

## Genesis 14:14

The interpreter is well-advised to look at the OT from the viewpoint of the divine Author rather than from that of a human reader. If, following the period of the judges (cf. 2 Sam 24:6), the readers of Genesis 14:14 had not heard the older name of Laish, is their assumed ignorance alone sufficient to necessitate an updating of the text? What if the reader were ignorant of all of the facts to which the divine Author has always been privy? Would it not be the better part of wisdom to accept that the text was accurate even if we lack knowledge of the referent? There are other possible explanations for the problem concerning Dan:

Though the Dan mentioned here is almost universally thought to be the Dan north of the Waters of Merom, which was so named after the Danite conquest of Laish during the period of the judges, it seems more likely that the Dan of Gen 14:14 and here (and possibly in 2 Sam 24:6) was a place in the north of Gilead. While such a place called Dan is not known from other sources, it would not be alone in that category. The Genesis narrative does not fit well at all with the Dan that had been Laish. ... A Dan in Gilead better fits the description here, since the Dan north of the Waters of Merom could not be seen from Nebo.<sup>1</sup>

Robert Dick Wilson offers an interesting solution without resorting to textual updating. He suggests that “Laish may have been written with the signs *la* and *ish* in

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<sup>1</sup> Earl S. Kalland, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. by Frank E. Gaebelain (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 3:235.

cuneiform and might be read as Laish, or after the conquest by the Danites as Dan.”<sup>2</sup> As Wilson points out, OT cities or countries sometimes have two different names (cf. Mizraim and Ham for Egypt, Hebron and Kiriath-Arba).<sup>3</sup>

In the light of these viable options, why insist that Moses originally may have written “Laish” and that it was later changed to Dan when that place name was changed?<sup>4</sup> It gives the appearance of an anti-Mosaic prejudice in order to support a preconceived conclusion. Indeed, some will go so far as to extend this conclusion regarding “Dan” to references in Deuteronomy 33:22 and 34:1. Surprisingly, Eugene Merrill places himself within that circle by his claim that,

It is obvious that some of these place names are latter additions to the text (e.g., Dan, Naphtali, Ephraim, Manasseh, Judah) inasmuch as they would not

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Dick Wilson, *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament*, rev. by Edward J. Young (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1959), 135. In Akkadian *la išānû* means “poor, powerless, dependent” (A. Leo Oppenheim and Erica Reiner, eds., *The Assyrian Dictionary: I and J*, volume 7 of *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, edited by Ignace J. Gelb, Benno Landsberger, and A. Leo Oppenheim [Chicago, Ill.: The Oriental Institute, 1960], 222); hereafter referred to as *CAD*. *La* is often used as the first element of proper names in Akkadian and also may act as a preposition meaning “from” (A. Leo Oppenheim, Erica Reiner, and Robert D. Biggs, eds., *The Assyrian Dictionary: L*, volume 9 of *CAD* [1973], 5. Interestingly, *dannu* (“solid, strong, reliable, fortified,” see A. Leo Oppenheim and Erica Reiner, eds., *The Assyrian Dictionary: D*, volume 3 of *CAD* [1959], 92) is the opposite meaning to *la išānû*. According to René Labat, *Manuel d’Épigraphie Akkadienne*, 5th edition (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geunther, 1976), 147 (#322), 261, *la*<sub>6</sub> is the same sign as *dan* as well as *KAL* (equivalent to *dannu*). In addition, *is* is the opposite meaning to *is* is the equivalent of *danna* (*ibid.*, 107 [#166]), meaning “hardly, with difficulty,” (*CAD*, 3:87). Therefore, Wilson’s suggestion that the same cuneiform signs could have been read both ways is perfectly legitimate. The Danites might have been attracted to Laish just because it may have also been known as Dannu, a name similar in sound to or reminiscent of their own ancestral tribal name.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament*, 138.

<sup>4</sup> Grisanti, “Inspiration, Inerrancy, and the OT Canon,” 584.

have been assigned to these sites until after the conquest, some years following Moses' death.<sup>5</sup>

Merrill's position ignores the revelatory facts. Firstly, approximately 400 years before Moses Jacob had already indicated that land would be apportioned to Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen 48:22). It is not an unusual nor an unexpected occurrence that land granted to an individual would be named for that individual (cf. Gen 36:21, 40 ["these are the names of the clans of Esau by families *and* by localities according to their names"]).<sup>6</sup> Secondly, in Deuteronomy 33:23 Moses himself ties Naphtali to a specific location within the land of promise ("take possession of the area south of the lake").<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, New American Commentary 4 ([Nashville, Tenn.]: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 452.

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the Table of Nations in Gen 10 and 11 apply the names of the ancestral heads to the land area their descendants would occupy.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 446. An alternate translation offered by Craigie ("The west and the south he will inherit") is possible, but seems unlikely since the tribal allotment of Naphtali was among the most northern. Cf. Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 401.