rendsburg, *Linguistic Evidence for the Northern Origin of Selected Psalms*, SBL Monograph Series, no. 43 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).

¹⁰Dahood, *Psalms III*, 196, 293-94.

¹¹Rendsburg, *Selected Psalms*, 104.

¹²See reviews of *Selected Psalms*, especially H. A. Stamp, *Australian Biblical Review* 39 (1991): 65-66.

One of the features discussed by Rendsburg is the relative pronoun **וְ**. Regarding the supposed northern Psalm 133, he wrote:

The form **še-** is found in the following northern compositions: Song of Deborah (Judg 5:7 [bis]), Gideon cycle (Judg 6:17, 7:12, 8:26), Elisha cycle (2 Kgs 6:11 [in the mouth of an Aramean king]), Song of Songs (always, except in the superscription in Song 1:10, and Qoheleth (67 times). All other instances are in Exilic and post-Exilic compositions. . . . Consequently, we conclude that **še-** is northern in origin, and did not penetrate southward until the 6th Century B.C.E.¹³

The **וְ** relative has been compared to the freestanding Phoenician relative **וּ**. Whether the biblical form is the Hebrew equivalent without a prosthetic **וּ** cannot be determined here. Kent Jackson has pointed out that Ammonite employed both **וּ** and **וְ** as relative pronouns.¹⁴ This introduces the possibility that the biblical form **וְ** has been influenced by a Transjordanian dialect.

Joseph Alexander explained this relative in a different way. Rather than taking **וְ** as a regionalism, he understood it to be a colloquialism which "belonged from the beginning to the dialect of common life, though not commonly employed in writing till a later date."¹⁵ There is no small debate over dialectal classification of this and other

¹³Rendsburg, *Selected Psalms*, 91-92.

¹⁴Kent P. Jackson, *The Ammonite Language of the Iron Age*, Harvard Semitic Monographs, no. 27 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983), 51, 77, 102. Specific texts are Heshbon 1.6 for **וּ** and Ammonite Seal 49 for **וְ**.

¹⁵Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Psalms: Translated and Explained* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1873; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 511.

forms. Part two of this study shows that there is still much which scholars have not determined about dialect classification.

Testimony from the Proverbs

Along with Rendsburg's concentration on dialect studies, Stephen Kaufman has impacted the field with his proposal of style-switching. According to this concept,

we have not to do with late language or foreign authors, but rather with intentional stylistic representations of Trans-Jordanian speech on the part of Hebrew authors within Hebrew contexts. . . . We must devote increased attention to the dialects reflected in quoted speech in the Bible. The [b]iblical authors apparently did not hesitate to use "style-switching" to reflect differences in the speech of their characters.¹⁶

One of the examples presented by Kaufman comes from Proverbs 31:2. In this verse, King Lemuel's mother is quoted as addressing her son in the following manner: "O my son [בֶּן], O son [בֶּן] of my womb, O son [בֶּן] of my vows."

Though the verse looks to have an Aramaized form for son (thus considered either northern or postexilic), Kaufman suggested that another valid explanation can be given. This he has proposed on the basis of the Deir 'Alla inscription, where a Transjordanian dialect has been preserved.¹⁷ At the

¹⁶Stephen A. Kaufman, "The Classification of the North West Semitic Dialects of the Biblical Period and Some Implications Thereof," *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress on Jewish Studies. Panel Sessions: Hebrew and Aramaic Languages*, ed. Moshe Bar-Asher; 41-57 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), 55.

¹⁷See discussion of Deir 'Alla dialect in Jo Ann Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Allā*, Harvard Semitic Monographs, no. 31, ed. Frank Moore Cross (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1980), 109-24. Also note statistics given

Ninth World Congress on Jewish Studies, Kaufman stated:

The discovery of DA changes the ground rules. No longer must an "Aramaizing" text have been written after the exile; nor must it be a translation from "Aramaic." It could simply have been written in a Trans-Jordanian pre-exilic dialect to start with!¹⁸

With his explanation for form variations, words which have often been used to argue for late dating may be seen as earlier, dialectal intrusions into the Hebrew text.

Testimony from Job

Previously in this study, the remarks of Barr and Weinberg pointed away from the use of orthography as a means of dialect distinction. Regarding Job, however, Freedman has argued that the abundance of northern spellings point decidedly to a northern provenance for the book.¹⁹ Based primarily on the contraction of diphthongs, he concluded that "the chief implication of the orthographic data with respect to the composition of Job is that the provenance of the book is northern and its date early."²⁰ As seen in the discussion below, his assessment of seventh century composition is not nearly as early as others have claimed.

Two other important issues are to be considered regarding the language of Job. First, the rare vocabulary

by Kaufman, "Classification," 52.

¹⁸Kaufman, "Classification," 55.

¹⁹David Noel Freedman, "Orthographic Peculiarities in the Book of Job," *Eretz Israel* 9 (Albright Volume, 1969): 35-44.

²⁰Freedman, "Orthographic Peculiarities," 43.

raises the question of where Job fits into the history of the Hebrew language. The other concern is the language of Elihu, whose recorded speeches seem to be a form of (or influenced by) Aramaic. Both issues are addressed in this section.

Job's Vocabulary

Harold Cohen has listed ten words as true *hapax legomena* in Job.²¹ In the Hebrew index to their commentary, Driver and Gray listed more than 150 words which were exclusive to the book.²² Marvin Pope has stated that "there are more *hapax legomena* (words which occur only once) and rare words in Job than in any other biblical book."²³ The lexical evidence clearly points to a vocabulary outside the normative Hebrew language.

Commentators disagree as to the dating of this book, because of both form and content. Job is often classified as a late composition, primarily because of language which is "tinged with Aramaic (this is more pronounced in the Eliu [sic] passages) and with Arabic; in part, this may be

²¹Harold R. (Chaim) Cohen, *Biblical Hapax Legomena in the Light of Akkadian and Ugaritic*, SBL Dissertation Series, no. 37 (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1978), 172-73.

²²Samuel Rolles Driver and George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job*, in *The International Critical Commentary*, ed. S. R. Driver, Albert Plummer, and C. A. Briggs (Edinburgh: Clark, 1921), 355-60.

²³Marvin Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, vol. 15 of *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965), lxii.

deliberate local coloring."²⁴ This last statement seems to coincide with Kaufman's concept of style-switching. Franz Delitzsch took the book to be somewhat older, perhaps Solomonic, because of its appreciation "of deeper thought respecting revealed religion, and of intelligent, progressive culture of the traditional forms of art."²⁵ The *Babylonian Talmud* (*Baba Bathra* 15a) taught that Moses was the author.²⁶ יְהוָה is quoted employing לְסֹס וְלִשְׁבַּז (Job 29:18), similar to Moses's and Miriam's סֹס וְרַכְבַּז (Exod. 15:1 and 21), which may bolster the Talmudic position.²⁷ Then again, 2 Kings 5:9 and Jeremiah 51:21 employ similar constructions.

A few of the early rabbis assigned a pre-Mosaic dating to the book:

Some say that Job lived in the time of Jacob and married Dinah the daughter of Jacob. [The proof is that] it is written here [in the book of Job], *Thou speakest as one of the impious women [nebaloth] speaketh*, and it is written in another place [in connection with Dinah],

²⁴*The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967 ed., s.v. "Job, Book of," by P. W. Skehan.

²⁵Franz Delitzsch, *Job*, vol. 6 of *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, ed. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch (Edinburgh: Clark, 1885; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 21.

²⁶*Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud: Baba Bathra*, ed. I. Epstein, trans. Maurice Simon and Israel W. Slotki, vol. 2, pt. 1 (London: Soncino Press, 1976), section 15a. This section provides an ongoing discussion of the various rabbinic interpretations of the authorship of Job.

²⁷That same verse in Job uses the dialectal root קְנֻתָּה, rather than the standard קְנֻתָּה.

*Because he had wrought folly [nebalah] in Israel.*²⁸

Other scholars believe that a "Job tradition" was prevalent in the Ancient Near East. In Akkadian literature, for example, a text has been found (*Ludlul bel Nemeqi*) which is known as the "Babylonian Job."²⁹ Under these conditions, the Job tradition is placed on an equal level with the Danel Epic of Ugarit, both supposedly referred to in Ezekiel 14:14 and 20.

Regardless of the actual dating, however, the language is problematic. While Aramaic and Arabic lexicography may be helpful for interpreting some of the language, they do not provide all the answers. Even the earliest translators had difficulty with the language of the book, which is a substantial argument for the antiquity of the text rather than its youth.

One other issue regarding the date is the mythopoetic references in the book. Like the hymn of Habakkuk 3, this book contains allusions to some of the mythical deities of the ancient world:

(1) Job 9--God speaks to **וְאַתָּה** and it does not shine (9:7); God treads on the waves of **אֹי** (9:8b); even **בָּנָיו**'s cohorts cowered at God's feet (9:13).

(2) Job 26--God churned up **אֹי** (26:12a); God cut **בָּשָׂר** to shreds (26:12b); God pierced **וְאַתָּה** (26:13);

²⁸Baba Bathra, 15b, original explanatory marks.

²⁹See James T. Pritchard, *Ancient Near East Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1956).

(3) Job 28--**הַמְּדֻבָּר** speaks (28:14a); **וְ** speaks (28:14b); and **אֲבָדוֹן** and **מִתְ** speak (28:22). They all admit that wisdom does not originate from them.

(4) Job 40--**בָּהֶמְתָּה** is described (40:15-24) and **לִוְיָנִין** is described (40:25-41:25, Hebrew). Only God was able to overcome these creatures. Though these are not exhaustive, the references show the power of God over the mythical deities of antiquity.

Elihu's Dialect

Kaufman has pointed out Rashi's concern over the peculiarities in the Elihu speeches, writing: "As Rashi already knew, the speeches of Elihu are particularly Aramaic-like."³⁰ Though the Elihu orations contain a higher concentration of Aramaisms, Max Wagner pointed out that the number of Aramaisms found in the remainder of Job is much greater than those found in the Elihu passages alone.³¹

Several forms in Elihu's speeches have been identified with Arabic, as Delitzsch explained with **حَلَّ**:

It becomes manifest even here that the Elihu section has in part a peculiar usage of the language. **حَلَّ** in the signification of [zhl], cogn. with [dhl], **ذَهَلَ**, to frighten back . . . occurs nowhere else in the Old Testament.³²

Other forms, such as **זָהָל** and **פְּלָעָה**, he refers to as possibly

³⁰Kaufman, "Classifications," 55. He wrote: "cf Rashi to 36:2a: *kwlw l' 'rmy.*"

³¹Max Wagner, *Die lexicalischen und grammatischen Aramaismen im Alttestamentlichen Hebräisch* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1966), 142.

³²Delitzsch, *Job*, 210.

being "dialectic."³³ Once again, the record shows that dialectal variants are evident in the text.

Testimony from Qoheleth

One of the most linguistically intriguing books in the Old Testament is Ecclesiastes. Commonly known by scholars as Qoheleth [קָהֶלֶת], it bears the name of the writer who introduces his message: "The words of Qoheleth the son of David king in Jerusalem" (1:1). Dialectal features are clearly evident in the text, but attempts to categorize them have been less than satisfactory.

Daniel Frederick's 1988 volume, *Qoheleth's Language*, gives readers an indepth analysis of the language.³⁴ Relating the issues of dialect and foreign loan words to his overall theme, his intent was to date the book by linguistic evidence. Gleason Archer used a similar, albeit more brief, approach.³⁵ Other scholars whose Qoheleth research relates to dialect studies are Robert Gordis³⁶ and James Davila.³⁷

³³Delitzsch, *Job*, 225 and 231. Since the term "dialectic" is closely tied to Hegelian philosophy, "dialectal" is to be preferred.

³⁴Daniel C. Fredericks, *Qoheleth's Language: Reevaluating Its Nature and Date*, Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies, no. 3 (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen, 1988).

³⁵Gleason L. Archer, "The Linguistic Evidence for the Date of 'Ecclesiastes,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 12 (1969): 167-81.

³⁶See Robert Gordis, *The Word and the Book: Studies in Biblical Language and Literature* (New York: Ktav, 1976), 231-307. This section is a collection of several previously published articles on the style and language of Qoheleth.

Dialectal Features

Three significant dialect variations found in Qoheleth are the relative pronoun **וְ**, contracted diphthongs, and the feminine demonstrative **אֵת**. Since the first two have been discussed earlier, attention will be given to the demonstrative pronoun **אֵת**.

Scholars often assume that this form is based on the Aramaic demonstrative pronoun **אָתָּה**.³⁸ Epigraphic evidence indicates that forms of the demonstrative **וְ** were prevalent in Phoenician inscriptions. The Azitawaddu inscriptions at Karatepe, for example, are replete with usages of **וְ**.³⁹ Evidence from the Hebrew text shows that the feminine form **אֵת** was employed occasionally in the Hebrew Bible. In contrast, the form **אֵת** is relatively rare. This fact has convinced some that **אֵת** is a North Israelite dialectal form. Fredericks disagreed.

The **אֵת** demonstrative is notably absent from all extant Hebrew inscriptions from the northern regions.⁴⁰ Though employed six times in Qoheleth and other suggested Israelite passages, the form is not exclusive to northern

³⁷James R. Davila, "Qoheleth and Northern Hebrew," *MAARAV* 5-6 (Spring 1990): 69-87.

³⁸Burney, 2:208.

³⁹H[erbert] Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*, 3 vol., 2d ed. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1962-67), #26. Also see François Bron, *Recherches de les Inscriptiones Pheniciennes sur Karatepe* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1979).

⁴⁰See Gibson, *Syrian Inscriptions*, vol. 1, *Hebrew and Moabite Inscriptions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 5-20.

biblical texts:

The demonstrative pronoun **וְהַ** is a common entry in many lists of North Israelite forms. . . . But what of three idiomatic instances in Judges 18:4; 2 Samuel 11:25; and 1 Kings 14:5? These uses show that **וְהַ** was equally available for use in the vocabulary of the southern sections of Judges and Kings as it was in the alleged northern sections of Judges and Kings.⁴¹

This challenge from Fredericks has yet to be answered in published form.

Dialectal Framework

Both Davila and Fredericks discussed the older theories regarding the outside linguistic influence which flavored Qoheleth's dialect: Phoenician influence, Aramaic origin, and Mishnaic influence.

Contrary to Davila's account, Cyrus Gordon,⁴² not Dahood, was the first to suggest that Qoheleth was influenced by Phoenician. Dahood was, however, the scholar to suggest that Qoheleth "employs Phoenician orthography and betrays strong Canaanite-Phoenician literary influence and that he was a resident of a Phoenician city."⁴³

Robert Gordis⁴⁴ concurred with Davila on at least two points. First, they agreed that the Aramaic

⁴¹Fredericks, Panel Discussion.

⁴²Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Literature* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1947), 123.

⁴³Mitchell Dahood, "The Language of Qoheleth," *Catholic Quarterly Review* 14 (1952): 302-18.

⁴⁴Robert Gordis, "Was Koheleth a Phoenician?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 74 (1955): 105. This article was in response to Dahood's initial article (cited above).

translation theory was untenable. This theory, proposed by Frank Zimmerman, suggested that Qoheleth was originally composed in Aramaic and then, sometime later, was translated into Hebrew.⁴⁵ As a translation, any Aramaic influences could be explained as carry over from the original writing.

The other point of agreement between Davila and Gordis was the late composition of the book. Both seem to point to a form of Hebrew similar to Mishnaic. Gordis unashamedly suggested the writing to have taken place in the early third century.⁴⁶ Davila explained that

the close relationship between Qoheleth and Mishnaic Hebrew is certainly due to the fact that they are both late. . . . We have evidence for a great mixture of dialects in the post-exilic period in the environs of Jerusalem (Neh 13:23-27). There are good indications that the dialect of Qoheleth was influenced by northern Hebrew, and we can only hope that further discoveries will give more information in this regard.⁴⁷

Unfortunately, Davila was not clear whether the book was written in or influenced by a northern dialect, or a postexilic southern dialect, for that matter. Only recently has he clarified his position, stating that "Qoheleth may have been a postexilic native speaker of a late North Hebrew dialect," but even then he could make a conclusive statement

⁴⁵Frank Zimmerman, "The Aramaic Provenance of Qoheleth," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 36 (1945-46): 17-45.

⁴⁶Robert Gordis, *The Word and the Book: Studies in Biblical Language and Literature* (New York: Ktav, 1976), 307.

⁴⁷Davila, "Qoheleth," 87.

on the matter.⁴⁸

Although there are parallels in Phoenician, Aramaic, and Mishnaic literature with forms in Qoheleth, Davila has presented a convincing argument for the dialectal explanation. He is less convincing, however, in his dating of the book to the fifth century.⁴⁹ After a lengthy discussion of Dahood's work, Archer concluded that the data shows a close relationship to the Ugaritic literature of Moses' time, and so there is every reason to deduce from this the suitability of the language of *Ecclesiastes* to a genre cultivated among the Phoenician-speaking peoples and adopted from them by a gifted tenth century Hebrew author.⁵⁰

Rather than arguing for a postexilic composition, he simply suggested that the traditional position of Solomonic author cannot be excluded for linguistic reasons.

Testimony from Esther

Esther's record is significant for a number of reasons. First, chronology is a factor, which reflects the postexilic patterns of speech and writing. With a Persian setting, a second issue is that the language shows signs of interaction with its linguistic surroundings. Finally, the social position of Esther within Persian culture is a concern of the language of the book. The issue of Jewish

⁴⁸Davila, Panel Discussion: "Biblical Hebrew Dialectology: A North Israelite Dialect?" National Association of Professors of Hebrew. Chicago: 20 November 1994, unpublished.

⁴⁹Davila, Panel Discussion.

⁵⁰Archer, "Linguistic Evidence," 181.

identity (language and culture) outside of Canaan, however, is the focus of this section.

One significant point to be made is the distinction which existed between the Jews and the ruling Persians. Unlike the returning exiles (discussed in Ezra-Nehemiah), the Jews in Persia maintained their language, their customs, and their script. Such a marked gulf existed between the two groups that Haman singled out the Jews for persecution and, later, for extermination.

Differences in Dialect and Script

Three different passages refer to the "script of each province and the language of each people" (once again, נָשֹׂר may be translated "dialect," Esth. 1:22; 3:12; 8:9). In the last of these, the writer distinguishes the communication of the Jews from that of the other peoples: "These orders were written in the script of each province and the language of each people and also to the Jews in their own script and language" (Esth. 8:9). Though in a foreign land, they maintained their language and script.

Implications for Retention of Identity

The fact that their language and script differed from the Persians is but one indication that the Jews retained their identity while dwelling in Mesopotamia. From Haman's own lips, the Jews were a people "whose customs are different from those of all other people" (Esth. 3:8). Furthermore, they initiated Purim as a celebration of their

freedom from wrongful oppression under Haman (Esth. 9: 18-28). Unlike the exiles who returned home, the Jews in Persia remained separate from all other people groups.

Testimony from Ezra-Nehemiah

The Jews who returned from the Babylonian exile faced a myriad of problems: no protection behind the walls of Jerusalem, no temple in which to worship, and an inactive priesthood which had long ago forgotten the ways of יהוה. In one life span, they forgot their native tongue, their covenant relationship, and their knowledge of יהוה.

Differences in Communication

The account of Ezra's recitation of the Law in Nehemiah 8:8 provides a look at one of several words used to speak of communication in the Old Testament, including their recognition of foreign dialects and languages. Moreover, it illustrates the state of national identity after the return from Babylonia. Finally, the context of the verse provides help in understanding Ezra's unique title as scribe: "They [the Levites] read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving meaning so the people could understand what was being read" (Neh. 8:8).

Terms Relating to Interpretation

תַּפְנִית is the first of two roots in the verse relating to interpretation. As in the context of Ezra 4:18 (in Aramaic), the verb means to translate from one language

to another. A majority of the exiles had grown up speaking the *lingua franca*, Aramaic, and needed an interpreter in order to understand the reading of the Law.

The root פִּתְּחָה, translated above as "giving meaning," is the other significant form in the verse. Normally in Hebrew, the term carries the idea of setting or placing an object.⁵¹ The Aramaic cognate is used in Daniel 3:10 and elsewhere to speak of the issuance of a decree. As seen above in Esther, decrees required translation into the various tongues of the peoples. The combination of the roots, therefore, suggests that the Levites not only offered a literal translation, but also presented it in the idiom or dialect of the people (perhaps Aramaized and colloquial). Because of their efforts, the people could understand (בַּן).

One other root found in the Old Testament for interpretation is לִזְבַּח. In the Hiphil, the root is used of Joseph's interpreter (Gen. 42:23) and of ambassadors (Isa. 43:27; 2 Chron. 32:31).

Terms Relating to Expression

Upon closer examination of the verb and related words, an interesting discovery is made; לִזְבַּח seems to be closely related to לִזְבֵּחַ, meaning "throat":

- (1) לִזְבַּח: to stammer; to speak barbarously; to mock;

⁵¹Heinrich Wilhelm Friedrich Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, trans. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (London: Bagster, 1847; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), s.v. "פִּתְּחָה."

(2) **לְלַעַן**: to stammer; to speak barbarously; to mock;

(3) **לְלַשָּׁן**: to speak barbarously, in a foreign language.⁵²

Without a doubt, there exists a tie between the consonants **ל** and **ל**. Gesenius has written that this must not be overlooked, but rather that the

very frequent interchange of the letters **ל** and **ל** should be remarked; this is done in such a way that for the Hebrew **ל** the Aramaeans, rejecting both the sibilant and the sound of *t*, retain nothing but a gutteral breathing.⁵³

If the interchange is not completely relegated to Aramaic, could it be that the differences in these terms are dialectal variants? While neither Harris nor Garr mentioned this particular interchange, further investigation may offer answers to this question.

Another root, independent of those mentioned above, is **לִקְדֹּם**. Often used in cosmological passages to refer to the act of "establishing" **תְּהִלָּה**'s universe, the term is used in Judges 12:6 of the ability to pronounce the word **שְׁבֵלָה**. As previously discussed, the context of this verse was the Gileadite/Ephraimite exchange on the fords of the Jordan.

Whether it is speaking in a foreign tongue or translating from one, the Old Testament makes it clear that the Hebrew people knew the difference between their own language and the dialects and languages of those around them. Following the exile, their choice of assimilating

⁵²All definitions are from Gesenius.

⁵³Gesenius, s.v. "**ל**."

themselves into the language and culture of others led to a loss of their identity as a people.

Implications for Loss of Identity

A recent article has advanced the premise that Old Testament Jews had a sense of identity which was tied to their language. Consequently, when they returned from the exile without a knowledge of יִהְעָדָה, they lost their national consciousness.⁵⁴ Nehemiah 13:23-24 records the ethnic and linguistic setting of postexilic Judah:

In those days I saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or the language of one of the other peoples, and did not know how to speak the language of Judah.

Studies in the Moabite and Ammonite languages have revealed a remarkable similarity to Biblical Hebrew, at least from a modern perspective. Perhaps it was the background of the tribes of Ammon and Moab which was of greatest concern to the writer (Gen. 19:30-38).

The לְשׁוֹן of Ashdod (in the context of Neh. 13:24) is another issue. Little is known about the Philistine language, apart from a few loan words (e.g., סֶנֶּה). Is אַמְּדוֹדִית to be taken as representing the language of Philistia? Block thought that it was the dominant form of the language, but added:

Here we have a dialect whose name derives from the name of a city, a rather limited toponym. It is reasonable

⁵⁴Daniel I. Block, "The Role of Language in Ancient Israelite Perceptions of National Identity," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103, no. 3 (1984): 321-40.

to propose that whatever dialectal distinctions were associated with a specific territory, that dialect could assume the name of the region.⁵⁵

Not only had the remnant from Judah allowed their children to marry outside the faith, but also failed to teach them the word of יהוה. They had no contact with who they were, where they had come from, nor what part they played in יהוה's plan.

As a result of the intermarriage of the returned exiles with the people of the region, their faithfulness to the Law could only come about if they had it in their new language. "Ezra the scribe" may have been named as such because of his transcription of the Law into the postexilic dialects of the people.

Testimony from the Chronicles

Personal names are a significant factor in tracing the history of a language or a people.⁵⁶ Prior to the European colonization of North America, the native Americans called one another by names from their language (Geronimo, Pocahontas, etc.). Gradually, with the amalgamation of English and their tribal tongues, they took on Anglicized names (e.g., Sitting Bull and Chief Joseph). Descendants of those tribes now have only vestiges of their heritage in their names, often preserving their ancestry by family

⁵⁵Block, "Role of Language," 330.

⁵⁶See Scott C. Layton, *Archaic Features of Canaanite Personal Names in the Hebrew Bible*, Harvard Semitic Monographs, no. 47 (Scholars Press, 1990).

surnames. Through time and exposure to other cultures, names changed.

Hebrew names also changed through the course of time, though under different circumstances.⁵⁷ The Old Testament records the change of personal names for religious reasons: Abram/Abraham (Gen. 17:5), Sarai/Sarah (Gen. 17:15), Jacob/Israel (Gen. 32:28). Cultural differences were the reason for some changes: Joseph/Zaphenath-Paneah (Gen. 41:45), Daniel/Belteshazzar, Hananiah/Shadrach, Mishael/Meshach, Azariah/Abednego (Dan. 1:7). They were also changed for personal reasons: (1) Naomi's self-designation as Mara (Ruth 1:20), (2) Jacob's renaming of Ben-Oni to Ben-jamin (Gen. 35:18), and (3) Jeremiah's renaming of Passhur ben-Immer to Magor-Missabib (Jer. 20:3). For some unknown reason, Moses renamed Hoshea as Jehoshua. While all of these are important, this final name is of particular significance in the study of the Chronicles.

From the conquest of Canaan until Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Jerusalem, the name "Joshua" was consistently spelled יְהוֹשֻׁעַ. With the return from captivity, the name יְהוֹשָׁׁׁעַ came into usage. As table 7 indicates, some postexilic writers noted the difference; others did not.

⁵⁷See Otto Eissfeldt, "Renaming in the Old Testament," in *Words and Meanings: Essays presented to David Winton Thomas*, ed. Peter R. Ackroyd and Barnabas Lindars; 39-45 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1968). This relates not only to personal names, but also to place and object names.

Table 7.--Changes in the Name Joshua

Location	son of Nun	high priest	other
Chronicles	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	---	יְשֻׁעָה
Ezra-Nehemiah	יְשֻׁעָה	יְשֻׁעָה	יְשֻׁעָה
Haggai	---	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	---
Zechariah	---	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	---
Malachi	---	---	---

Source: Independent research by D. K. Wilson, Jr.

This data brings up several questions, the least of which is, which record is wrong? The answer is, both are correct. Such a question would be akin to determining whether the American hero of the 1936 Olympics was Jesse Owens or J[ames] C[leveland] (J. C.) Owens. Both names are accurate, though the latter is more precise.

Another question emerges which deals with chronology, When did the name יְשֻׁעָה become prevalent? All twenty nine references to the name occur in Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah. Furthermore, excepting 1 Chronicles 7:27, this is the exclusive spelling in these books.

Postexilic books mentioned above use יְשֻׁעָה, but Haggai and Zechariah have elected to use יְהוֹשֻׁעַ. What is the reason for the difference? A suitable explanation is that יְהוֹשֻׁעַ was the original form, including the theophoric element יה. Studies on theophoric elements show that, over the course of time, the element bearing the deity name is often lost; hence, a hypocoristic (shortened) name is

formed.⁵⁸ Because of their conservative nature, Haggai and Zechariah, who were calling the returned exiles back to their covenant responsibility with יהוה, chose to preserve the fuller form. The indication of the records, therefore, is that 1 Chronicles 7:27 and 24:11 better illustrate the chronological distinction between these two forms.

Conclusion

The form of the Psalms is a dialect of its own, yet within its confines are dialectal variants. Proverbs contains not only a collection of wisdom, but also several forms of dialectal variants. Job's vocabulary makes it difficult to assign a late date, unless the scholar commences his study with that assumption. Scholars agree that Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes) has a great cache of variant forms of dialect, though agreement in assigning a date has yet to occur. The Book of Esther provides a unique perspective, recording Israelite history in a Persian setting, though presumably in the square script of the era. By contrast, Ezra-Nehemiah records the account of Jews who returned to their homeland, though they lost their separateness. Chronicles provides the reader with a look at the distinction of a personal name through the course of Old Testament time.

The evidence of the Hebrew Bible is enough to

⁵⁸See *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), s.v. "Names, Hypocoristic," by Dana M. Pike.

convince the skeptic that dialect variations exist in Biblical Hebrew. While some may not be as convincing as others, the weight of testimony should be sufficient. Now to the larger task, which is to delineate the features from one another with the attempt to classify them.

PART II

PROPOSED CLASSIFICATIONS OF DIALECT VARIATIONS

CHAPTER FIVE
CLASSIFIED BY CHRONOLOGY

Any attempt to categorize linguistic variants is a difficult task alone. The problem is intensified when the issue of chronology is made part of the equation. So begins the task of this chapter. Three main issues are involved in this focus on the development of Biblical Hebrew: the division of the language into definite periods, the difference between archaic (authentically old) and archaistic (simply employing old) forms, and the implications of diachronic language work for Old Testament disciplines.

Proposed Periods of Biblical Hebrew

Among Old Testament scholars, there have been two main schools of thought regarding the division of the language. The older position, held by S. R. Driver and others, held that the Babylonian exile was the clear dividing line between classical and late Hebrew, between preexilic and postexilic records.¹ Certainly the updated view agrees to this point, but it also recognizes the

¹S[amuel] R[olles] Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1902). He has dated the earliest writing (JE) to the eighth century, leaving no room for earlier writing (109).

reality of a third division: early Hebrew poetry. This threefold view is the predominant position today among biblical scholars.

In *A History of the Hebrew Language*, E. Y. Kutscher defined this threefold division of Biblical Hebrew:

It is scarcely possible to date the different books of BH on a linguistic basis, but by and large, scholars have accepted the following tripartite division:

1) Archaic Biblical Hebrew (ABH) is represented mainly by the poetry of the Pentateuch and the Early Prophets. . . .

2) Standard Biblical Hebrew (SBH) representing Biblical prose.

3) Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH) as it appears in the Chronicles and other books.²

In terms of exact chronology, there is no consensus among scholars as to the dating of the three periods. Some, including the present writer, date the earliest Hebrew to the Patriarchal Period. A recent publication has defined the periods as ABH (1100-1000 B.C.), SBH (1000-550 B.C.), and LBH (550-200 B.C., including Ben Sira), reflecting a bias against Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.³ In order to interact with the available materials, Kutscher's terminology is employed in this chapter.

As discussed in the introduction to this study, the chronological divisions of Akkadian have been consistently

²E[duard] Y[echezkel] Kutscher, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, ed. Raphael Kutscher (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982), 12.

³Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period: 450 B.C.E. to 600 C.E., ed. Jacob Neusner and William Scott Green (New York: Macmillan Library Reference, Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1996), s.v. "Hebrew language."

designated as dialects,⁴ whereas with Hebrew, they are often referred to layers or strata.⁵ This study calls for the consistent use of dialect within all Semitic languages and has, therefore, included chronology as a classification of dialects.

Archaic Biblical Hebrew

Ian Young wrote that "ABH is a style of poetry characterized by the frequent use of variations in form. These variant forms are both archaic and dialectal."⁶ Although Young and several other scholars have written on archaic forms in the language, David Robertson's monograph on archaic Hebrew poetry has become the standard work.⁷ Robertson's insights regarding the historical development must not be overlooked:

The growth of a language has two aspects: addition and subtraction. Simultaneously with the accretion of new forms by internal development and by borrowing, old forms atrophy, either disappearing entirely or continuing in limited use as archaisms. Before linguistic evidence can be utilized for dating, one must chart this process of growth.⁸

⁴Wolfram von Soden, *Grundriß der Akkadischen Grammatik*, Analecta Orientalia, nos. 33/47 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), 2-4.

⁵Rendsburg, "The Strata of Biblical Hebrew," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 17 (1991): 81-99.

⁶Ian Young, "The Style of the Gezer Calendar and Some 'Archaic Biblical Hebrew' Passages," *Vetus Testamentum* 42, no. 3 (1992): 374.

⁷David A. Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence in Dating Early Hebrew Poetry*, SBL Dissertation Series, no. 3 (Missoula, Mont.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1966).

⁸Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence*, 1.

Using this methodology, he introduced the features, set up the parameters, then set out to analyze the development.

Features isolated as archaic forms are delineated by Robertson, including

the two finite verbal conjugations in past narrative, in the preservation of the y/w of a final y/w root when it opens a syllable, and in the use of ze/zō/zū as relative pronouns, of the affixes -anhū and -annū, of the 3mpl pronominal suffix -mw, of the affixes -y and -w, and of enclitic -m.⁹

He determined these to be archaic forms, based on their affinity with forms from the Amarna Letters and Ugaritic poetry. Another important discussion on features, though much more abbreviated, is located in Kutscher's section on Archaic Biblical Hebrew.¹⁰

Analysis

Taking particular features to represent the oldest dialect of Hebrew, Robertson set out to determine whether clusters of these forms were evident in previously identified archaic poetry. He began with commonly held archaic poetry--Exodus 15 (Song of Moses), Judges 5 (Song of Deborah), Habakkuk 3, Psalm 18, Deuteronomy 32, and Job--and looked at the concentration of archaic features within each passage. He then analyzed the distribution of Standard Biblical Hebrew features in the same passages. When the older features were located within a passage which exhibited classical features as well, it was disallowed as genuinely

⁹Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence*, ix.

¹⁰Kutscher, *History*, 79-80.

archaic. That left only the Song of Moses as truly ancient.

What Robertson failed to account for was a transitional period between identifiable dialects. As he had previously mentioned, the synchronic study of the form of a language must allow for variables, since all living languages are in flux. Most likely, this is the reason why his conclusion seemed so inconclusive. Following his synchronic methodology, the data could only point to one passage which met his specifications.

One of the issues addressed by Robertson was the delineation between genuinely archaic poetry and poetry which contained archaisms. In the latter, the Bible writer would employ older forms of the language because they were still part of the standard vocabulary or (as others have surmised) to give the impression of age.¹¹ Robertson seems to take the former position.¹² Biblical writer X could be writing in the seventh century; but because of the poetic dialect employed, he wrote with some forms which dated from the tenth century or earlier. This use of archaic (as opposed to archaic) vocabulary is addressed below.

Features

Kutscher isolated features which distinguish the dialects of Archaic from Standard Biblical Hebrew:

- (1) Morphological features--archaic suffixes, such as

¹¹See Young, "Gezer Calendar," 362-75.

¹²Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence*, 147-50.

the third masculine singular possessive **ת-** as an archaic feature (**תָוֹתָה**, Gen. 49:11).

(2) Particles--definite articles were often unused in archaic poetry. Furthermore, the verb was often negated with **בְּלֹ'**; and the relative pronoun was sometimes omitted from the relative clause.

(3) Vocabulary--specialized terms uncommon in standard prose included: "חִמֵּד" (**חִמֵּד**) 'to listen'; **יַיִן** (**יַיִן**) 'wine' (**יַיִן**); **כָּבֵיד** (**כָּבֵיד**) 'gold'; **חֲרִיזָם** (**חֲרִיזָם**) 'big'; 'smite'; **נִנְפַּךְ** (**נִנְפַּךְ**) 'shine'; and **פָּעֹל** (**פָּעֹל**) 'do.'"¹³ As previously discussed, Robertson also isolated several features which he considered to be archaic. Clearly, a distinction is made between this dialect of archaic Biblical Hebrew and the standard form of the language.

The failure of many scholars at this point is to take a feature, discover it in another chronological era, and conclude that its presence is unreliable or less than original. A form which is common in one dialect is not to be understood as exclusive to that dialect.

Standard Biblical Hebrew

The classic approach to teaching Hebrew is by introducing the students to Standard Biblical Hebrew. Using this synchronic approach, the instructor presents normal morphological forms, dominant pronouns and particles, and standardized spelling. Although the well-known grammars do

¹³Kutscher, *History*, 80.

not specify this dialect, their basic approach is to present the standard form with which the student is to become familiar. After sufficient progress is made in Standard Biblical Hebrew, the instructor presents vocabulary and syntax which do not conform to the general rules.

Kutscher wrote nothing on this dialect of the language, other than to say that it represented "Biblical prose."¹⁴ Angel Sáenz-Badillo explained that

classical Hebrew prose is clearly linked to the reigns of David and Solomon and their successors in Jerusalem. . . . An "official" language was created, which was used at court and in educated circles in Jerusalem. . . . The language of prophetic and liturgical poetry from this period is not markedly different from that of the prose writings.¹⁵

He continued by explaining that several previous forms were changed and others omitted. The difficulty with attempting to define this dialect is that it is the standard form.

Fortunately, Chaim Rabin wrote of the general characteristics of this dialect in the general:

The principal innovations of the language of the classical prose . . . are the introduction of regular use of the definite article הַ and the use of the simple and conversive tenses, and the increase in the use of conjunctions (כִּי, אֲשֶׁר, and like) in subordinate clauses.¹⁶

His explanation of the classical dialect also includes the

¹⁴Kutscher, *History*, 12.

¹⁵Angel Sáenz-Badillo, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, trans. John Elwolde (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University, 1993), 68.

¹⁶1971 ed., s.v. "עָבֵרִית," אַנְצִיקְלּוֹפְּדִיה מִקְרָאִית, by Chaim Rabin.

supposition that it is a contrived form, composed during the united kingdom period by which both northerners and southerners could communicate. In essence, he allowed for the infiltration of northernisms even into the classical dialect of the language.

Late Biblical Hebrew

Among scholars who have, in recent years, taken great strides in the discussion of Late Biblical Hebrew, Robert Polzin's monograph on late Hebrew prose is the principal volume on the subject.¹⁷ Avi Hurvitz has also provided insightful information regarding the language of Ezekiel.¹⁸ In addition, studies on the language of Esther have been developed through the work of Ronald Bergey.¹⁹

Polzin has taken the position that the so-called Priestly Document (P) exemplifies late biblical prose and whose linguistic features point to that conclusion.²⁰ As a resource, the volume is a helpful tool in isolating features

¹⁷Robert Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew: Toward an Historical Typology of Biblical Hebrew Prose*, Harvard Semitic Monographs, no. 12 (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976).

¹⁸Avi Hurvitz, *A Linguistic Study of the Relationship between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel: A New Approach to an Old Problem*, Cahiers de la Revue Biblique, no. 20 (Paris: Gabalda, 1982).

¹⁹Ronald L. Bergey, "Late Linguistic Features in Esther," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 75, no. 1 (July 1984): 66-78; and "Post-Exilic Hebrew Linguistic Developments in Esther: A Diachronic Approach," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31 (June 1988): 161-68.

²⁰Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew*, 1.

of Late Biblical Hebrew, particularly the section regarding late features from the Chronicles. The author provided a total of nineteen syntactical features:

(1) Features not related to Aramaic--include reduced use of **מְ** with pronominal suffix, increased use of **מְ** before nominative (emphatic use), expressing possession with **לְ** plus noun or **לְ** plus noun, collectives understood as plurals, preference for plural forms, greatly diminished usage of infinitive absolute, less frequent use of **בָּ** and **כָּ** with infinitive construct, singular word repetition, merging third feminine plural suffix with the masculine, infrequent use of **וְיִ**, plural substantive followed by cardinal number, and increased use of **לְ** plus infinitive construct.

(2) Features related to Aramaic--inclusion of material and its weight, **לְ** used as *nota accusativi*, **לְ** of **מְ** unassimilated before anarthrous nouns, **לְ** emphatic at list end, **לְבִם** used attributively before substantive, and employment of **עַד לְ**.²¹

Using Esther as a control for his scientific approach, he then tested selected P passages and found them to be late. He did the same for the Book of Ezekiel. What he failed to address was that commonness does not suggest exclusivity. A series of features common to the exilic period does not preclude their earlier use, and in this case, much earlier.

Kutscher made an interesting observation regarding

²¹Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew*, 21-69.

Israelite features which relates to the chronological development of Hebrew. With the forms וְ and וּ, the sequence for their use in Hebrew followed this pattern: Israelite passages, then Late Biblical Hebrew, and finally Mishnaic Hebrew.²² This fact may help substantiate the idea that Mishnaic Hebrew was borne out of colloquial Israelite Hebrew (see discussion in chapter seven).

The Issue of Archaisms

Archaisms in religious language have been a practice since ancient times, but exist even in modern times. In the United States, there are some Christians who dare not read from a Bible or utter a prayer which is not framed in the Elizabethan English of the seventeenth century. They treat the King James Version as if it were the original language of the Bible. Groups of Muslims around the world form schools to learn classical Arabic in order to retain the pure faith. To this day, some twenty or more years after Vatican II, many Catholics around the world prefer mass in Latin, rather than their native language.

Practice in Other Semitic Languages

Similar devotion was paid to archaic languages in the ancient Mesopotamian world. Though the *lingua franca* was Akkadian, old Sumerian vocabulary was retained in religious and legal proceedings. This type of archaic practice is evidenced among the tablets found in the

²²Kutscher, *History*, 32.

Ashurbanipal library at Nineveh and elsewhere.²³

Practice in Biblical Hebrew

Studies in the Old Testament indicate that archaisms are found in Biblical Hebrew. The question is, Does this occur in every genre of Hebrew or only in selected ones?

Archaic elements have been identified in nearly all dialects of Biblical Hebrew. From the Song of Deborah, Freedman identified an archaic form of energetic -anna in Judges 5:12. This, he explained, provided metrical symmetry.²⁴ Dahood also identified an archaic ending in Proverbs 31:6. In this example, it is the archaic genitive ending -î.²⁵ Evidence of a vestigial case ending would be a significant find. The problem with both of these archaic forms discussed by Dahood is that they were apparent only after he made emendations to the text.

As previously mentioned, Dahood argued for the close linguistic relationship between Ugaritic poetry and Hebrew poetry, particularly with regard to the Psalms. Many of the features in the poetry of Ugaritic are identical in Hebrew, though the composition dates were separated by two to four

²³Leonard Cottrell, *Reading the Past: The Story of Deciphering Ancient Languages* (New York: Crowell-Collier, 1971), 93; see also W[illiam] H[enry] Boulton, *Assyria* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., n.d.), 122.

²⁴David Noel Freedman, "Archaic Forms in Early Hebrew Poetry," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 72 (1960): 101-2.

²⁵Dahood, "The Archaic Genitive Ending in Proverbs 31:6," *Biblica* 56, no. 2 (1975): 241.

hundred years at their closest point. One example is the pair שָׁמַר / שְׁמַר, used in Psalm 7:17 and elsewhere. In Psalm 7:17, the latter term is an archaism, a vestige of a former vocabulary. Job 2:7 also employs שְׁמַר, but in this case, the term is genuinely archaic (presuming Job's antiquity).

Many of the conclusions regarding these forms of linguistic features are highly subjective. Dahood presented the example of Psalm 127, which most scholars take to be of late origin. Yet verse 2 yields a usage of שִׁיר not employed in late writing. He wrote:

To be sure, one may hazard the opinion that the psalmist was indulging in post-Exilic archaizing, but then it becomes difficult to explain why so many archaizing usages were lost upon the contemporary translators of the LXX.²⁶

As Dahood's comments indicate, an objective approach to chronological linguistic evidence leads to possibilities, even probabilities, but not to dogmatic answers.

Even in the late record of the Chronicles, archaic elements have been located. These must be taken as archaisms, for they reflect the language and forms of ancient Ugaritic.²⁷ Gordon has suggested that they survived by way of an Israelite dialect.²⁸ Two examples are Hebrew

²⁶Dahood, *Psalms I: 1-50. Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965), xxxv.

²⁷Wilfred G. E. Watson, "Archaic Elements in the Language of Chronicles," *Biblica* 53 (1972): 191-207.

²⁸Cyrus Gordon, "North Israelite Influence on Post-exilic Hebrew," *Israel Exploration Journal* 5 (1955): 85-88.

עָזָר, which parallels Ugaritic *g̡zr* (1 Chron. 12:1), and the idiom לְבֶקֶר וּלְבֶקֶר (1 Chron. 9:27), which is similar to a Ugaritic idiom from Aqhat 1.175-76.²⁹ Watson also provided an assortment of vocabulary, syntax, and stylistic features which paralleled Ugaritic literature. Whereas some might argue that the record indicates northern dialectal features, he was unsure. Watson concluded his article, stating that whether Chr[onicles] is exhibiting phenomena common to texts written at a late stage in any language, or whether one must conclude that the bulk of the work was composed at a much earlier date than commonly supposed, remains to be seen.³⁰

Because of this issue of archaic versus archaic forms, dialectal features cannot prove or disprove the dating of a text. As Robertson has indicated, the clearest conclusion to be drawn is that the features may indicate relative age, but they do not prove the dating of a passage.³¹

Implications of the Diachronic Approach

A new volume has just been published which deals with the issue of diachronic and synchronic approaches to the Old Testament.³² The significance of this work is that it illustrates the reality of the twofold nature of Hebrew studies. In one sense, the Hebrew text must be viewed as a

²⁹The Ugaritic idiom reads *lymm lyrhm*, *lyrhm lsnt*.

³⁰Watson, "Archaic Elements," 206.

³¹Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence*, 154-55.

³²Johannes C. de Moor, ed. *Synchronic or Diachronic: A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis*, Oudtestamentische Studiën, no. 34 (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

unity, regarded as a whole revelation with a single message. But it must also be understood in its historical setting, wherein developments in the language may be recognized. Robertson wrote, "Each synchronic description presents the dialectal form of the language at a particular historical moment."³³ This duality impacts both teaching and exegesis.

Chronology and Teaching Hebrew

Nearly twenty years ago, J. H. Hespers addressed the issue of diachronics in Hebrew pedagogy. Several scholars had voiced opposition to the diachronic approach, that is, the presentation of Hebrew features in various chronological stages of the language.

Hespers agreed with the premise that Hebrew must be introduced as a single form. In other words, students ought to learn the classical forms: "Language description has to be primarily synchronic, but when teaching one cannot stop here."³⁴ As students discover variant forms in the text, the instructor should not shy away from explaining the chronological significance and development of one form to another:

In my opinion, the teaching of Classical Hebrew can and should profit from these new attitudes bearing on the relation between historical linguistics and synchronic description. Language is not an unchangeable static,

³³Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence*, 1.

³⁴J. H. Hespers, "The Role of Diachronics in the Teaching of Old Testament Hebrew," in *General Linguistics and the Teaching of Dead Hamitico-Semitic Languages*, ed. J. H. Hespers; 93-107 (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 103.

but a dynamic entity.³⁵

This approach proposed by Hovers need not only apply to historical linguistics, but also to the advances in biblical dialectology.

Chronology and Exegesis

For the majority of biblical texts, the issue of chronology is not problematic. Some books clearly date from the period of the united and divided kingdoms. Others exhibit characteristics which resemble Aramaic or Mishnaic Hebrew and by their record are clearly postexilic. There are sections, however, upon which Old Testament scholars disagree. Such is the case with the Pentateuch in particular, though some individual books are controversial.

James Barr has recently addressed the issue of synchrony and diachrony in relation to exegesis. In this address, he noted the difference in approaches to exegesis among various scholars:

What happens is that, given a peculiar group of connections in the text, one scholar tends to think of traces of a previous version or of later redaction, while another tends to think of exquisite literary art on the part of the writer: the former is now deemed 'diachronic,' the latter 'synchronic.'³⁶

The contention of this study is that the presence of chronologically transient dialectal features may account for

³⁵Hovers, "Role of Diachronics," 101.

³⁶James Barr, "The Synchronic, the Diachronic, and the Historical: A Triangular Relationship?" in *Synchronic or Diachronic: A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis*, ed. Johannes C. de Moor, *Oudtestamentische Studiën*, no. 34 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 10.

some of the forms which make the dating of individual passages so complicated. Rather than approaching the Bible with the presumption of disunity and redactional traces, the exegete must reckon with the fact that there are other explanations than those proposed by adherents of the historical-critical method.

Taking the tradition approach to compositional dating (*sans scribal traditions*), the exegete will find features which clearly define the time period with which he is working. No doubt he will also find problematic material. As these forms are encountered, he must recognize the fluid (nonstatic) nature of the language and understand that these problems do not have to be accounted to another author or to another age.

CHAPTER SIX
CLASSIFIED BY REGION

Interest in regional dialects in Biblical Hebrew is not an entirely new phenomenon. As early as 1815, Gesenius made mention of regional distinctions.¹ Prior to Rendsburg's landmark dissertation, Zellig Harris also distinguished ancient Hebrew regionally in *Development of the Canaanite Dialects*. In that study, the language was generally referred to as a single entity, though he occasionally mentioned the distinguishing features of North Palestine, Jerusalem Hebrew, and South Palestine.²

The continued work of Gary Rendsburg and other scholars in regional distinctions is likely to be the most promising area of Biblical Hebrew studies for the near future. In recent years, their publications have pioneered

¹F[riedrich] H[einrich] Wilhelm Gesenius, *Geschichte der hebräischen Sprache und Schrift: Eine philologisch-historische Einleitung in die Sprachlehre und Wörterbucher der hebräischen Sprache* (Leipzig: Vogel, 1815; reprint, New York: Olms, 1973), 54.

²Zellig S[abbettai] Harris, *Development of the Canaanite Dialects: An Investigation in Linguistic History*, AOS, no. 16 (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1939; reprint, Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus, 1978), 22-24, 38. Philological distinctions of this sort are not to be confused with the position that a Pentateuchal Yahwist document was contrived in the southern kingdom and an Elohist document in the north. This writer rejects any form of that latter position.

methodologies to identify the provenance of selected passages (though their conclusions were often overly zealous). This matter has received such attention that the National Association of Professors of Hebrew held a panel discussion in late 1994 specifically related to North Israelite as a recorded dialect of Biblical Hebrew.³

In this chapter, the methodology is threefold. Features which have been classified as regional are first cited and analyzed. Following this, the study addresses the issues regarding missing links in dialect geography. Finally, the implications of dialectology for other Old Testament disciplines are discussed.

Geographical Features in the Text

One might expect that in the Hebrew Bible geographical features of dialect are few and far between. On the contrary, Hebrew dialectology is regularly isolating new features. Recent scholarship indicates that progress has been made in Semitic dialectal studies, particularly the dialect of Deir 'Alla, which has provided new insight for Hebrew scholars.

Recently, Rendsburg wrote an essay on morphological evidence of regionalisms. He isolated fourteen features (as northernisms) having cognates in Aramaic (six), Phoenician

³This discussion--"Dialectology in Biblical Hebrew: A North Israelite Dialect?"--was held in Chicago, 20 November 1994. Participants included James Davila, Daniel Fredericks, and Stephen Kaufman; with Gary Rendsburg as respondent.

(three), Deir 'Alla (one), Punic (one), and Moabite (one).⁴

As other inscriptions and information are assimilated, dialectal discussions will continue to be updated. Above all other regional studies, discussion of the northern dialect is presently receiving the greatest attention.

Israelite Hebrew

Features of the Dialect(s)

Phonology. Discovery of the Samaritan ostraca has proved to be of great benefit to the field of Hebrew dialectology. Among the features which the texts had in common with biblical texts are the contraction of the medial diphthong 'ā to .. ('ā for 'ā, "wine"), personal names with theophoric elements (nine with 'ā), and a form possibly resembling the proto-Semitic feminine ending *תָּוֹתְךָ* (*תָּוֹתְךָ* for *תָּוֹתְךָ* "year"), though this form is more likely a cognate to Akkadian *šattu*. Gibson commented that "the ostraca tell us little of the northern dialect," but they have confirmed the assessments of scholars who identified these features in Biblical Hebrew as dialectal.⁵ Contrary to John Gibson, Chaim Rabin said that the Samaritan ostraca and parts of Hosea show that Israel's spoken dialect was different from

⁴Rendsburg, "Morphological Evidence for Regional Dialects in Ancient Hebrew," in *Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew*, ed. Walter R. Bodine; 65-88 (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992).

⁵John C. L. Gibson, *Hebrew and Moabite Inscriptions*, vol. 1 of *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 7-8.

the official one.⁶

In regional studies in Biblical Hebrew, contraction of the unaccented diphthong is commonly recognized as a northernism: Harris,⁷ Cross and Freedman,⁸ Kutscher,⁹ and Garr.¹⁰ Kutscher, for example, wrote that "there is reason to believe that in the Israelite Kingdom the diphthongs were always contracted (as in Canaanite)."¹¹ Not all scholars concur with this position. Stephen Kaufman, for one, has stated that he was not convinced of the claims that diphthong contractions were an established fact as a northern feature:

All we know is that there are writing traditions about how to write such vowels in some Northern Hebrew texts. A little careful listening to the way Semitic is actually spoken should be enough to demonstrate the vacuousness of these kinds of claims. **הַבְלָת הַבְלָת**, as a famous postexilic writer once said.¹²

While the present writer does not share Kaufman's (and

⁶Anatolian Encyclopedia, 1971 ed., s.v. "עֲרִיתָה" by Chaim Rabin.

⁷Harris, *Canaanite Dialects*, 31.

⁸Frank Moore Cross, Jr., and David Noel Freedman, *Early Hebrew Orthography: A Study of the Epigraphic Evidence*, AOS, no. 36 (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1952), 47.

⁹Eduard Yechezkel Kutscher, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, ed. Raphael Kutscher (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982), 66.

¹⁰W. Randall Garr, *Dialect Geography in Syria-Palestine, 1000-586 B.C.E.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985), 38-39.

¹¹Kutscher, *History*, 62.

¹²Kaufman, Panel Discussion.

Solomon's) pessimism regarding this matter, his cautious approach to this area of language study is not without merit.

Another characteristic of the northern dialect was the omission of the final י in personal names with the theophoric יְהוָה. Isaiah 1:1 records the Judahite kings as יְהוּדָה and יְהוּנָה, whereas Amos 1:1 and Hosea 1:1 name the same kings יהוּדָה and יהוּנָה, respectively. Even in the Annals of Sennacherib, the full theophoric element was preserved in Hezekiah's name: Hazaqiau (Annals iii.18).

Morphology. Along with subtle changes within individual words, particles and other forms seem to have distinguished northern dialects from the prominent form in Judah and Jerusalem. While some may be vestigial forms which never left the vocabulary of northerners, others seem to have made their way into northern usage through contact with other cultures, particularly Syria (Aram) and Phoenicia.

Reemerging forms include the relative וְ, first singular pronoun יְהִי, and second feminine singular pronoun יְהִת (kethib, יְהִת is qere). Among early literature, וְ is found in Job 19:29; Judges 5:7; 6:17; 7:12; and 8:26. In standard and later books, it is utilized in 2 Kings 6:11 (spoken by an Aramean king); Psalms (122; 133; 146, etc.), Song of Songs, Qoheleth, Jonah, Lamentations, Ezra, and 1 Chronicles.

Not all scholars are in agreement regarding the differences between נָהָרִי and נָהָרִי. Table 6 earlier in this study was inconclusive concerning distribution in some northern books. Nonetheless, some argue for the northern influence upon the late (and more colloquial) dialect, which led to Mishnaic Hebrew.¹³ As Segal pointed out, נָהָרִי was the exclusive form of the pronoun in the Mishnah and contemporary writings.¹⁴

The personal pronoun נָהָרִי, according to Kutscher, "occurs in stories coming from the Israelite dialect" in Judges and Kings.¹⁵ In Jeremiah (4:30) and Ezekiel (36:13), however, the same form is regarded as a "mirage form," influenced by Aramaic. While Aramaic does possess the form נָהָרִי, Kutscher's explanation does not seem to fit the evidence.

The Samaritan Pentateuch, presumably close to the dialect of biblical Samaria, frequently used נָהָרִי for נָהָרִי.¹⁶ Furthermore, Elisha Qimron has written that נָהָרִי was rarely used in the Dead Sea Scrolls: "The feminine (נָהָרִי and נָהָרִי)

¹³Rendsburg, "The Galilean Background of Mishnaic Hebrew," in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lee I. Levine, 225-40 (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992); and M[oses] H[irsch] Segal, *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1927), 6: "MH is essentially a popular and colloquial dialect."

¹⁴Segal, *Mishnaic Hebrew*, 39.

¹⁵Kutscher, *History*, 30.

¹⁶August Freiher von Gall, *Der Hebräische Pentateuch der Samaritaner* (Geissen, Germany: Töpelmann, 1918).

occurs only in the biblical Scrolls."¹⁷ These facts indicate that the form was a vestigial northern feature, rather than the rebirth of one.

As a feature which made a later entrance into Biblical Hebrew, Rendsburg has argued that the double plural is a feature of Israelite Hebrew, having been influenced by the Phoenicians.¹⁸ As discussed previously in Chapter 2, the epigraphic evidence seems to confirm his assertion, though the construction was not unique to the Phoenicians.

One other morphological feature which made its way into Biblical Hebrew by means of the north is פְּנִים. *BDB* assigned this term as late (and thus, northern), particularly because of the same form in Mishnaic Hebrew (as opposed to BH פָּנִים). This is, by no means, an exhaustive list of features, but they are representative of the many variants that are classified as northernisms because of their affinity with Phoenician, Aramaic, Mishnaic Hebrew, or their placement in later writings of the Old Testament.

Facts and Future of the Study

Several questions were raised at the NAPH panel discussion in Chicago, including the following: (1) Was there a single Israelite dialect, or several different

¹⁷Elisha Qimron, *The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Harvard Semitic Studies, no. 29 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 57.

¹⁸Gary A. Rendsburg, *Linguistic Evidence for the Northern Origin of Selected Psalms*, SBL Monograph Series, no. 43 (Atlanta: Scholars, Press, 1990), 106.

dialects? (2) What was the relation of North Israelite with colloquial Hebrew and/or Mishnaic Hebrew? (3) What dialectal features are verifiably northern, as opposed to being chronological or stylistic forms? Although these and other issues were raised by the panel, no dogmatic proclamations were forthcoming.

Regarding the first question, the consensus of the panelists was that several dialects must have existed, rather than a singular northern dialect. The language of Hosea, for instance, records features not found in Amos, though they were contemporaries. If Amos's dialect--who prophesied in the northern kingdom--is considered to be rural or colloquial, because of his shepherding background, one may assume that Hosea's language represents the formal or urban dialect of Samaria. As a member of the established leadership in Samaria, his language may certainly be a reflection of the royal dialect, spoken in the court of Jeroboam. Davila has stated:

Could the dialect of Samaria, for example, have had the same importance in the north as the dialect of Jerusalem did in the south? Unfortunately, the royal chronicles of Samaria do not survive (if they ever existed), and the few scraps of information left to us are not decisive.¹⁹

Whether Hosea spoke the dialect of the court is, thus far, unanswerable.

Keil presented the possibility that the features found in Amos represented some form of a common or

¹⁹James Davila, Panel Discussion.

colloquial dialect.²⁰ Rather than *a priori* rejection of this position, one might consider two possibilities:

(1) Keil's view, taken in conjunction with Rosenbaum's suggestion that it was a regional dialect,²¹ may explain the differences between Amos and Hosea.

(2) The isolations in Amos which Rendsburg made in his work on diglossia may confirm both its northern and common standing.²²

One other approach is to accept the current limitations of the text and provide informed analysis rather than unsubstantiated conjecture. Where Mishnaic Hebrew parallels "late" texts, one must keep in mind Baruch Levine's research on Ugaritic survivals in the Mishnah.²³

Regarding the final question, isolating verifiably northern features, statistical analysis of the features seems to be the better approach. Passages which are set in a northern location (Samaria, Carmel, Bethel), spoken by a northern person (Ahab, Jeroboam, Hosea), and/or displaying features which represent an obvious northern influence (cognate to Phoenician, Ugaritic, or Aramaic) are most

²⁰Carl F. Keil, *Minor Prophets*, vol. 10 of *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, ed. C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, trans. James Martin (Edinburgh: Clark, 1885; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 236.

²¹Rosenbaum, *Amos of Israel*, 89.

²²Rendsburg, *Diglossia in Ancient Hebrew*, AOS, no. 72 (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1990).

²³Baruch Levine, "Survivals of Ancient Canaanite in the Mishnah," Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1962 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Dissertation Services).

likely candidates for this classification. Beyond study of the distribution of these features, in both northern and southern passages, no objective analysis can be made.

Judahite Hebrew

The predominant attitude regarding Biblical Hebrew is that the majority of texts were recorded in the dialect of Jerusalem, or Judahite Hebrew. Davila stated: "Much of the Bible is written in Jerusalemitic Hebrew, and most of the rest seems to have been edited by speakers of this dialect."²⁴ The position of this writer is, therefore, that Standard Biblical Hebrew is a reflection of the Judahite dialect, though Davila's position regarding editors has yet to be proven. As a dialect, there should be features which distinguish it from the other regional dialects. The Siloam Inscription may demonstrate such a feature of this dialect.

The Siloam Inscription is a primary source of Judahite Hebrew from the time of Hezekiah. Within the six lines of this tunnel inscription, the substantive word pair שָׁבֵךְ/אִישׁ was used three times: line 2 (רַעֲוֹן אֶל.שָׁבֵךְ), "each man to his neighbor", lines 2-3 (רַעֲוֹן קָרְבָּן אֶל.שָׁבֵךְ), "each man called to his neighbor"), and line 4 (רַעֲוֹן לְקָרְבָּן אֶשְׁבֵךְ, "each man to the front of his neighbor").

According to Dahood, another word pair used in a similar manner, שָׁבֵךְ/חָמֵץ, is occasionally employed in biblical,

²⁴Davila, "Panel Discussion."

Ugaritic, and Phoenician poetry.²⁵ In addition, the Old Testament records thirteen instances in which the phrase אִישׁ אֶל־אֲחֵי is employed.

The only other record where this pair is used in tandem is the Hebrew Bible. As a matter of record, the Old Testament writers employed this pair seventy one times. Of this number, at least fifteen are preserved in the phrase אִישׁ אֶל־רְעוּהוֹ. Many of the other uses employ an inseparable preposition with רְעוּהוֹ. On occasion, several words separate the pair; but the context makes it obvious that the two correlate, "one to the other."

With the available evidence, this study contends that the word pair preserved on the Siloam Inscription and in the Hebrew Bible is representative of the dialectal vocabulary exclusive to Judahite (and its predecessor). Perhaps some will consider this an argument from silence. At present, however, there is no other evidence available.

Ephraimite Hebrew

Once again, the שְׁבָلַת incident makes its way into the dialectal discussion. There is, however, another approach taken to the issue in Judges 12. Speiser wrote that there was no evidence of any Semitic language without the sibilant š sound. Consequently, his contention was to suggest that the שׁ in שְׁבָלַת points back to a proto-Semitic t

²⁵See Dahood, *Psalms III: 101-150. Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, vol. 17a of *The Anchor Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), 445.

(= θ) sound which was lost in the Ephraimite dialect.²⁶

Kutscher explained that θ to s interchange is not uncommon today: "Certain immigrants to the U.S. sometimes substitute /s/ for English /θ/ which is alien to their native language, and pronounce [sing] instead of [thing]."²⁷ This is also true of some Jews who speak of šabbas (for šabbath).

What about the final consonant for the Ephraimites? Would these warriors have pronounced the word "sibboles," "sibboleth," or "sibboleth." The problem with Speiser's explanation is that it rests on incomplete information, rather than on solid proof.

Rosenbaum has suggested that Amos may have been an Ephraimite. This would account for some of the sibilant interchanges cited in his volume.²⁸ Unfortunately, so little is known about the Ephraimite dialect, other than Judges 12, that proposals to this point have been pure speculation. As a result, unless primary source material from the region of Ephraim is discovered, any discussion about the dialect will remain scholarly conjecture.

Transjordanian Hebrew

Toponyms may play a significant role in identifying the dialectal vocabulary of Transjordan. Kutscher has

²⁶E. A. Speiser, "The Shibboleth Incident," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 85 (1945): 10-13.

²⁷Kutscher, *History*, 15.

²⁸Rosenbaum, *Amos of Israel*, 88-91.

pointed out that

וַיְבָשֵׁה and בַּבְשָׁה do not occur in place names in Trans-jordan (with one exception) while רַמָּה and רַמֶּה do. Unless this is due to mere chance, the attestation of the place names indicates that the use of the root בַּבְשָׁה was restricted to central Palestine.²⁹

While this may be considered an argument from silence, the evidence indicates that Kutscher may have been correct.

Because of his familiarity with the dialect of Deir 'Alla, Kaufman has proposed that some of the style-switching features in the Hebrew text may be attributed to a Transjordanian dialect.³⁰ Not only would this account for "Aramaisms" in Biblical Hebrew prior to the exile, but also would introduce into the discussion a previously overlooked possibility.

Since Ammonite was the only other language to employ the relative particle וְ (with the possible addition of Phoenician), one could argue for the presence of a Transjordanian dialect with the use of the form.³¹ This explanation is unlikely due to other facts concerning the affected texts. A more prudent approach is to say that this may have been a feature of Transjordanian Hebrew, but even

²⁹Kutscher, *History*, 54-55.

³⁰Stephen A. Kaufman, "The Classification of the North West Semitic Dialects of the Biblical Period and Some Implications Thereof," in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress on Jewish Studies. Panel Sessions: Hebrew and Aramaic Languages*, ed. Moshe Bar-Asher; 41-57 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), 55. See quotation earlier in this study.

³¹Kent P. Jackson, *The Ammonite Language of the Iron Age*, Harvard Semitic Monographs, no. 27 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983), 102.

this is little more than speculation.

Unresolved Issues in Dialect Geography

For all the contributions that Harris, Rendsburg, Garr, Davila, Kaufman, Fredericks, and others have made to the field of biblical dialectology, much remains unknown. Unless archeological digs afford new Hebrew inscriptions from various regions in Canaan which date to the preexilic period, many theories will go uncorrected. Suggested emendations to the Hebrew text have been overturned by Ugaritic parallels. Similarly, distinctly regional inscriptions would help resolve unanswered questions.

With the evidence at hand, has an unquestionable answer been given to the demonstrative נִי (and נֵי)? Surely, it must be late and based on Aramaic נִי. No, it is a northernism based on Phoenician נִי. Or is it a colloquialism, since נִי is the prevalent form in Mishnaic Hebrew? Are all northernisms colloquial, or all colloquialisms northern? The verdict is still out.

Another classification enigma is the relative pronoun נַי. Only Ammonite has an identical form, so it may be Transjordanian. Indeed, it could be a colloquialism (dating back to Judg. 5), since it is a form employed in Mishnaic Hebrew (see chapter seven). Perhaps it should simply be labeled a northernism, since it seems to be found exclusively in "northern" texts. These are possibilities with no clear answers--at least for the time being.

Implications for Old Testament Studies

With the many unanswered questions, what are the possible benefits of regional dialect studies for the Old Testament disciplines? The position of this writer is that the Hebrew Bible faithfully preserves the words as they were initially recorded. Differences in spelling or form provide a means of understanding the dynamic reality of dialect variation in Biblical Hebrew. When northerners spoke, they would be expected to communicate in a dialect which varies slightly or greatly. People from Transjordan or central Canaan would invariably have slight variations from the uniformity of the official dialect.

Some scholars try to wed the obvious evidence for dialects with the ambiguous nature of the historical-critical method. As a result, they have evidence but believe that the evidence is not enough. Kaufman stated:

Simply different histories--not just of redactional histories, not just of scribal histories, but of translator histories or compositional histories--it's an extremely complex thing. . . . I finish by saying that combining this kind of redactional history with the problems inherent in the scribal transmission of biblical texts in general can lead us only to a state of abject agnosticism.³²

For those who choose to allow room for a system which rules out faithful, historical rendering in the biblical text, agnosticism is to be preferred to blatant denial of the Hebrew Bible. By contrast, this study assumes a faithful presentation of the facts.

³²Kaufman, Panel Discussion.

Generally, when a text from the Ancient Near East is discovered which bears the names of historical figures, it is approached primarily at face value. When the Bible is examined, however, the scrutiny goes beyond the record of the text to theories which cannot be proved but are taken to be facts. The Hebrew Bible records the communication of real people in a real world, speaking real words which vary according to region (*i.e.*, Transjordan), ethnic group (*i.e.*, Ephraim), and population setting (urban or rural).

CHAPTER SEVEN
CLASSIFIED BY STYLE

Throughout the course of this investigation, dialectal variants have been presented which cannot be categorized either chronologically or regionally. In general, these variations have been the choice of the speaker or recorder. The writer of Job or the composer of the hymn in Habakkuk 3, for example, chose to employ mythopoetic vocabulary to express the truth of God. Davidic and post-Davidic psalm writing which employed specialized syntax and archaic vocabulary was done so by choice as a certain style of hymnopoetry. Because of the controversial distinction between genre and dialect in this matter, this issue is not included in the discussion of social and stylistic classifications of Biblical Hebrew.

Amos seemed to be particularly selective in his vocabulary. Focusing on the judgment oracles recorded in chapters one and two, one may see the care with which each nation's judgment follows a pattern, yet is unquestionably unique.

Where scholars have found colloquialisms in the record, Amos may have intentionally employed his native dialect to distinguish himself from the payroll prophets

of Israel under Jeroboam. The issue of vernacular or colloquial speech is a key focus in this chapter.¹

In addition, the proposals regarding "switching" must not be overlooked. Kaufman's style-switching concept² and Rendsburg's addressee-switching concept are major factors of dialect classification.³ They also are examined here.

Colloquialisms

In the study of Hebrew dialects, colloquial Hebrew (regardless of region or chronology) generally refers to an informal, spoken dialect in contradistinction to an official literary style. This is not to suggest, however, that these forms are mutually exclusive:

Sermons, parliamentary speeches, university lectures, and news broadcasts--which are presented orally--are delivered in the written dialect. Conversely, folk literature and captions on cartoons--which appear in printed form--are typically cast in the spoken dialect.⁴

¹The primary text on the subject is Gary Rendsburg, *Diglossia in Ancient Hebrew*, AOS, no. 72 (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1990).

²Stephen A. Kaufman, "The Classification of the North West Semitic Dialects of the Biblical Period and Some Implications Thereof," *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress on Jewish Studies. Panel Discussions: Hebrew and Aramaic Language*, ed. Moshe Bar-Asher (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), 41-57.

³Rendsburg, *Linguistic Evidence for the Northern Origin of Selected Psalms*, SBL Monograph Series, no. 43 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 13; and "Kabbir in Biblical Hebrew: Evidence for Style-Switching and Addressee-Switching in the Hebrew Bible," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 112, no. 4 (1992): 649-51.

⁴Rendsburg, *Diglossia*, 3; see also Stephen J. Lieberman, "Response [to Joshua Blau]," in *Jewish Languages: Theme and Variations (Proceedings of Regional Conferences of the Association for Jewish Studies Held at The University of*

While one may assume that the literary nature of the Hebrew Bible would preclude colloquialisms, scholars have agreed that there are particular morphological features which distinguish the colloquial Hebrew dialect from formal ones. Likewise, there has been discussion regarding colloquial Biblical Hebrew and the dialect of the Dead Sea Scrolls and regarding the colloquial dialect and Mishnaic Hebrew. An examination of each of these issues is, thus, in order.

Identifying Colloquial Features

In Rendsburg's *Diglossia* monograph, he isolated several features which were considered to be colloquial. With each item, he confirmed the colloquial feature by comparing it to the standard form and by illustrating similar features in other Semitic languages. In the order that they were presented, the features are:

(1) Gender Neutralization. This is identified as second and third person masculine plural forms completely superceding feminine plural forms of independent pronouns, pronominal suffixes, and the imperfect. More specifically, this may take place when a feminine plural subject is coupled with a masculine plural verb.

(2) Incongruence. When gender discord (as mentioned above) and/or number discord (when subject and verb disagreement) occurred, Rendsburg referred to the phenomenon

Michigan and New York University in March-April 1975), ed. Herbert H. Paper; 21-28 (Cambridge, Mass.: Association for Jewish Studies, 1978), 24.

as incongruence.

(3) Merger of נ"ל and י"ל verbs. Regarding the coalescence of final נ verbs to final י, both Joshua Blau⁵ and Moses Segal⁶ have recognized this as a standard feature in Mishnaic Hebrew and is thus considered to be colloquial (see discussion on Mishnaic Hebrew below).

(4) Omission of ה in Niphal, Hiphil, and Hithpael infinitives forms with ה prefix. Rendsburg cited the distinction between the formal forms of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira with the informal form of Mishnaic Hebrew. He, thus, concluded that the form was an informal form.

(5) Omission of the definite article in either the noun or the adjective in an adjectival clause. Since the classical form follows the pattern "article plus noun, then article plus adjective," deviations from the pattern are seen to be colloquialisms.

(6) Use of the relative pronoun וְ. The generally late usage (with obvious exceptions in Judges), along with the nearly exclusive northern contexts, suggests that this form is informal. This is, perhaps, Rendsburg's weakest argument in his monograph.

(7) Use of הַנָּא to express the genitive. Rather than using the standard construct form, this combination of

⁵Joshua Blau, *On Pseudo-Corrections in Some Semitic Languages* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1970), 30.

⁶M[oshe] H[irsch] Segal, *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1927), 90.

relative pronoun with preposition anticipates Mishnaic **שֶׁל** or **שָׁל** (which is now standard Israeli Hebrew form).

(8) Use of anticipatory pronominal suffix. When a pronominal suffix is used prior to the introduction of its subject, this is its category. As pointed out by Rendsburg, Qumran Hebrew does not employ this form; but Mishnaic Hebrew uses it occasionally.

(9) Use of the demonstrative pronouns **זֶה** and **אֵלֶּה**. Again, the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira represent postbiblical formal Hebrew; and their corresponding forms are **זֹה** and **אֵלָה**. Since Mishnaic Hebrew is taken to represent spoken postbiblical Hebrew, the fact that the forms **זֶה** and **אֵלֶּה** are used there is confirmation of their colloquial status.

(10) Use of shortened demonstrative pronoun **זה** (for both **זְהִיא** and **זְהַזֵּה**). Though they are not accounted for in the formal dialects of the postbiblical era, they do exist in Mishnaic Hebrew, though in somewhat different forms.

(11) Use of the shortened independent pronoun **מָה** (for **אֲנָה**) in Jeremiah 42:6. In the case of this form, it is attested to in both Qumranic Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew. Since only Jeremiah uses it (once), one must assume that it is a dialectal variant. Whether one can assume from singular usage that it is colloquial is questionable to this writer.

(12) Use of **נִנְהָר** plus the participle. As a regular syntactical construct in Aramaic, one may assume the influence of Aramaic upon the Hebrew. Since this is found

in preexilic writing (Gen., Deut., Judg., etc.) and is not a regular form in Dead Sea Scrolls material, the combination may be a colloquialism. The problem with this argumentation is the fact that it also may not be a colloquialism. Thirty seven references from all three divisions of the Hebrew suggests that this might not be colloquial.⁷

Rendsburg's study has, thus far, been well taken. In his comments on dialectal studies, Kaufman stated that an important aspect of the work "is the understanding of the socio-linguistic matrix of the Orient" which included regional, ethnic, urban-rural, and formal-informal distinctions. This, he continued, could "only be achieved by acquaintance with the real world."⁸ The present writer concurs with Kaufman; *Diglossia in Ancient Hebrew* is a necessary tool for any scholar investigating Hebrew dialectology--particularly colloquialisms.

Two other dialects of Hebrew were brought up during the course of Rendsburg's investigation: Qumranic Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew. The relationship between these two dialects and colloquial Biblical Hebrew are the subject of the following two sections.

Colloquialisms and Qumranic Hebrew

Among the discoveries at Khirbet Qumran were the most ancient copies of Hebrew Bible manuscripts yet to be

⁷Rendsburg, *Diglossia*, 35-149.

⁸Kaufman, Panel Discussion.

found. This Dead Sea community was populated by religious isolationists, perhaps Essenes, who were conservative in their treatment of the **דבר יהוה**, the Word of the LORD.

Elisha Qimron asserted that Dead Sea Scrolls (henceforth DSS) Hebrew was not a contrived imitation of Late Biblical Hebrew, but rather another dialect in the ongoing development of the language.⁹ This is not to say that DSS Hebrew was identical to Late Biblical Hebrew, nor to suggest that it was a forerunner to Mishnaic Hebrew:

DSS Hebrew also has many features not found in any other Hebrew tradition, in MH, or in any Aramaic dialect (such as personal pronouns **הָאֵת**, **הָיָה**, the pattern **'קֹטֶלְנִי** in the imperfect with pronominal suffixes, final *he* in the adverb **מִזְמַרְתָּךְ**, etc.). . . . These unique features show that DSS Hebrew is not merely a mixture of BH, MH and Aramaic, but also draws on a distinct spoken dialect.¹⁰

Qimron's assessment that the writers in the Qumran community drew from a spoken (colloquial) dialect brings this study to the heart of the matter. How does the colloquial dialect of Qumran relate to the colloquial dialect of Biblical Hebrew?

Three related issues in dialectal studies help to answer this question: time, location, and social makeup. Because the community dwelt in the area from 200 B.C. to A.D. 200, the time differential suggests that this was a separate, later dialect. The distance from Jerusalem would not preclude contact with residents of Judea; but this

⁹Elisha Qimron, *The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Harvard Semitic Studies, no. 29 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 116.

¹⁰Qimron, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 117-18.

dialect was distinct from Mishnaic Hebrew, which scholars recognize as the direct descendant of the colloquial Biblical Hebrew (see below). Finally, the community was a group of separatists. As this study has previously discussed in chapter two, one of the recognized factors in dialect development is isolation from other groups. With the available information, this writer must conclude that the colloquial dialect of Qumran was distinct from the informal dialect of Biblical Hebrew.

Colloquialisms and Mishnaic Hebrew

According to Rendsburg, formal Biblical Hebrew followed a similar path of devolution experienced in Egyptian and Latin, as addressed by Kurt Sethe¹¹ and E. Pulgram,¹² respectively. With regard to Latin, Charlemagne recognized the breakdown of classical Latin and thus pronounced the vernacular Romance to be the official language of the Roman Empire. There was no such leader to make a decree concerning Hebrew. Instead, the scribes and scholars of the early postbiblical era acquiesced to the common language of the people. Therefore, scholars concur that Mishnaic Hebrew is the direct offspring or a continuation of colloquial Hebrew from the biblical period. Rendsburg stated his

¹¹K[urt] Sethe, "Das Verhältnis zwischen Demotisch und Koptisch und seine Lehren für die Geschichte der ägyptische Sprache," *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 79 (1925): 290-316.

¹²E. Pulgram, "Spoken and Written Latin," *Language* 26 (1950): 458-66.

agreement with this assessment.¹³

Regarding the colloquial-Mishnaic connection, Moshe Segal added:

M[ishnaic] H[ebrew] vocabulary was in the main drawn not from a literary source, but from the actual Hebrew speech of daily life which preceded the Mišnaic period. . . . This explains also why MH has not preserved the poetical words and expressions of BH. These words and expressions were not used at all, or only rarely, in the colloquial Hebrew of [b]iblical times, which was the ancestor of MH.¹⁴

This explanation would account for the vocabulary which does not occur in Biblical Hebrew nor can be traced to Aramaic.

Segal made a few generalized remarks about this relationship, but Rendsburg's research provided convincing evidence that informal Biblical Hebrew is closely tied to Mishnaic Hebrew.

Style-Switching

In 1988, Stephen Kaufman demonstrated that the Solomonic adage is true: אין כל חדש תחת השמש ("there is nothing new under the sun," Eccls. 1:9). Although the argumentation was powerful and the phrase "style-switching" was original, his remarks about that particular subject were an echo of what another scholar had previously concluded.¹⁵ E. Y. Kutscher's 1982 English publication laid the groundwork for what is recognized today as a breakthrough in understanding Hebrew dialectology. Regarding language which

¹³Rendsburg, *Diglossia*, 31.

¹⁴Segal, *Mishnaic Hebrew*, 11.

¹⁵Kaufman, "Classification," 54-55.

recorded the words of foreign speakers, Kutscher wrote that

in order to characterize them as such, the Bible puts in their mouth roots and forms which were either rare or non-existent in BH, but which were supposed to be identical or at least close to the roots and forms employed in the language of the people alluded to.¹⁶

Kutscher's three illustrations for this phenomenon were 2 Kings 6:8-13; Isaiah 21:11-14, and Proverbs 31:2. In Kaufman's style-switching paper, the focal passages were Job (where he quoted Rashi), Proverbs 31 (in which he quoted verse 2), and Isaiah 21:11-14. This writer would not presume to question Kaufman's scholarship, only to suggest that attention given to the concept of style-switching by Davila and Rendsburg must be properly placed.

At issue here is the use of nonstandard forms spoken by or addressed to foreign individuals. With the two specific passages cited by Kaufman and ten verses by Rendsburg (see below), this dialect-related concept needs proper investigation.

Foreign Speakers

As discussed in Chapter 3, Lemuel's mother is a key player in the discussion of style-switching. Three times in Proverbs 31:2 she calls her son נָזֵל (as opposed to נָזֵל). Although this seems to constitute an Aramaism, Kaufman argued that these references, along with the speech peculiarities of Elihu (in Job) and the watchman of Seir (in

¹⁶Eduard Yechzekel Kutscher, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, ed. Raphael Kutscher (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982), 72.

Isaiah's Dumah oracle), are Transjordanian quotations:

They represent the direct speech of these characters! In all these Hebrew texts I believe that we have not to do with late speech or foreign authors, but rather with intentional stylistic representations of Trans-Jordanian speech on the part of Hebrew authors within Hebrew texts.¹⁷

Thanks to a mother's instruction, the world of Hebrew scholarship may begin to recognize the verbal accuracy of the Hebrew Bible.

Foreign Listeners

Taking the style-switching proposal of Kaufman a step forward, Rendsburg has presented another feature in the interchange between native and foreign communicators: dialect changing for the benefit of the listener.¹⁸ Kaufman seemed to regard style-switching as an attempt to recreate the speech of a foreign speaker or to differentiate foreign speech from classical Hebrew idiom. On the other hand, Rendsburg indicated that the addressee-switching directed to a foreign hearer was the actual language employed.

Citing the usages of the term **כָּבֵר** (mighty), which is not used in Judahite Hebrew, he separated the ten verses into two categories: seven are examples of style-switching, and three illustrate addressee-switching. Job 8:2 (Bildad); 15:10 (Eliphaz); 31:25 (Job); 34:17 (Elihu); 34:24 (Elihu); 36:5 (Elihu); and Isaiah 10:13 (Assyrian leader) record foreign individuals speaking. Rendsburg asserted that in

¹⁷Kaufman, "Classification," 55.

¹⁸Rendsburg, "Kabbîr," 649-51.

those verses were instances when the "writers employed the word to color the speech of foreigners,"¹⁹ thus taking Kutscher's position. Isaiah 16:14 (Moab); 17:12 (Damascus); and 28:2 (Ephraim) record instances of "addressee-switching" in which the hearers are from the north and Transjordan.

Rendsburg has failed to address the entrance point of קָבֵר into Hebrew idiom. Is this to be classified as a Transjordanian, Aramean, or Ephraimite loanword? What relationship, if any, does קָבֵר have with classical נָבוֹר, which also means "mighty"? Although he has isolated the uses, the information is of little use for dialectal studies until it is related to semantic parallels in Biblical Hebrew and etymological cognates in other Semitic languages.

¹⁹Rendsburg, "Kabbîr," 651.

CHAPTER EIGHT
CONCLUSION

This investigation set out to demonstrate that dialects and dialectal variants exist in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. It attempted also to present and analyze the prevalent proposals regarding dialect classification. Both of these tasks have been accomplished in parts I and II. An overview and final implications for exegesis are presented below.

Sufficient Evidence for Dialect Variation

Chapter two presented evidence from the Pentateuch that there was contact with foreigners by the Hebrew people, which was a contributing factor to the development of dialects. Evidence in early Genesis indicates linguistic contact with Mesopotamia, which would be understandable, since Abraham was from the region. The account of Joseph's life in Egypt bears the marks of familiarity, including a possible Egyptian loanword (**לְבָנָן**). Also, peculiarities in Jacob's ideolect when blessing his sons (Gen. 49) is an indication of his personal contact with Aramaic culture. The record of Laban's name for Gilead (Gen. 31:47) likewise indicates the veracity of the Jacobean accounts.

In addition, chapter two provided distinctions

related to dialect: specifically, terminology and toponyms. Genesis 10 and 11 distinguish between dialect (לְשׂוֹן, relating to people groups) and language (הָלֶבֶת, relating to vast regions). Recognition of language distinctions were also made in Genesis, when Jacob and Laban made a "heap of witness" (Hebrew עַלעַד, Aramaic עַלְעַד, Gen. 31:47). The Moabites called the Rephaites אֲמִים (Deut. 2:11) and the Ammonites called them זָמָרים (Deut. 2:20). Finally, Mount Hermon had secondary names, dialectally variant to one another: שְׁרֵן by the Sidonians (Deut. 3:9), שְׁנֵיר by the Amorites (Deut. 3:9), and אַשְׁרָה by the Hebrews (Deut. 4:48). These selected examples illustrate the awareness of dialect variation in the Pentateuch.

In similar fashion, chapter three provided examples from selected books which illustrate dialect distinction and variation in the Prophets. Among the Early Prophets, the Song of Deborah (Judg. 5) was recognized for its archaic forms, the שְׁבֵלָה incident (Judg. 12) pointed out dialectal sibilant interchange, 1 Samuel 9:9 illustrated semantic distinction regarding terms for the prophetic office, and 1 Kings 18 brought the issue of language and dialect terminology to light.

Among the Latter Prophets, Ezekiel was recognized as a pivotal book, where the Hebrew language is in obvious transition. Amos was analyzed for its dialectal orthography and colloquialisms. The language of Hosea was examined, particularly focusing on dialectal forms

recognized to be northernisms. Nahum was discussed for the Galilean origin of the prophet. Concluding that chapter, the hymn of Habakkuk was recognized for its mythopoetic distinction.

The Writings examined in chapter four provided a wealth of dialectal examples for this study, from the Psalms to the Chronicles. Regarding the Psalms, the resemblance to poetry of other "Canaanite dialects"¹ and the distinctive nature of hymnopoetry were discussed, along with Gary Rendsburg's work on northernisms. Stephen Kaufman's concept of "style-switching" was raised as a dialectal example in the Proverbs. Job's distinctive vocabulary and Elihu's dialectal peculiarities provided further evidence for the presence of distinguishable dialect features. Gleason Archer, Mitchell Dahood, James Davila, Daniel Fredericks, Robert Gordis, and Cyrus Gordon are among the scholars whose comments on Qoheleth were discussed. Although their conclusions were far from unanimous, each recognized the dialectal peculiarities of the book.

Along with the poetic and wisdom literature of the Writings, the prose literature offered evidence of dialect variation. The distinction between the dialect of the Jews from the other peoples and their dialects was significant to the discussion in Esther (8:9). Loss of national

¹Zellig S[abbettai] Harris, *Development of the Canaanite Dialects: An Investigation in Linguistic History*, AOS, no. 16 (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1939; reprint, Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus, 1978).

identity necessitated the use of interpreters for the exiles after their return from Babylon. Ezra-Nehemiah illustrates the distinction between the dialects of Ashdod and the other peoples from the dialect of Judah (תְּלִינָהּ, Neh. 13:24).

Concluding evidence comes from the Chronicles, where the issue of hypocoristic names brings light to the dialectal name distinctions after the Exile.

Considerable Overlap in Classification

Generally, the categories of Biblical Hebrew dialects are recognized as chronological, regional, and stylistic (which includes "switching," colloquial-formal, and possibly urban-rural). As seen in the discussions of chapters five through seven, attempting to provide precise classification for dialectal variants cannot be accomplished. At best, features can be classified in a category with qualifications.

Certain morphological forms seem to defy definitive classification. The relative pronoun *וַיְ* and demonstrative *וְ* are two obvious examples of the overlap experienced with classification. These two forms were discussed in chapters six and seven.

Often a form that is considered to be standard is classified as Standard Biblical Hebrew and Judahite. Dialectal forms (deviations from the standard) may be classified as Late Biblical Hebrew, Israelite (or Israeli), and colloquial. The problems with such a

classification are clear. All forms which resemble Aramaic are not necessarily late or colloquialisms, although they are generally thought to be northernisms.

The information presented in this study still begs the question: How does this study relate to the issue of biblical exegesis? As seen below, the fact that dialectal variants were preserved in the Hebrew text is a testimony to the accuracy and veracity of the Old Testament.

Benefits for Exegesis

Hebrew dialectal studies can be beneficial for Old Testament exegesis in a number of ways. First, linguistic intrusions, either by loanwords or dialectal variants, help confirm the historical rendering of events by the writers. In other words, the Hebrew Bible must be taken as temporal history as well as faith history. When one encounters people of other tongues, their languages or customs are incorporated into the text. This is true of the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Transjordanians, the Arameans, and the Philistines, Amorites, Ammonites, Moabites, and Sidonians (and possibly others). Extrabiblical sources have helped substantiate the historical accuracy of the biblical record.

Another benefit regards the history of the Hebrew language. When evidence from Qumranic (nonbiblical) Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew indicate that Biblical Hebrew is linguistically older, that confirms the antiquity of the Hebrew Bible. This is in spite of the fact that the oldest

extant Hebrew Bible manuscripts date from the first or second century B.C. When the exegete takes into consideration that scholars recognize three distinct chronological dialects of Biblical Hebrew (ABH, SBH, and LBH), this, too, confirms the linguistic age of the Hebrew Bible.

Finally, the recognition of regional, colloquial, and stylistic dialectal features in Biblical Hebrew argues against the notion of Masoretic leveling of the text. Rather than confirming a monolithic form called Biblical Hebrew, the Hebrew Bible preserves a spectrum of dialectal coloration. Throughout the course of its transmission and textual history, the Hebrew Bible has remained the faithful record of יְהוָה's covenant relationship with בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל and the promise of the coming מֶלֶךְ.

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