

# THE LOVE POETRY GENRE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST: ANOTHER LOOK AT INSPIRATION

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## I. THE PROBLEM

One of the more intriguing aspects of the current debate on the inspiration/infallibility of Scripture is the problem most writers have with the wisdom books of the OT. In a brief unscientific survey (some twenty-five books and monographs I happened to have at hand) on the nature of the inspiration of Scripture I found only five listing any references to the wisdom literature.

Warfield in *Inspiration and Authority* has about twenty references, mostly footnote lists of "poetic words" in Proverbs, Job and apocryphal wisdom literature. He makes no use of any of these books in his arguments for inspiration. In *The Infallible Word* (ed. Woolley and Stonehouse) there are four references to Job: one an appeal to 13:15 to "trust Yahweh," one noting that the description of Leviathan is "poetry, not biology," and two references to the text criticism of the MT in light of the LXX. E. J. Young in *Thy Word Is Truth* makes a single reference to Job 9:32. In *The Structure of Biblical Authority* Meredith Kline gets more mileage out of Leviticus (eleven references) than he does out of all the wisdom literature together (eight references, all in Proverbs: three to Wisdom's house of the seven pillars, paralleling both the seven days of creation and Solomon's temple court [pp. 86-87], and five to support the thesis that the "function of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament is the explication of the covenant" [pp. 64-65]).

Only Dewey Beegle in *The Inspiration of Scripture* pays much attention to the wisdom literature, and then only to call in question the whole idea of inspiration on the basis of these books. He describes Ecclesiastes as a third-century book by "someone putting his message in the mouth of Solomon"; Paul's quotation of Job 5:13 in 1 Cor 3:19 as somehow providing "an infallible account of error"; the references in Prov 25:1; 22:17; 30:1; 31:1 as validating the word of "uninspired writers" (Hezekiah's men, Agur, and either Lemuel or his mother); and the Song of Solomon as nothing more than love poetry whose inclusion in the canon has to be justified on the basis of elaborate typology or allegory.<sup>1</sup> He observes: "It is the content, however, not the authorship which is the basic problem relating to inspiration. . . . The Song had its place in the age of Solomon and the following years, but it has long since ceased to serve its original function. Are we then to contend for the unique inspiration of every word?" Beegle concludes with a comment on "plenary inspiration" invoking Jude's use of Enoch: "By definition the quoted words are inspired because they are from an authoritative source and they

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<sup>1</sup>I have discussed this issue in an article in *JETS* 24 (1981) 97-106.

actually occur within the New Testament canonical limit."

What are we to say then? Our conservative colleagues essentially ignore this part of the OT in their arguments for inspiration, and our critical friends turn the same material against us. Is there any way of dealing with this dilemma?

It has long been recognized that the various literary genres found in the OT are common coin in the ancient Near East and that in many instances documents from various periods and locales can serve as an effective tool for understanding the Biblical material better. One need only look at the Mendenhall/Kline material on covenant form, the hymn/psalm parallels from practically every attested ancient Near Eastern culture, or the many historical documents, etc., in *ANET*. And an examination of the wisdom material from the ancient Near East suggests some additional problems and perhaps some tentative options towards a solution.

## II. THE WISDOM LITERATURE: PROVERBS

The wisdom literature is one of the best attested and most important classes of ancient Near Eastern texts. Take, for example, the proverb or folk-wisdom genre. John Ruffle<sup>2</sup> has identified more than thirty types of similarities "from the structural passages which give the works their basic form, through the general and specific content of the books, to the details of vocabulary and figurative images" that, allowing for regional, national and cultural differences, still manifest an "underlying similarity of thought and expression" (p. 36).

Kenneth Kitchen<sup>3</sup> identifies two major types of Proverbs form: Type A, marked by (1) a formal title and (2) the main text (for example Prov 25:1 and 25:2-29:27, or 30:1 and 30:2-37); and Type B (for example Proverbs 1-24), which differs from Type A notably by the inclusion of an extended prologue (e.g. 1:7-9:18) between the title (1:1-7) and the main text (10:2-24:34). Frequently, but not always, brief subtitles introduce various sections of the main text (e.g. 10:1 and possibly 22:17 and 24:23). Ruffle's work, which deals more with the content of the collection than with the formal structure, lists a dozen-and-a-half "general interest topics" such as the protection of the poor, patterns for normal family life, warnings against dealings with prostitutes, care for parents, avoidance of lying and slander, theft, honesty in business dealings, equity in dealing with people, avoiding other people's quarrels, etc.—all illustrated with quotations from the literature.

A second series of "theological observations" includes such items as man's inability to understand God's plans, encouragement not to worry over the future since it is in God's hands, warnings against trusting in wealth for salvation, the ramifications for the family of moral (or immoral) behavior on the part of one of the members—and perhaps most interestingly an excerpt from the "Teaching of Merikare" 128-129, a contemporary of Abraham c. 2100-2000 B.C., which prefi-

<sup>2</sup>J. Ruffle, "The Teaching of Amenemope and its Connection with the Book of Proverbs," *TB* 28 (1977) 29-68.

<sup>3</sup>K. Kitchen, "Proverbs and Wisdom Books of the Ancient Near East: The Factual History of an Ancient Form," *TB* 28 (1977) 69-114. Although he lists over thirty separate collections of such material from Egypt to Mesopotamia over a period of 3000 years, Kitchen remarks that this is not a complete bibliography of the genre but only a list of the works he considered in his article.

gures 1 Sam 15:22 and/or Mic 6:6-8: "More acceptable is the character of one upright in heart than the ox of the evildoer."

A third category, "linguistic contacts," lists common personal names, individual loan-words, idiomatic expressions, and common literary images that these documents share. Among the literary images in the proverbs-type wisdom are such items as the "wisdom"="treasure" idea, the concept of the "two ways" or the "two trees," and the "good speech/rash words" and "good wife/strange woman" contrasts.

### III. THE WISDOM LITERATURE: LOVE POETRY

This latter category of "literary images" in the international wisdom is well illustrated in the love-poem genre. There is no readily available collection of ancient Near Eastern love poetry or even universal agreement on what materials really belong in this category. There is, however, at least broad consensus on much of this.

The extant love poetry from Egypt is all preserved in MSS from the New Kingdom period (1300-1100 B.C.), although situations described in the documents are illustrated by much of the early graphic art on public buildings.<sup>4</sup> By contrast almost all of what could be called love poetry from Mesopotamia occurs in the context of rituals associated with the "sacred marriage" of Inanna and Dumuzi or, later, of Ishtar and Tammuz (Marduk).<sup>5</sup>

While examination of the sacred marriage rite is a topic of interest for OT studies in the light of the pervading involvement with the fertility cult in Canaan and the persistence of the Tammuz rite in the temple of Yahweh (Ezek 8:14), it is not my purpose to develop these concepts here<sup>6</sup> but rather to draw from this material some data on the genre. Several points emerge.

1. It is fairly obvious that the love poems are relatively short, although there is considerable variation in the length of individual poems. The 54 Egyptian poems (excluding a few that are preserved only in fragments) average 13 lines each, with the longest ("The Little Sycamore") being 45 lines and the several shortest four lines each. The Mesopotamian poems are more difficult to figure since many of them are fragmentary and because of the somewhat arbitrary nature of the selec-

<sup>4</sup>The standard treatment of these is A. Hermann, *Altägyptische Liebesdichtung* (Wiesbaden, 1959), who lists 55 songs and four additional fragments. The most readable English translation of the whole set (Hermann, numbers 1-47) is in W. K. Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, 1972) 296-352, where he also includes bibliographic material. The most recent treatment in English is M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings*, Vol. 2 (Berkeley, 1976). Unfortunately she uses only twenty-six of the fragments and has suggested some rearrangement of them from the Cairo Ostrakon. Unfortunately, too, her translations seem to be very wooden and lacking in poetic sensitivity.

<sup>5</sup>There is a great deal of this material extant from the Sumerian period to the late Assyrian era. I have in my bibliographic file a selected listing of over 80 such text collections, many of them in multiple copies and most of them fragmentary. I am not aware of any definitive listing of this material.

<sup>6</sup>For a preliminary survey see my "Is the Song of Songs a 'Sacred Marriage' Drama?", *JETS* 22 (1979) 103-114 and my more extensive "Ancient Near Eastern Love Poetry" (forthcoming). For extended treatment see S. N. Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969) and the plethora of material in M. Pope, *The Song of Songs* (AB 7C; Garden City: Doubleday, 1977).

tion of materials from larger units. However, of the fifty or so usually considered in this context the average length is about 35 lines, with the longest single poem (Ni 9602) being 142 lines and the shortest (excluding fragmentary items) eleven lines (TRS XV, No. 20; UET VI, No. 21). The Song of Solomon, by comparison, is made up of about 28 units<sup>7</sup> ranging in length from 29 lines (Song 4:1-15) to two lines (5:9; 6:1) with an average length of eight lines.

2. The individual poems are usually arranged in some sort of formal order. Frequently there is a series of alternating speeches or soliloquies by the woman and the man, sometimes interspersed with short comments by a third party or a group of onlookers—e.g., Song 1:2-7, the beloved; 1:8, the onlookers; 1:9-11, the lover; 1:12-14, the beloved; 1:15-17, the lover; 2:1, the beloved, etc. From Egypt the “Songs of Extreme Happiness,” a cycle of seven songs in which the first and last words of each stanza are either the numbers one to seven (consecutively) or a word that has the same sound as the appropriate number, are spoken alternately by the man and the woman.<sup>8</sup> An example from Mesopotamia would be the (damaged) text SLTN 35 from Nippur about 2000 B.C. It reads in part as follows, as Inanna prepares for the sacred marriage:

Obv. ii: 12-22.

Inanna, at the command of her mother,  
Bathed, anointed herself with goodly oil,  
Covered her body with the noble *pala* garment,  
Took . . . her dowry,  
Arranged the lapis lazuli about (her) neck,  
Grasped her seal in (her) hand.  
The lady directed her step,  
Opened the door for (?) Dumuzi.  
In the house she came forth to him like the light of the moon,  
Gazed at him, rejoiced for him,  
Embraced him. . . .

The tablet is broken off here, and as it resumes at the top of column iii Inanna continues speaking:

Dumuzi. . . .  
The Lord Dumuzi. . . .  
“My king, I (?) . . .  
“My king (?) . . .  
Dumuzi. . . .  
My king, his (?) . . . the house. . . .”  
The shepherd Dumuzi says to his wife:  
“My wife . . . his coming forth.  
Inanna . . . the house of my god,  
I will bring you to the house of my god,

<sup>7</sup>There is no agreement among scholars as to the precise number or the exact places of division. This observation does not necessarily suggest that the Song is a compilation of unrelated segments as most critics hold, but it is simply the recognition of the various changes of speaker, motif, locale, etc., that the text suggests.

<sup>8</sup>Simpson, *Literature*, numbers 31 to 37, pp. 315-321.

You will lie before my god,  
 You, Inanna, (?) will sit at the seat of honor of my god."<sup>9</sup>

3. Many of the collections, whether unified or simply linked together arbitrarily, have either titles, incipits or colophons. In the Mesopotamian material there is little evidence for titles as such. In the Ritual Text, first lines of texts are used as incipits but nothing further is done with them. The standard format, rather than titles, is a colophon that identifies the type of poem, the dedicatee, and occasionally some other information about the copying scribe or the process he used—e.g., “. . . collated and checked. . .”; “it is a *durgar* of Inanna. Written with a tablet reed, with a reed”; “it is a *sagarra*. A *tigi* song of Inanna”; “a *nam-sub* [incantation] song of Inanna”; or, frequently, “a *balbale* of Inanna”.<sup>10</sup> Poems 9 through 16 of the Egyptian Harris Papyrus 500 are entitled “The Beginning of the Songs of Excellent Enjoyment, for your sister, beloved in your heart, when she returns from the fields.” Poems 17 to 19 are the “Beginning of the Songs of Entertainment.” Although the manuscript breaks off at line six of number 19 there were apparently more of these than have been preserved. Poems 31 to 38 are “The Beginning of the Poems of Extreme Happiness,” and numbers 41 to 47 are the “Beginning of the Pleasant Sayings discovered carrying a scroll written by Nakht-Sobek, the scribe of the cemetery.”<sup>11</sup> The heading “The Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s” is not out of keeping with this well-established pre-twelfth-century tradition.

4. Sometimes the poems are linked by some sort of progressive movement from one place to another. Poem number 8 from the “Songs of the City of Memphis”<sup>12</sup> describes the girl traveling on Prince Canal to the canal of the sun-god Pre, where she is going “to prepare the booths on the hill overlooking the locks” and await her lover. She says:

I’ll retire with you to the trees,  
 . . . my face set toward the shed.  
 My arms are full of *Persea* branches,  
 My tresses laden with salves.  
 Whenever I am there, I am the Mistress of the Two Lands;<sup>13</sup>  
 I am [the happiest of all].

<sup>9</sup>S. N. Kramer, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 107/6 (Philadelphia, 1963) 498.

<sup>10</sup>BM 41107, 1.5, in W. G. Lambert, “The Problem of the Love Lyrics,” *Unity and Diversity* (ed. H. Goedicke and J. J. H. Roberts; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1975) 107. The others in order are UM 29-16-37, lines 46-47; TMH NF III, line 22; CT XLII #13, line 77; and Ni. 9602, obv. line 28 or N. 3560, line 23. All these are in Kramer, *Proceedings*.

<sup>11</sup>Simpson, *Literature*, 302, 308-309, 315-321, 323-325. The connection of this material with the cemetery staff and the funeral cult (?), suggested by the Nakht-Sobek link, and the placing of “The Song of the Harper,” a known funerary inscription, between songs 16 and 17 in the Harris Papyrus, bears further investigation. Unfortunately that task lies outside the scope of this paper. However, the link is probably far less close than Pope, *Song*, argues for. Cf. H. W. Fairman, “The Kingship Rituals of Egypt,” *Myth, Ritual, and Kingship* (ed. E. S. Hooke; Oxford: University Press, 1958) 87.

<sup>12</sup>Simpson, *Literature* 301.

<sup>13</sup>A title of the queen.

Similarly in the Babylonian Ritual Text the celebration moves from Ishtar's temple/palace to her bedroom, to the river, back to the bedroom, to a banquet hall, to a garden in her palace, and back to the river. Specific sections of the love poetry are recited at the stopping points and certain elements in the ritual enacted there. In the Song of Solomon the "search" sequences in 3:1-5; 5:2-8 or the wedding procession in 3:6-11 reflect this aspect, as do such smaller units as 2:4 ("he brought me to the house of wine, and his intention toward me was to make love") or 8:2-3 ("I would lead you and bring you to my mother's house—she who has taught me. I would give you spiced wine to drink, the nectar of my pomegranates. His left arm is under my head and his right arm embraces me" [NIV]). While this "progression" motif is common in ancient Near Eastern love poetry and all of it is highly erotic, the specific cultic aspect of sexuality is missing from the Hebrew material and rare in the Egyptian love songs.

5. One of the current mythologies of human relationships is that expression of sexual interest and the initiating of sexual contact is primarily male aggression against helpless, weaker, unwilling females—the "rape syndrome." The evidence from ancient Near Eastern love poetry gives a different perspective. In the 54 best-preserved Egyptian poems (excluding the Song of the Harper) almost twice as many lines are attributed to the woman as to the man. Twenty-eight poems (355 lines) are spoken by the woman, 20 (186 lines) by the man, in three cases (30 lines) it is not clear who is speaking, and in three poems (96 lines) the garden trees are describing the actions of the two lovers. Much of the Mesopotamian material is third-person description of the lovers, but of the approximately 33 "dialogue" poems there are 18 by the woman (about 732 lines, including 124 from the "mixed dialogues"), four in which the speaker is male (153 lines, 53 of which are in a single poem and including 44 in the "mixed dialogues"), six in which the speaker is unidentified (128 lines), and five poems (168 lines) in which the dialogue moves back and forth between the woman and the man. A very similar pattern is evident in the Song of Songs: 28 poems totaling 227 lines are divided into 15 (114 lines) for the girl, four (54 lines) for the lover, five (31 lines) of mixed dialogue, and four (28 lines) by a third party. This two-to-one ratio of female to male speeches is consistent across the genre.

6. This female orientation of the material is also evident in the content of the poems. What is often identified as the "search" motif or the "seek/find" *topos* is very frequently set in terms of the girl seeking her lover, and often in openly erotic terms. Numbers 38 to 40 of the Egyptian cycle all begin with the plea, "Please come quick to the lady love," and number 36, lines 13-16, reads as follows:

If only my mother knew my wish,  
She would have gone inside by now.  
O, Golden Goddess, place him in her heart too,  
Then I'll rush off to the lover.

In the Nakht-Sobek cycle (numbers 41 to 47) her desires are graphically expressed, as also in numbers 14 and 20. Much of the Mesopotamian cult liturgy is even more explicit.

The Song of Solomon is a little less obvious than this literature, using more euphemisms and double-entendres. And although most of our English-language

translations do their best to obscure the meanings, at least in the Hebrew they are clear. For example Song 2:6 (and 8:3), "O that his left hand were under my head and that his right hand embraced me" is probably better expressed with the translation "his right hand fondling me," and 2:4 is probably "his intention toward me was lovemaking."<sup>14</sup> Such openness with sexuality has been a problem for the Church ever since the days of Augustine and the Manichees. Both Theodore of Mopsuestia (late fourth century A.D.), who was condemned by the Council of Constantinople in 553, and Sebastian Castellio, who was forced out of Geneva by Calvin, argued that the Song ought not to be in the canon simply because it spoke explicitly of human erotic love and therefore had no place in Scripture. The intriguing aspect of these episodes is that these men had the correct interpretation of the text but believed that this aspect of our human nature was not worthy of God's attention. Such an attitude is totally at odds with the OT itself, for the pre-Christian Hebrew community never had that perspective.

7. One other major area where this literature shares common elements is in specific vocabulary items. Such things as the use of the "I-thou" formula, the identification of the lovers as "sister" and "brother," or "queen" and "king," or "princess" and "prince," are common conventions in these poems. So too is the use of imagery from plants, trees, grasses and flowers. "My girl is a lotus bud"; "her fingers" are "like lotus flowers unfolding"; her brow "is a snare of willow"; her eyes "are berries"; her breasts are "love apples"; her hair is "dark as night, like a bunch of grapes." In Mesopotamia, Inanna describes her hair as "lettuce, planted by the water," her lover is "the honey-man" and her body is "the orchard." Perfumes (cedar oil, cypress oil, myrrh); jewelry (alabaster, amber, gold, silver, bronze, carnelian, lapis lazuli); various types of animal and bird imagery (falcons, crocodiles, the wild goose, the turtledove and other types of doves, "wolf-cub" as a pet name, mice, lizards, lions, gazelles, etc.; domestic animals such as sheep, oxen, bulls, cows, horses, stallions, mares, etc.); specific regional features (cities or other geographic references, lakes, rivers, etc.)—all are common features. The familiar parallels in the Song of Solomon need no rehearsal here. Without going into a lot of detail, it deserves noting that there is a distinct pattern that emerges with these *topoi*: There are similar categories across the genre, but in the individual regional material there is no crossing over to "exotic" places or items. The poets make use of regional flora, fauna, geography, etc., or of items that would be commonly available through trade. This sort of careful selection supports the concept of an international genre but with specific local flavor.

And that gets us to the heart of the issue. There is in the wisdom tradition a great deal of common material. There are specific *topoi* and vocabulary items that appear across the whole region. There are common ways of expressing what are in fact universal feelings. But there does not appear to be direct borrowing. The similarities are more than coincidental, but it is going far beyond the evi-

<sup>14</sup>The use of *dôdîm* ("love") in Prov 7:18; Ezek 16:8; 23:17 is very clearly referring to physical sexual love rather than some abstract idea. Such a meaning is required by the context in Song 1:2, 4; 2:4; 4:10; 5:1; 7:12 and is a possibility in several other instances. The Hebrew *dgl*, translated "banner" in most of our common versions, is probably related to the Akkadian *dagālu* ("see, look") with the idea here of "his look on me was loving" or with the Akkadian *diġlu* ("wish, intention")—i.e., "his intention was to make love." The latter is more in keeping with the context.

dence to argue for direct dependence from one group to the other. Sexual love by its very nature is a universal human experience, and love poetry celebrating these relationships is a universal human expression. But one needs now to ask how all of this is related to the inspiration of Scripture.

#### IV. THE WISDOM LITERATURE AND INSPIRATION

On the basis of the above material it is obvious that in many respects the Bible is like much other ancient Near Eastern material. Similarities are obvious and beyond question. But the Bible is also different—and if it is only these differences that define inspiration, we are in trouble.

It seems to me that the core of the problem is a failure to be sufficiently rigorous in our definition of inspiration. The almost universal tendency is either to equate or confuse inspiration with other implicitly related but actually separate doctrines such as revelation, infallibility and authority. Let me say again that I hold these positions personally and in my preaching and teaching affirm them to be true, but in a sense they have nothing to do with the doctrine of inspiration as such. Warfield states: "The real issue is to be kept clearly before us, and faced courageously. Nothing is gained by closing our eyes to the seriousness of the problem we are confronting. Stated plainly, it is just this: Are the New Testament writers trustworthy guides in doctrine? Or are we at liberty to reject their authority, and frame contrary doctrines for ourselves? If the latter pathway is to be taken, certainly the doctrine of plenary inspiration is not the only doctrine that is 'destroyed'."<sup>15</sup> Warfield's concern is a valid one that we all share, but linking the two concepts simply clouds the issue. The real problem of inspiration is inspiration, not authority.

The word *theopneustos* is relatively infrequent. It does not occur in the LXX or pre-Christian classical sources. The earliest attestation is in 2 Tim 3:16. Although it is found in the later Christian fathers and secular contexts, there are fewer than half-a-dozen uses in the literature before the middle of the second century and always in a way different from the NT use.<sup>16</sup> Generally the reference is to all wisdom coming from God, specifically to that conveyed through God-given dreams as opposed to "natural dreams." In second-century gnostic theology the word occurs in conjunction with the work of the Demiurge, the degraded creator. Many scholars emend even some of these uses to the word *theopemptos*, "sent by the gods." Significantly the non-Biblical writers used "inspiration" of people, with the written record considered to be something secondary—a long step removed from "inspiration."

Biblically *theopneustos* is limited to the *graphē* (2 Tim 3:16). In 2 Peter 1:21 the prophets are described as "having their sails filled" by the Holy Spirit,<sup>17</sup> and according to v 19 "we have the prophetic word" (but note that Peter avoids the use of *theopneustos* in this context). Certainly the OT prophets were "men of the

<sup>15</sup>Warfield, *Inspiration* 169.

<sup>16</sup>In *Pseudo-Phocylides* 121 with *sophia*; in Plutarch 2.904f with *oneiroi* ("dreams"); in Vettius Valens with *dēmiorgēma* (LSJ 791). Cf. TDNT 6. 453-454; Warfield, *Inspiration* 245-296 for full treatment.

<sup>17</sup>*Pheromenos*, used of being carried along by winds or waves (LSJ 1925).



Spirit" (cf. Hos 9:7). Even Balaam is said to have the Spirit of God (Elohim) upon him as he prophesied (Num 24:2), and v 5 states that "Yahweh put a word into Balaam's mouth."<sup>18</sup> But James Orr is simply wrong when he says, "It is important to notice that inspiration belongs primarily to the persons and to the book only as it is the product of the inspired person."<sup>19</sup> It is, on the contrary, the Scriptures that are "breathed out" by God.

Technically not all Scripture is "revelation"—for example, 1 Chr 32:30: "Hezekiah closed the upper outlet of the waters of Gihon and directed them down to the west side of the city of David." It did not take divine revelation to validate that comment. All it took was a walk to the foot of the hill and into the tunnel. So too the Shulammite's "rounded thighs, like jewels," may have been a revelation to the spectators at the dance of Mahanaim—and may even have been a "divine" one (Song 6:13-7:1)—but all it took to get that "revelation" was a good eye and being there.

Next, J. I. Packer argues as follows: "Inspiration . . . guarantees the truth of all that the Bible asserts. . . . ('Truth' here denotes correspondence between the words of man and the thought of God, which is in the realm of fact or meaning.)"<sup>20</sup> Granting the ambiguity of the word "asserts" this appears on the surface a valid statement, but the expression of it is infelicitous for certainly not all Scripture is "true"—for example: "His disciples came by night and stole him away while we slept," or Herod's words: "When you have found him bring me word that I too may come and worship him."<sup>21</sup> And while it can be argued that the context makes it clear what was going on in these accounts, that does not make these statements any more true.

## V. CONCLUSION

But all Scripture is inspired—that is, the books are exactly what God wanted us to have. Inspiration comes into play in this sort of material at the point of the selection process, whether it be of theme, idiom, vocabulary, idea, or even direct borrowing from earlier material. Inspiration is the guarantee that what is recorded—be it direct revelation as in Daniel's visions or Moses' creation account; be it selections from a larger body of material, as in "all the rest of the acts of . . . are they not recorded in . . ." or "but these things are written that you may believe"; be it the lies of the Jewish leaders or the accusations of Satan against Job—is recorded accurately. That merely means that not all Scripture is propositional doc-

<sup>18</sup>An interesting sidelight on this issue was described recently by Jo Ann Hackett Carlton in a paper presented to the Boston Theological Institute Old Testament Colloquium. A text from Deir 'Alla in the trans-Jordan valley from about 700 B.C. reads in part as follows: "[This is the] account [of Balaam, son of Be'or, who was a seer of the gods. The gods came to him in the night, and he saw a vision like an oracle of El. They said to [Balaam], son of Beor, 'Thus he will do-make [ ] hereafter (?) [ ]. . . and he said to them. 'Sit down!' I will tell you what the Shadday[in have done]. Now come, see the works of the gods.'" Carlton and McCarter have an article on this in *BASOR* (forthcoming).

<sup>19</sup>Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration* 162.

<sup>20</sup>*New Bible Dictionary* (rev. ed.) 516.

<sup>21</sup>Matt 28:13; 2:8.

trinal statements (your nose is a tower of Lebanon”), and not all Scripture is intended to give us direction for living (“Pharaoh hardened his heart” . . . . “Go thou and do likewise”). Inspiration does not guarantee the truthfulness of anything in the Bible. Inspiration only guarantees the accuracy of the record.

And all Scripture is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness. Finding and applying those aspects of the inspired word is the task of the scholar, the teacher, the pastor, the hermeneutician (if one may coin a word) and the ordinary believer. But that is not inspiration.