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A Brief Survey of the Book of Jubilees **Robert C. Newman**

The book of Jubilees is one of the pre-Christian writings of Jewish authorship traditionally categorized among the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, being so placed in Charles' standard work, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*.¹ This is to say that the work was not accepted as Scripture either by Rabbinic Judaism (the canonical Old Testament) or by the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent (OT apocrypha). Jubilees gives every evidence of being pseudepigraphal in the broader sense also, as it presents itself as a revelation to Moses at Sinai. As we shall see below, the work may also be classed in the category of works with an apocalyptic character.

Text

The text of Jubilees is preserved to us principally in four Ethiopic manuscripts from the late middle ages.² These are supplemented by a large fragment of the work in Latin, probably translated in the fifth century AD, consisting of about ¼ of the whole, from chapter 13 to the end.³ There was also an ancient Greek version of Jubilees, which is attested by a number of citations among Greek-speaking Christian authors, beginning with Justin Martyr in the second century and continuing to the twelfth century,⁴ when interest in the work seems to have died out.

Working with these materials, Charles suggested that both the Ethiopic and Latin versions came from the Greek, but that the Greek itself was in turn a translation from Hebrew.⁵ Recent manuscript finds in the caves near Qumran have included fragments from at least ten different copies of Jubilees, all in Hebrew,⁶ confirming Charles' view and indicating some definite connection between the Qumran community and the book of Jubilees.

Contents and Character

The book of Jubilees is written in the form of a revelation from God to Moses on Mt. Sinai, mostly through the mediation of the Angel of the Presence. It is basically a

¹ R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913). Hereafter referred to as *CAPOT*.

² *CAPOT*, 2:2.

³ *CAPOT*, 2:3.

⁴ *CAPOT*, 2:2; George E. Ladd, "The Kingdom of God in the Jewish Apocryphal Literature: Jubilees," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 109 (1952): 164-174.

⁵ *CAPOT*, 2:3-4.

⁶ D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (London: SCM Press, 1964), p. 38.

repetition of the material in Genesis and the first twelve chapters of Exodus, with some noteworthy modifications, additions and deletions.

There is, for instance, a tendency to withdraw God from man by the interposition of angelic intermediaries (paragraph above, 17:11, and often), although this is not absolute (27:21). Several orders of angels are mentioned, including wicked angels led by their chief named Mastema, who is apparently to be identified with Satan.

Jubilees also tends to make its good characters look better and the bad ones worse. For instance, God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac is pictured as having been instigated by Mastema (17:16; cp. Gen 22:1). Likewise God's attempt to kill Moses as he returned to Egypt (Ex 4:24) is transferred to Mastema. Abraham is portrayed as rejecting idolatry from his youth (12:16ff; cp. Josh 24:14). His lying in Egypt is not mentioned (13:11ff). His tithing to Melchizedek is missing from the extant manuscripts (13:25), although apparently it was present in the original. In substantial contrast to the Biblical account, Jubilees indicates that Jacob is perfectly good (35:6, 12), whereas Esau is almost totally wicked.

There are a number of features in Jubilees which we would call midrashic, as the treatment of the Scriptural text is similar to that found in the Rabbinical Targumim and Midrashim. Thus, the two highest orders of angels join God in keeping the Sabbath (2:18), a feature reminiscent of the Rabbinical idea that God spends his time studying the Torah and Mishnah (Ab. Z. 3b, Bab. Mez. 86a). Adam's creation in the first week and Eve's in the second (!) explains the Biblical injunction for a male-female distinction in purification periods (3:8-13). Men and animals speak one language before Adam's expulsion from Eden (3:20; Hebrew! 12:25-26).

There is also a priestly interest in the material. Throughout the book we find details regarding the names of persons anonymous in Scripture. Much emphasis is laid on the exact dates of events and on the calendar as a whole, as we shall see below. Likewise, we find considerable detail regarding the patriarchal sacrifices (e.g., 3:24, 6:2ff, 16:22ff, 32:48), and the principal Jewish festivals and fast are instituted (or at least foreshadowed) hundreds of years before Moses.

The book of Jubilees also shows an interest in eschatology, especially in chapter 21. This will be discussed in connection with the theology of Jubilees, below.

Dependence on Other Writings

Jubilees is obviously dependent on the Pentateuch. This dependence seems so strong that it is hard to credit Zeitlin's belief that Jubilees was intended to displace it.⁷ Not only does the book make use of the Pentateuch for the time-period from Adam to Sinai (Gen 1 to Ex 12), but the extensive liturgical material in Jubilees clearly presupposes the rest of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers as well.

⁷ Solomon Zeitlin, "The Book of 'Jubilees' and the Pentateuch," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 48 (1957-58): 218-235.

None of the works I have examined discussed the dependence of Jubilees on other Scripture, nor have I attempted any such detailed work myself. Jub 12:16ff may reflect the author's meditation on Josh 24:14, as mentioned above. The writer's emphasis on weeks of years probably indicates his knowledge of Dan 9:24ff and 2 Chron 36:21, as well as the Pentateuchal institution of the Sabbatical cycle for land use. Doubtless many other such parallels could be found. In any case, Jubilees seems to show a knowledge of and very high regard for the Pentateuch. Except for some calendric statements, the few disagreements between the two are probably unintentional.

Among extra-canonical writings, Jubilees seems to show a knowledge of 1 Enoch. Jub 4:17-23 speaks of Enoch writing a book and mentions several subjects in it. According to Charles, these subjects indicate that the writer of Jubilees was familiar with three of the earliest sections of 1 Enoch (chapters 6-16, 23-36, and 72-90).⁸ 1 Enoch also seems to use a calendar very similar to, if not identical with, that of Jubilees.⁹ A book of Noah is also mentioned in Jub 10:13 and 21:10. Although no such work is extant, Charles has suggested that such a work served as a source for some of the Noah material in both 1 Enoch and Jubilees.¹⁰

Date

The book of Jubilees is universally conceded to originate in the Second Temple period, but otherwise a wide range of dates has been suggested, from about 400 BC (Zeitlin) to the first century AD (Headlam).¹¹ Most scholars have followed Charles in assigning Jubilees to the late second century BC, although a substantial minority (Albright, E. Meyer, and Finkelstein) favor the early part of the same century.¹²

As far as external evidence is concerned, if Jubilees is dependent on parts of 1 Enoch, then it was written after them. These parts are dated by Charles in the early second century BC.¹³ Although one may argue either that his dates are wrong, or that the 1 Enoch sections were written to supply a book hitherto only in the mind of the author of Jubilees, it appears that the data are consistent with Jubilees having a date from the early second century onward.

The Damascus Document, or Zadokite Fragment, first discovered in the Cairo Geniza but now known at Qumran, also helps in dating Jubilees. In column 16, lines 3 and 4, we read:

⁸ *CAPOT*, 2:18.

⁹ Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), §§ 98-103.

¹⁰ Russell, *Method and Message*, p. 51.

¹¹ H. H. Rowley, *Relevance of the Apocalyptic* (2nd ed.; London: Lutterworth Press, 1947), pp. 84f.

¹² Louis Finkelstein, "Pre-Maccabean Documents in the Passover Haggadah. Appendix: The Date of the Book of Jubilees," *Harvard Theological Review* 36 (1943): 19-24.

¹³ *CAPOT*, 2:170-171.

... an exact specification of the time when Israel will be blind to these things is spelled out with equal exactness in the Book of the Divisions of the Times into their Jubilees and Weeks.¹⁴

This pretty clearly refers to Jubilees, which is also known at Qumran, and therefore the Damascus Document was written later. Since the latter must have been written before the fall of Qumran about AD 70, Jubilees could be no later than the first century AD and is probably not even that late.

The internal evidence is consistent with this range (or, even more narrowly, with the second century BC), but otherwise it is problematical. Jub 3:31 speaks of the Gentiles "uncovering themselves," which immediately suggests the gymnasium. But, as Zeitlin points out, this criterion alone could equally well date the Pentateuchal episode of Noah and Ham as Hellenistic.¹⁵ However, this reference, together with 15:33, which speaks of Israel's "departure from circumcision," leads Finkelstein to date Jubilees in the period 175-140 BC, when the Jews were most seriously tempted to extreme Hellenization. Furthermore, 50:12 contains a prohibition against fighting on the Sabbath, which would seem to be pre-or early Maccabean, unless it came from a person or group who never was reconciled to the Maccabean casuistry on this point.

On the other hand, 38:14, which speaks of the Edomites being in servitude to Israel "to this day," would seem to favor a date in the reign of John Hyrcanus (134-104 BC), when Israel reconquered these ancient neighbors, or even later, which would seem to be inconsistent with the above data. Of course, it is possible the writer had Moses' day in mind, but the Edomites were not subject to Israel then, either. Perhaps the author was just using Biblical terminology without thinking through all its implications.

The eschatological passage in Jubilees chapter 23 is another place to attempt dating, on the theory that apocalyptic writers placed themselves in the last days. In verses 16-25, we see that the end-time is characterized by a generation gap, many forsaking the covenant, wickedness, famine, rebellion, oppression, defilement of the temple and invasion by Gentiles. Unlike most apocalypses, however, Jubilees follows this with a spontaneous return to the law and (apparently) a gradual improvement in conditions. As nothing is said which could really refer to the Maccabees, the passage looks rather pre-Maccabean, except for the defilement of the temple. Here again we have ambiguity. Perhaps the book is pre-Maccabean and considers the activities of Jason and Menelaus to constitute defilement of the temple, or perhaps it is post-Maccabean by an author who discounts the importance of Judah and his brothers.

In conclusion, the second century BC looks best for the date of Jubilees, but it is difficult to choose between a time immediately before Antiochus desolates the temple (say 175-168) or later during the reign of John Hyrcanus (say 130-105).

¹⁴ Theodore H. Gaster, ed., *The Dead Sea Scriptures* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956), p. 85.

¹⁵ Zeitlin, "Book of Jubilees."

Theology

Theologically, the writer of Jubilees shows considerable interest in the law and the priesthood, as noted above. He seems to have a high regard for the Pentateuch, even though he occasionally contradicts it.

Exegetically, the methods employed by Jubilees are very much like those of the Rabbis, even though a number of the results are different.¹⁶ The Jubilees *halakoth* for the Sabbath (2:25-30, 50:6-13) are more stringent, for instance, viewing violations as eternal rather than merely capital offenses (2:27). Objects are not to be carried from house to house (2:30), nor is marital intercourse (50:8) or warfare (5:12) allowed on this day.

In regard to festivals,¹⁷ the passover meal is only to be eaten in the temple court, rather than at any home in Jerusalem, as permitted by the Rabbis. However, it may be eaten throughout the night, rather than just to midnight. Old grain may be offered at the Feast of Weeks in famine situations, though this is not allowed by the Talmud.

We see similar differences in regard to the laws of sacrifice, marriage and tithing. Finkelstein feels that the *halakoth* of Jubilees are mostly earlier than the Rabbinic ones.¹⁸

Moving on to other areas of theology, angelology has been touched on above. Details are given in Charles.¹⁹

The writer's view of the kingdom of God is given in 23:9-31 and is discussed by Ladd.²⁰ As in most apocalyptic and eschatological literature of Judaism, the kingdom is preceded by a period of woes. The climax, however, is not a supernatural intervention into history, but the return of God's people to the law, which is the key to bring in the kingdom (23:26).

The resulting kingdom is an earthly one which apparently comes in gradually (23:26-30) but lasts forever (23:30), in contrast to most other apocalypses. There is no Messiah in this kingdom passage, and the only possible messianic reference in the whole work (31:18-19) probably refers to David.

Also noteworthy is the apparent absence of a resurrection, combined with a continuation of the individual. Of the righteous, it is said (23:30)

And their bones shall rest in the earth
And their spirits shall have much joy,

¹⁶ See Louis Finkelstein, "The Book of Jubilees and the Rabbinic Halaka," *Harvard Theological Review* 16 (1923): 39-61.

¹⁷ Ibid. See also the notes by Box in R. H. Charles and G. H. Box, *The Book of Jubilees or the Little Genesis* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1917).

¹⁸ Finkelstein, "Rabbinic Halaka."

¹⁹ *CAPOT*, 2:9.

²⁰ Ladd, "Kingdom in Jubilees."

which is consistent with the "eternal sleep" mentioned in 23:1 and 36:1, 18. The wicked, however, are cast into Sheol (7:29, 22:22).

Authorship

The book of Jubilees seems to be a unified work by a single author, even though several sources appear to have been used.²¹ But what sort of person is the author?

Using the descriptions of Jewish groups found in Philo, Josephus and Pliny the Elder, all of which apply to the first century of our era (and therefore probably at least a century after Jubilees was written), our author does not fit well into any of the categories. The author does not seem to be a Sadducee, for his outlook is too deterministic, he believes in the immortality of the soul, makes midrashic additions to Scripture, and has a complex angelology. Of course, it is possible that in some of these points we or our ancient sources have misunderstood the Sadducees. In any case, it is conceivable that Sadduceism changed considerably in a century, as the Unitarians and Methodists have certainly done so over the course of their histories. But the connection of Jubilees with the Sadducees is certainly not obvious.

Neither does the author seem to be a Pharisee, at least not one of the first century AD or Talmudic sort. Jubilees has no resurrection, a different (and very important) calendar, and a strong emphasis on divergent *halakoth*.

Naturally, one is inclined to look to the Essenes or Qumran for our author, since manuscripts of Jubilees were used by the latter, and Jubilees' stringency and calendar also point in this direction. However, as Noack observes,²² Jubilees lacks the characteristic Qumran emphasis on the Holy Spirit, the communal meal and ritual bathings for the laity. Most important, however, is the difference in outlook. Qumran is a strongly separatist community which considers itself alone as the righteous remnant, whereas Jubilees looks forward to Israel as a whole returning to God and his law. It is certainly possible that the perspective of Jubilees is the earlier attitude which gradually hardened as the call for repentance was ignored, but this cannot be said as yet to have been demonstrated.

Of the other sects, the Zealots are probably too late and certainly too militaristic to have authored Jubilees; the Therapeutae are linguistically probably too Greek; and the other sects are too vaguely known to us to make any judgment possible. Therefore, it appears that our author either belongs to no group at all, to a group we know virtually nothing about, or that he belongs to one of the better-known groups at an earlier and rather different-looking stage of their history. At the moment, the suggestion that the author is an Essene of pre- or proto-Qumran would seem to be the safest bet.

²¹ *CAPOT*, 2:7.

²² Bent Noack, "Qumran and the Book of Jubilees," *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 22-23 (1957-58): 191-207.

Calendar

The calendar of the book of Jubilees is certainly a central theme, if not the central theme, of the work. The title of the book (prologue) is calendric; 1:14 speaks of Israelites going astray in these matters; 6:23-38 gives a fairly detailed picture of the calendar, and a good fraction of the Jubilees' material not found in the Pentateuch consists of specific dates of various liturgical or redemptive events.

From chapter six, we learn that the year in Jubilees is exactly 52 weeks long (6:30), or 364 days (6:32), and that it was divided into four thirteen-week quarters (6:28). With such a year, all the Jewish festivals (which, according to Scripture, fall on fixed days of the month), also fall on fixed days of the week, with no change from year to year. Presumably each quarter (with 91 days) would consist of a 31-day month and two 30-day months.

This is a sort of solar calendar, since its year corresponds to the solar year (just under 365 $\frac{1}{4}$ days) more closely than its months (average 30 $\frac{1}{3}$ days) correspond to the lunar month (29 $\frac{1}{2}$ days). The Islamic calendar with 12 months totalling 354 days is strictly lunar, whereas the Rabbinical (and modern) Jewish calendar is a luni-solar one, with 12 lunar months, plus a thirteenth one intercalated every two or three years, so that the average length of the years match the solar year.

It is possible to make the Jubilees' calendar more explicit *if* we assume that certain similar calendars were actually identical. For instance, the calendar presupposed in 1 Enoch 72 starts the year at the spring equinox (agreeably, Jubilees has Passover in the first month), and each quarter has three months of length 30, 30 and 31 days, in that order. This would give us the additional information that it is the 3rd, 6th, 9th and 12th months which are longer, given that Jubilees uses the same calendar. A list of festival days and dates from Qumran would fit this arrangement and add the detail that the years starts on a Wednesday.²³ Baumgarten also cogently argues that the day in both Qumran and Jubilees calendars begins at sunset. Thus we have the following common calendar for Jubilees, 1 Enoch and Qumran, with each day of the week beginning the previous evening compared with our (Gentile) reckoning:

| Months 1, 4, 7, 10: | | | | | | |
|---------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
| 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 |
| 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 |
| 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | | |

²³ Joseph M. Baumgarten, "The Beginning of the Day in the Calendar of Jubilees," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 77 (1958): 355-360.

| Months 2, 5, 8, 11: | | | | | | |
|---------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
| | | | | | 1 | 2 |
| 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 |
| 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 |
| 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |

| Months 3, 6, 9, 12: | | | | | | |
|---------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 |
| 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 |
| 29 | 30 | 31 | | | | |

Is it possible that this calendar was used by a Jewish sect for any substantial length of time? To answer this, it is important to recognize that the Jewish festivals are partly agricultural in nature (this is reflected in Jubilees as well as in the Scripture) and therefore the calendar must stay synchronized with the seasons, which in the long run are tied to the exact length of the solar year, just under 365 ¼ days. Since the Jubilees calendar is only 364 days long, there is a cumulative error of about four months per century. It is therefore impossible that this calendar can have been used over the century or two that the Qumran community existed unless some sort of intercalation was employed. However, we have no information from Jubilees, 1 Enoch or Qumran to indicate the kind or even the existence of intercalation, so any suggestions given must be rather speculative. Nevertheless, let us look at some possibilities.

Leach²⁴ suggests that a year of average length 365 days may be obtained without violating Jubilees' week-structure by adding a full week (not counted as days of the month) every seven years. He feels that this could be done at the Feast of Tabernacles, where there exists a special Scriptural emphasis every seven years anyway. With such a scheme, the cumulative error is reduced to just under 25 days per century. This error is still very large, but might just be tolerable for a short-lived community.

For further refinement, the calendar could be made as accurate as the Greek Octaeteris system then in use (in which three 30-day months were intercalated every eight years) by a rather complicated and implausible trick suggested by Leach.²⁵ On the 49th year of each Jubilee cycle, the usual week is added because it is a seventh year, but this time after

²⁴ E. R. Leach, "A Possible Method of Intercalation for the Calendar of the Book of Jubilees," *Vetus Testamentum* 7 (1957): 392-397.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

the Day of Atonement (month 7, day 10) rather than at Tabernacles. At the end of this added week (which constitutes the Jubilee year), the whole month is started over (i.e., from month 7, day 1), effectively adding the necessary ten days, though unfortunately interrupting the sequence of weekdays. Although Leach feels this solves the problem of having no agriculture on the 50th (Jubilee) year (which is only this added week, or at most, 17 days), his model seems a bit too heavy at present for the data to support it. However, it does reduce the cumulative error in the calendar to about one day per century.

A more reasonable suggestion is made by Finegan.²⁶ He notes that the late Rabbinic work *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* (completed in the 9th century AD) mentions a "28-year cycle of the sun." If to Leach's first suggestion of adding a week every seventh year, we add an additional week every 28th year, the cumulative error in the Jubilees' calendar can be cut to about one day per century, which is comparable to the error in the Julian calendar before the refinements instituted in modern times by Pope Gregory.

Finally let us ask, was the Jubilees' calendar an innovation, or was it the traditional Jewish calendar in the centuries before the beginning of our era? Internal evidence in Jubilees could point either way, for both traditionalists and innovators have been known to ascribe to God and to antiquity their favorite views. Both Morgenstern and Segal,²⁷ though differing sharply on details of the history of the calendar, think that a solar calendar like that of Jubilees was once used widely in Israel, but that at the time of Jubilees it was being (or had recently been) replaced by the Babylonian luni-solar calendar used by the Jews today.

It is true that the flood account of Genesis 7 and 8, having 30-day months, gives some calendric information which predates the present Jewish luni-solar calendar and suggests an earlier calendar of a solar sort. However, the numbers given in Gen 7:11, 24 and 8:3, 4 suggest a calendar of five successive months of 30 days each, which disagrees both with the Jubilees' calendar and the Jewish luni-solar calendar used today. It is possible that these Pentateuchal dates surrounding the flood may have formed a core from which the writer of Jubilees either attempted to build up a new calendar or to justify a similar (but not identical) calendar already in existence. Therefore it does not appear that the question of the antiquity of the Jubilees' calendar has as yet been solved.

²⁶ Finegan, *Biblical Chronology*, §110.

²⁷ Julian Morgenstern, "The Calendar of the Book of Jubilees," *Vetus Testamentum* 5 (1955): 34-76; J. B. Segal, "Intercalation and the Hebrew Calendar," *Vetus Testamentum* 7 (1957): 250-307.