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Hebrew Diachrony and the Doctrine of Scripture

Status Quaestionis

Abstract: In the early twentieth century, scholars of biblical archaeology and epigraphy began to recognize what they deemed an archaic phase of the Hebrew language that plausibly evinced an earlier dating of many biblical texts than the dates assigned to them by critical scholars. Debate intensified in the 1990s alongside the "minimalist-maximalist" controversy, but while the latter faded, debate has persisted for the last two decades over the appropriate application of historical linguistics to biblical Hebrew and the dating of texts. While a now-standard periodization has prevailed in major publications, many challenges have also seriously qualified the confidence with which such a model should be assumed and applied, and others have brought to light alternative and/or complementary models for interpreting the data. The fact that some diachronic change obtained in Hebrew during the biblical period is beyond dispute. Yet, whether or not the prevailing model is accurate, integration of the fact of linguistic diachrony with the biblical self-witness is wanting, as is integration with the doctrine of Scripture within Reformed and evangelical scholarship. The latter especially regards inspiration, canonization, authenticity, historicity, and authority. This paper will overview the various issues in Hebrew diachrony, its relevance for the doctrine of Scripture, and a path forward for research at the intersection of the two subjects.

1. Diachrony in Biblical Hebrew

1.1 Rise of the Study

The study of diachronic change in Hebrew reaches back to the early Muslim period in Palestine (638–1099). The penchant of medieval Arabists for new grammars and lexicons led to new studies by Hebraists with an interest in archaic etymology.[1] Such studies, however, fell out of practice until the modern era, when interest was reborn with Willhelm Gesenius's *Geschichte der hebräischen Sprache und Schrift* (1815), whose grammar (1813) espousing the same approach remains a standard today. Other contributors on a small scale included Franz Delitzsch (1877) and Julius Wellhausen (1885). Yet it was S. R. Driver's *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (1891) that for the first time assessed the language of the Old Testament (OT) book-by-book and described the post-exilic books as exhibiting "new Hebrew."[2] A third landmark work came in Arno Kropat's *Syntax des Autors Chronic verglichen mit der seiner Quellen* (1909), which focused on comparing the language of the books of Samuel and Kings with the parallel material in Chronicles—a method that is still foundational to linguistic-diachronic studies today and which secured the two periods that serve as its anchor points, classical (or early or standard) biblical Hebrew (CBH, EBH,

[1] For example, one etymological dictionary was devoted to verbs having related roots but opposite meanings (contronyms), frequently identifying the phenomenon as reflecting diachronic change through rabbinic, biblical, and pre-biblical phases of Hebrew (or its ancestor tongue): David Kimchi ("Radak"), *Sefer HaShorashim* [Hebrew], eds. Jo. H. R. Biesenthal and F. Lebrecht (ca. 1160–1235; repr., Berlin: Bethge, 1847) / קמחי, דוד. ספר השרשים.

[2] Cf. the summations of Mark F. Rooker, "Characteristics of the Hebrew of the Recognized Literary Divisions of Isaiah," in *Bind Up the Testimony: Explorations in the Genesis of the Book of Isaiah*, ed. Daniel I. Block and Richard L. Schultz (Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, 2015), 195–99; and Ron Hendel and Jan Joosten, *How Old Is the Hebrew Bible? A Linguistic, Textual, and Historical Study*, AYBRL (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 127–34.

SBH) and late biblical Hebrew (LBH). But besides establishing the two periods, the general tendency of these early studies was to date the composition of biblical texts by their form to periods after—sometimes centuries after—the traditional dates assigned to them by a simple reading the texts' content. To quote Franz Delitzsch, "If the Book of Koheleth were of old Solomonic origin, then there is no history of the Hebrew language."[3]

Then in the 1920s, it was archaeologist William F. Albright who while studying ancient inscriptions "isolated anomalous forms in biblical poetry and analyzed them within the larger framework of the Northwest Semitic (NWS) languages in order to date these features and to delineate a progression from ['archaic biblical Hebrew' (ABH)] to the Hebrew of the monarchal period."[4] Eminent scholars of the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS), Frank Moore Cross and D. Noel Freedman, followed from the 1940s onward, as did E. Y. Kutscher, who in 1959 compared the Hebrew of the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa[a]) with that of MT Isaiah, famously identifying the former as a kind of "reader's edition" with linguistic updating.[5] However, far and away the most prolific scholar of the last sixty years is Avi Hurvitz, who, beginning with his 1961 dissertation, has devoted his academic career largely to the study of Hebrew diachrony and the dating of biblical texts, culminating in his most recent major work *A Concise Lexicon of Late Biblical Hebrew* (2014).[6]

1.2 Comparative Historical Linguistics

Hebrew is not the first language to undergo a thorough historical-linguistic analysis for the dating of texts. Living European languages with massive textual corpora like English, Spanish, and French have been examined to date texts such as *Beowulf*. Moreover, the periodization of languages is a basic assumption in the teaching of ancient languages today. Take, for example, Egyptian, related to Hebrew by the Afro-Asiatic language family and the longest-lived language known to date. Scholars date the earliest extant Egyptian inscriptions to approximately 3200 BC. The language changed over three millennia, morphing along with its script into new daughter languages, yet which linguists consider to be derived forms of the earlier phases:[7]

Archaic Egyptian (+3200–2700 BC)
Old Egyptian (2700–2100 BC)
Middle Egyptian (2100–1600 BC)
Late Egyptian (1600 BC–AD 641+)
Demotic (650 BC–AD 400s)
Coptic (AD 100–1100s)

For all these strata, however, it is Middle Egyptian that is considered the classical age of the language. "It survived as a spoken language for some five hundred years but remained the standard hieroglyphic language for the rest of ancient Egyptian history."[8]

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[3] Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes*, trans. M. G. Easton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1877), 190.

[4] Alice Mandell, "Biblical Hebrew, Archaic," *EHLL*, 1:325–29.

[5] E. Y. Kutscher, *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa[a])*, Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 6 (1959 [Hebrew]; Leiden: Brill, 1974).

[6] Avi Hurvitz, A Concise Lexicon of Late Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic Innovations in the Writings of the Second Temple Period, VT Sup 160 (Leiden: Brill, 2014); hereafter, CLLBH.

[7] Table dates derived from James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1–2.

[8] Ibid., 2.

Still closer to Hebrew is the Semitic language of Akkadian. It is commonly divided up into two branches and several stages each:[9]

Old Akkadian (mid to end of 3rd m. BC)	
Old Assyrian (2000–1500 BC)	Old Babylonian (2000–1500 BC)
Middle Assyrian (1500–1000 BC)	Middle Babylonian (1500–1000 BC)
Neo-Assyrian (1000–600 BC)	Neo-Babylonian (1000–600 BC)
	Late Babylonian (600–100 AD)

John Huehnergard writes:

> Already during the Kassite period [1595–1155 BC] Old Babylonian had come to be regarded as the classical period of Akkadian language and literature, and scribes in both Babylon and Assyria attempted to duplicate it in a purely literary (i.e., unspoken) dialect that Assyriologists call Standard Babylonian (SB). The scribes' efforts to reproduce the classical language usually had mixed results, as their own language patterns frequently intruded. Standard Babylonian is the dialect in which such important works as *Enūma eliš* and the later, longer version of Gilgamesh are written, indeed, all of the literary works of the late second and the first millennia, as well as many royal inscriptions.[10]

He writes further, "Several *tens of thousands* of documents are attested from the first dynasty of Babylon [2000–1600 BC] ...from the Isin and Larsa dynasties and from other cities in Babylonia... from sites in the Diyala region, and from farther afield, such as the city of Susa in Elam and the city of Mari in Syria some 250 miles up the Euphrates from Babylon."[11]

The fact that linguistic change is so widely observed helps identify several causes of the phenomenon. Hendel and Joosten have cited at least the following possibilities:

- Simplification – the reduction of redundant variants
- Complication – the addition of new variants to increase expressivity
- Disambiguation – the addition of new variants to increase specificity
- Language contact – the influence of other languages arising from political, economic, or otherwise social change[12]

What is common to all of the above examples, however, is the massive corpora, with localized and externally dated texts, from which a linguistic chronology can be confidently reconstructed.

1.3 Inner-biblical Evidence

Beside the inscriptions and the comparative linguistic evidence, a cursory reading of the OT also reflects the fact of diachronic change in Hebrew. Such changes can be divided into five categories: orthography, phonology, vocabulary, morphology, and syntax. Frequently cited examples are given below.

- Orthography – changes in spelling and the adoption of *plene* spelling (*matres lectionis*)

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[9] Table dates derived from John Huehnergard, *A Grammar of Akkadian*, 3rd ed., Harvard Semitic Studies (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), xxv.

[10] Ibid., xxvi–xxvii.

[11] Ibid., xxviii, emphasis added.

[12] Hendel and Joosten, *How Old*, 11–30.

    - דוד → דויד – intervocalic *mater lectionis* (e.g., throughout post-exilic books)
    - ע(ו)שׁ(ו)יהו → (ע)שׁו(י) (→ Ἰησοῦς)[13] – short form as in Gk LXX, NT (Neh 8:17)
    - דמשק → דרמשק – late Second Temple form (e.g., for MT only in Chron)
    - *הא → הוא\היא (?) – MT's curious *Qere perpetuum* throughout the Torah could reflect orthographic shift[14]
- Vocabulary – semantic shifts, replacement, abbreviation, loanwords (Aramaisms)
    - רֹאֶה → נָבִיא (cf. 1 Sam 9:9)
    - סֵפֶר → אִגֶּרֶת (latter only in 1–2 Chron; Neh; Esth)
    - אֲשֶׁר → שֶׁ-
- Morphology – changes in the grammatical realization of words
    - ם֫ → ֵיהֶם as 3mp suff. on plurals ending in וֹת- (אֲבֹתָם → אֲבֹתֵיהֶם)[15]
    - *qatal* → *yiqtol* and participle to express present state[16]
- Phonology – changes in the vocalization of words
- Syntax – changes in the construction of words with other words in context

Thus, the fact of diachronic change in Hebrew has long been recognized, albeit not consistently; it is to be expected from a language with a lifespan over two millennia, even within a classical phase of a single millennium; and it is apparent from even a cursory reading of the OT. It is on this bases that the debate over the dating of biblical texts is waged.

2. Dating of Biblical Texts on Linguistic Bases

2.1 Sources of Biblical Hebrew

All of Hebrew's history is typically divided into four stages: biblical, Mishnaic (or rabbinic), medieval, and modern.[17] However, according to Robert Rezetko and Ian Young, the "biblical Hebrew" period would more appropriately be termed "classical Hebrew," because it must include the OT (both MT and non-MT text types), the non-biblical DSS (ca. 250 BC–AD 150), the Wisdom of Ben Sira (ca. 2nd c. BC), and all extant inscriptions spanning the period of those compositions.[18] In other words Hebrew's classical period they consider to have extended up to ca. AD 200 when Mishnaic Hebrew obtained, purposefully distinguishing itself from the language form of Scripture.[19] Of the extant OT witnesses, the Samaritan Pentateuch must be included as possibly reflecting the available variety of orthography, phonology, vocabulary, morphology, and syntax during the Bible's composition.

As for Ben Sira, since the discovery of the DSS and of the Cairo Geniza, about 68 percent of the book known in Greek Vaticanus is now extant in Hebrew from just nine

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[13] "יֵשׁוּעַ," *CLLBH*, 131; "Ἰησοῦς," *NIDNTTE*, 2:527.

[14] However, the feminine הִוא throughout the Torah (all but 11 of the 3fs pronouns) could instead represent a change in vocalization, but this *contra* "הוּא," BDB, 214–15 and GKC §32.l, which both estimate it was only a recensional peculiarity that led to the (almost) consistent use of הוּא as an epicene for both genders in MT. The SP and DSS do not reflect this reading.

[15] Aaron Hornkohl, "All Is Not Lost: Linguistic Periodization in the Face of Textual and Literary Pluriformity," in *Advances in Biblical Hebrew Linguistics: Data, Methods, and Analysis*, ed. Adina Moshavi and Tania Notarius, LSAWS 12 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2017), 62–63.

[16] Hendel and Joosten, *How Old*, 22.

[17] Hurvitz, "Introduction," *CLLBH*, 1.

[18] Robert Rezetko and Ian Young, *Historical Linguistics & Biblical Hebrew: Steps Toward an Integrated Approach*, Ancient Near East Monographs 9 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 10.

[19] Ibid., 10; cf. David J. A. Clines, "Introduction," *DCH*, 1:14.

fragmentary manuscripts. Three of them date from between 50 BC and AD 50; the rest are from the 10th or 11th century AD. [20]

Hebrew inscriptions from the Iron Age are most significant for the periodization of Hebrew, because they are the closest approximation of dated, localized texts from which one can reconstruct an absolute chronology. In other words, all other witnesses are copies of copies of Hebrew compositions. Besides this, they are also most often documentary texts, as opposed to literary texts, and so reveal the state of the *spoken* language at the time of their composition more precisely than would the Bible. However, they are extremely fragmentary and sparse. Examples include:

Gezer Calendar (ca. 10th c.)[21]
Tel Zayit Abecedary (ca. 10th c.)
Samaria Ostraca (ca. 800–775)
Arad Ostraca (ca. 750–700)
Siloam Inscription (ca. 701)
Ketef Hinnom Scrolls (ca. 650–600)
Lachish Ostraca (ca. 586)

Others widely held to be cognate languages but reflecting features very close to presumed older phases of Hebrew include the ʿIzbet Ṣarṭah Abecedary (Proto-Canaanite[?]; ca. 11th c.), the Mesha Inscription ("Moabite Stone"; ca. 842), and the Tel Dan Inscription (Old Aramaic; ca. 9th c.). In sum, the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* produced the following statistics in 2011:[22]

Corpus	Number of Words	% of Classical Hebrew
Hebrew Bible	432,982	75.5%
DSS (biblical and non)	85,507	19.7%
Ben Sira	13,818	3.2%
Hebrew Inscriptions	6,762	1.6%
Total	**539,067**	**100%**

Put another way, the extra-biblical corpora of the classical period of Hebrew equals about one-third the size of the Hebrew Bible.[23] Other NWS languages playing a comparative or synchronistic role in the eras of biblical Hebrew are Ugaritic, Akkadian (including the Amarna dialect), Aramaic, Persian, and post-biblical Hebrew.

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[20] Alexander A. DiLella, "Wisdom of Ben-Sira," *ABD*, 6:935; Wido van Peursen, "Ben Sira" in *A Handbook of Biblical Hebrew*, ed. W. Randall Garr and Steven E. Fassberg (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 1:71.

[21] The date and nature of the Gezer Calendar inscription, whether it is truly Hebrew, has been challenged. However, Shmuel Ahituv summarizes well:

> Accepted paleography suggests a date in the tenth century BCE. Historical considerations would suggest the third quarter of that century, between the reconstruction of Gezer by Solomon after its burning at the hands of his father-in-law, an unnamed Egyptian pharaoh (1 Kgs 9:15–17), and its subsequent destruction by Pharaoh Shishak (c. 925 BCE). … There are, in fact, no distinguishing features of the text that would set it apart as Israelite Hebrew in contrast to Phoenician (there is no support for its Philistine origin, *pace* Lemaire). Nevertheless, the provenance tends to suggest that the text is Israelite though Gezer was known for its Canaanite population (Josh 16:10; Judg 1:29). All of the lexemes are certainly compatible with an Israelite source.

Shmuel Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2008), 252.

[22] Clines, "Introduction," *DCH*, 8:9.

[23] Ibid., 8:7.

2.2 Consensus Periodization

The periodization of Hebrew that has coalesced since the 1960s is fourfold but built upon the aforementioned distinction between CBH and LBH. The periods and corpora generally agreed upon by those in the "dating game" are as follows:[24]

Period	Hypothetical Corpora	Absolute Chronology
Archaic Biblical Hebrew (ABH)[25]	**Gen 49; Exod 15; Num 23–24; Deut 32–33; Jdgs 5**; 1 Sam 2:1–10; 2 Sam 1:17–27; **2 Sam 22 // Ps 18**; 2 Sam 23; Job; Pss 29; 68; 72; 78; Hab 3	Turn of the 2nd Millennium
Classical Biblical Hebrew (CBH)	**Gen–2 Kgs 23**; Isa 1–39 ("I Isa"); Hos; Amos; Obad; Mic; Nah; Zeph; Prov 10–29	(Divided) Monarchy
Transitional Biblical Hebrew (TBH)	**Jer; Lam; Ezek**; 2 Kgs 24–25	Exile
Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH)	**Ezra-Neh; Chron**; Isa 40–66 ("II Isa"); Qoh; Song; Job pro-/epilogue; Prov 1–9; 30–31; Ruth; Esth; Dan; Jonah; Joel; Hag; Zech; Mal	Post-exile

2.3 Problems for Some High Views of Scripture

At several points the consensus periodization of Hebrew based on linguistic features is in conflict with the traditional dating of texts derived more (or exclusively) from content. Immediate cases are the three books attributed in traditional exegesis to Solomon but dated now to LBH: Qohelet (1:1), Song of Songs (1:1), and Proverbs (1:1). While the edited and compiled nature of Proverbs, for example, was already apparent (cf. Prov 22:17; 24:23; 25:1; 30:1; 31:1), the doubt cast on Solomon's authorship of the poems in chapters 1–9, including the prologue, goes too far for many evangelicals. Moreover, even if Qohelet 1:1 refers to a Davidic heir other than Solomon, which is unlikely, a date of LBH is still a direct contradiction: "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, *king in Jerusalem*." There was no Davidic king in Jerusalem post exile.

Another example is so-called Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 40–66), which Hurvitz presupposes to be a late composition because it names Cyrus king of Persia, who rose to power almost two hundred years after the eighth century prophet Isaiah flourished (44:28; 45:1).[26] In other words, mantic prophecy is ruled out as a possibility *a priori*, and as a result certain features are too quickly pronounced late.[27] Mark Rooker—who has written defending Hebrew periodization in general and the transitional periodization of Ezekiel in particular[28]—has shown that, statistically, Isaiah 40–66 is clearly aligned with the recognized pre-exilic portion of Isaiah.[29] Chaim Rabin characterized it as almost perfect CBH.[30]

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[24] Table reproduced with slight modification from Rezetko and Young, *Historical*, 249.

[25] Ian Young, "Starting at the Beginning with Archaic Biblical Hebrew," *HS* 58 (2017): 99; and Phillip Marshall, "Hebrew Language," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), n.p.

[26] Hurvitz, "Introduction," *CLLBH*, 4.

[27] Shalom M. Paul, "Signs of Late Biblical Hebrew in Isaiah 40–66," in *Diachrony in Biblical Hebrew*, ed. Cynthia Miller-Naudé and Ziony Zevit, LSAWS 8 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 293–99.

[28] Mark F. Rooker, Biblical Hebrew in Transition: The Language of the Book of Ezekiel (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990).

[29] Idem., "Characteristics," 195–225; idem., "Diachronic Analysis and the Features of Late Biblical Hebrew," *BBR* 4 (1994): 135–44.

[30] C. Rabin, *Die Entwicklung der hebräischen Sprache*, Veröffentlichungen der Hochschule für jüdische Studien Heidelberg 2 (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1988), 16; cited in Rooker, "Characteristics," 221.

Daniel is dated to LBH on similar bases, i.e., primarily, its presumed *vaticinium ex eventu* and, secondarily, late loanwords. In making this point, Hendel and Joosten summarize poignantly what is at stake for evangelicals: "The book of Daniel is situated in the sixth century but has long since been *unmasked* as a writing of the Hellenistic age because of its manifest allusions to the Maccabean wars. Ecclesiastes is *fictively* attributed to Solomon but is similarly recognized as one of the latest books of the Hebrew Bible."[31] In most biblical scholars' eyes, the dating of biblical texts by linguistic features is "unmasking" and showing to be "fictive" the historical claims of those texts.

The syllogism follows that if the antiquity of a text is undermined, then so is its authenticity; if authenticity is undermined, then so is its historicity; if historicity is undermined, then so is its veracity in other matters; and if its general veracity is undermined, then so is its authority.

3. Challenges to Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts

There are, however, challenges to the prevailing view of Hebrew periodization, coming from scholars outside of evangelicalism. In 2003, Ian Young edited a volume, *Biblical Hebrew: Studies in Chronology and Typology*, collecting contributors in a dialogue over the developments of the 1980s and 90s. Meetings at the SBL continued the debate in 2004, 2005, and 2007, which proceedings were then published in the journal *Hebrew Studies* and in a book edited by Ehud Ben Zvi (2010). In 2008, a two-volume work authored by Young, Rezetko, and Martin Ehrensvärd titled *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts* set out, in the authors' words,

> to propose, on the basis of many case studies, a new perspective on the language of Biblical Hebrew: not only is the linguistic dating of biblical writings unfeasible, but the distribution of linguistic data in the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible suggests that EBH and LBH are better explained in general by a model of co-existing styles of Literary Hebrew throughout the biblical period.[32]

Rezetko and Young then followed this with a second book, *Historical Linguistics & Biblical Hebrew: Steps Toward an Integrated Approach* (2014), not denying the reality of diachronic change but setting forth a proposed new model for analyzing the data, one which has already been found sound in historical linguistics outside of biblical studies. Three of their critiques of the prevailing method will suffice as exemplary.

3.1 Text (Un)Critical Assumptions

Rezetko and Young have critiqued the assumptions of the "consensus scholars" that the MT reflects the original composer's language. Non-MT manuscripts of the OT, including ancient versions (their retroverted *Vorlagen*), are not dealt with as equal witnesses to the composition. Moreover, the complexities claimed of the transmission history of the OT by leading text critical scholars are such, it is claimed, that the composer's language can rarely if ever be confidently known. To the objectors, all the textual witnesses we possess to the OT are what other historical linguistics call *mischsprachen* ("mixed language"). Rezetko and Young quote other linguists with regard to scribally transmitted texts, saying, "Because the edited texts are, as it were, an interpretation of the primary material, it could be said that they

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[31] Hendel and Joosten, *How Old*, 36–37, emphasis added.
[32] Rezetko and Young, *Historical*, 2.

constitute secondary sources rather than primary ones."[33] "In other words," they put it, "there is no *primary* evidence for BH; the evidence is secondary (DSS, MT, SP) or *tertiary* (i.e., translational: Septuagint, Old Latin, etc.) or tangential (inscriptions, non-biblical DSS, etc.)."[34]

Rezetko and Young also cite the analogy of other ancient Near Eastern transmitted texts. On the epic of Gilgamesh, they quote A. R. George, saying, "As the epic pass through its various versions, the text was susceptible to the influence of the prevalent vernacular dialects."[35] And regarding *Enuma Elish*, they cite Kouwenberg's research, who writes that,

> Von Soden includes [*Enuma Elish*] among his sources for the 'hymno-epic dialect' and explains the predominance of late features partly as intrusions caused by the process of copying in the late period, and—where this is implausible—as resulting from a conscious modernization that the scribes undertook to make the work more accessible and/or more romantic (*romantischer*) by means of artificial archaisms.[36]

David Carr adds his voice to this objection:

> Given the fluid character of scribal transmission and the ways in which literary language was interpenetrated by various dialects of Hebrew across the stretch of Judean and Israelite history, linguistic features are only an approximate and precarious tool in the historical placement of Hebrew texts.[37]

Richard Dean also found the prevailing assumption—namely, that transmission had *not* obscured the original composer's language—was the inverse of the assumption in studies of the DSS. Whereas in the DSS, scholars have typically attributed Aramaisms to the influence of the scribe and not the author, the same was not true in the MT; Aramaisms were almost always attributed to the author of the biblical text and therefore to its lateness of composition rather than transmission.[38]

These scholars all call for more text-critical assumptions and procedures in the dating of texts. To quote Kouwenberg, "Even though individual manuscripts of literary texts may still be datable on grounds other than language, generally speaking, the date of composition of a literary work cannot be established on the basis of linguistic criteria."[39]

3.2 Nature of the Sources

A second major criticism that challenges the prevailing view regards the nature of the sources in quality and quantity. As to quantity, it has already been shown that biblical Hebrew is extant in a far smaller corpus than other historical linguistics require for chronological conclusions. In Akkadian, there were hundreds of thousands of *texts* available (i.e., countless words), whereas in biblical or classical Hebrew, there are only 500,000 *words* at best. For another example, one repository of Old English texts (just one period of English covering ca.

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[33] O. Fischer, *Morphosyntax: Functional and Formal Perspectives*, Oxford Surveys in Syntax and Morphology 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 44; cited in Rezetko and Young, *Historical*, 22.

[34] Ibid., 67.

[35] A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1:435; cited in Rezetko and Young, *Historical*, 42.

[36] N. J. C. Kouwenberg, "Diachrony in Akkadian and the Dating of Literary Texts," in *Diachrony in Biblical Hebrew*, ed. Cynthia Miller-Naudé and Ziony Zevit, LSAWS 8 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 445; citing W. von Soden, "Der hymnisch-epische Dialekt des Akkadischen, I-II," *Zeitschrif für Assyriologie* 41 (1933): 178–81.

[37] David M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 131–32.

[38] Richard Dean, "Aramaisms: Not What They Used to Be," *Journal for Semitics* 25, no. 2 (2016): 1080–1103.

[39] Kouwenberg, "Diachrony," 448.

600 years) contains 3,000 texts and over 3,000,000 words. Yet, whereas the Old English of *Beowulf* had once confidently been dated with more precision than merely this broad period, there has been a "collapse of the scholarly consensus" observed.[40]

As to quality, the texts possessed by Hebrew scholars in manuscripts and inscriptions are in the vast majority not dated or localized—two more essential reconstructive elements normally required in other historical linguistic applications. In addition, it is argued, literary language does not adequately reflect currency in language at a given point in time. Rather, contemporary language is intentionally obscured by authors composing literary texts as opposed to documentary ones (e.g., letters, administrative documents, notes).

3.3 Other Explanations of "Diachronic" Features

A third area of critique toward the diachronic approach is that there are other explanations for variations in language that either cannot be ruled out or routinely are simply not ruled out in the analysis. Besides "chronolect" (i.e., changes in language due to time),[41] other possibilities include:

- Dialect or *diatopic* variation (i.e., by region, e.g., Israelian Hebrew)[42]
  - שִׁבֹּלֶת (Gileadite test) vs. סִבֹּלֶת (Ephraimite failure) – Judges 12:6[43]
  - יְהוּדִית (?) – 2 Kgs 18:26 // Isa 36:11 // 2 Chron 32:18; Neh 13:24
- Sociolect or *diastratic* variation (i.e., by class, diglossia, e.g., higher and lower)
- Idiolect or *diaphasic* variation (i.e., by individual, e.g., style, attention to aesthetics, degrees of formality)
- Medium or *diamesic* variation (e.g., speech vs. text)
- Register or *diasituative* variation (i.e., subject, activity, group setting)
  - Genre, e.g., literary vs. documentary, poetry vs. prose
  - Exod 18 – an example of foreign speech characterization via Aramaisms[44]
- Textual updating
  - Toponyms – *apparent* anachronisms are found in Torah but taper off through the Former Prophets (e.g., Gen 14:14 [cf. Jdgs 18:29]; 15:2; Exod 1:11)[45]

My aims here are not to evaluate all these arguments but to simply acknowledge them in advance of further study. Yet, it can be said immediately that these explanations are not mutually exclusive. Multiple factors may have obtained in any text.

4. Potential Integrations with the Doctrine of Scripture

While some evangelical and Reformed scholars are engaged in the historical linguistic discussions, few are relating the debate to the doctrine of Scripture. Those that have to my

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[40] Rezetko and Young, *Historical*, 20.

[41] Hendel and Joosten, *How Old*, 45.

[42] See for example Gary A. Rendsburg, who takes the features indicating a northern "Israelian" dialect of Hebrew to be quite vast; idem., "A Comprehensive Guide to Israelian Hebrew: Grammar and Lexicon," *Orient* 38 (2003): 5–35.

[43] Hendel and Joosten (*How Old*, 14–16) explain that the early *sin* [ɬ] and *samek* [ʦ, č] fell together in the later (modern) *samek* [s] as late as the 8th c. BC based on the external evidence of the Greeks' adoption of the Phoenician alphabetic sign for *samek* (s) to signify their *xi* ([ks], Ξ). Thus, they indicate that the Judges story was at least that old, because the older [ʦ, č] realization of the *samek* must have still obtained: *čibboleth* was the Ephraimite attempt to imitate the Gileadite *shibboleth*.

[44] Mordechay Mishor, "On the Language and Text of Exodus 18," in *Biblical Hebrew in Its Northwest Semitic Setting: Typological and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Steven E. Fassberg and Avi Hurvitz (Jerusalem: Magness, 2006), 225–30.

[45] Cf. Michael A. Grisanti, "The Composition of the Old Testament," in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament*, ed. Eugene H. Merrill, Mark F. Rooker, and Michael A. Grisanti (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 79–92, especially 83–89; idem., "Inspiration, Inerrancy, and the OT Canon: The Place of Textual Updating in an Inerrant View of Scripture," *JETS* 44, no. 4 (December 2001): 577–98.

knowledge include Mark F. Rooker and to a small degree Richard L. Schultz and Michael A. Grisanti. Others allude to the subject but broadly, as allowed within a canonical-critical model of Scripture, for example John Sailhamer and Stephen B. Chapman. Thus, I would like to research this issue at the intersection of biblical studies and systematic theology.

While some questions will remain unanswered, the epigraphic and historical evidence demands attention in the confirmation of a high view of Scripture for the global church. A lack of engagement or rote dismissal of the arguments weakens the faith of evangelical Christians who increasingly encounter biblical criticism in popular books and media. In addition, if the sub-doctrines of Scripture—such as inspiration, preservation, and veracity—are ill-defined and so later refuted, the result will be discouraging to faith in God's Word. Evangelical bibliologists must on the one hand not "go beyond what is written" in defining inspiration (1 Cor 4:6) but on the other hand strive to hold exactly that high view of Scripture which was held by Jesus Christ (cf. Matt 5:18; John 10:35).

Moreover, the information in the OT regarding its own composition, custody, transmission, preservation, and canonicity is, I believe, underutilized in the discussion of how linguistic features may have obtained in texts over time that, from a literary reading of the text, would appear to be misplaced. Even if not from a dogmatic approach, the text's own self-conscious testimony to its history must be given a hearing. In addition, I expect that the cultic, prophetic, and royal offices in Israel which had special interests in the emerging canon of the OT hold promise for understanding diachronic features in ways that are either similar to or distinct from ANE scribal traditions. The interests of those offices ebbed and flowed with the spiritual vitality of OT Israel, and yet the prophetic careers and several spiritual reformations in Israel's history tell of renewed and vibrant concern for the Scriptures and for their contemporaries to understand the Scriptures for faith and obedience. In such settings, textual transmission may be both faithful and modernizing.

5. Possible Research Case Studies

As a proposal, then, for my research I would like to conduct one or more case studies in biblical texts, propose possible reconstruction histories of those texts, and then evaluate those possibilities from various high views of Scripture in Reformed and evangelical churches. How, for example, would the neo-Calvinist view of Scripture interpret the evidence and my reconstruction? Or how, on the other hand, might my reconstruction critique the neo-Calvinist doctrine?

The texts chosen for my case studies will have parallel passages elsewhere in the Bible, be well attested textually, and/or show a contrast in linguistic features with the environments in which they appear (such as a text judged by consensus scholars to be ABH but located in a CBH context).

- Scenario 1: A passage of parallels between strata (e.g., 2 Sam 22 // Ps 18; 1 Kgs 22 // 2 Chron 18; 2 Kgs 18–20 // Isa 36–39; 2 Kgs 25 // Jer 52)
- Scenario 2: A passage that besides MT, also has a Q and/or SP witness
- Scenario 3: A passage of one stratum within the context of another stratum (e.g., Gen 49; Deut 32)

Ideally, the case studies chosen will have multiple of these complex elements at play in each, so as to promote an analysis at the intersection of maximum data. It is hoped that such a study will be relevant for biblical scholars but also for the church and its understanding and use of the OT.

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