

Chapter 4: Restructuring the Past: Remembering Genesis in the Book of Jubilees

4.1 INTRODUCTION

4.1.1 Discovery and Publication

In 1844 Heinrich Ewald published a description of an Ethiopian manuscript which had been preserved in Classical Ethiopic (Geʿez) under the title መጽሐፈ ክፋሌ [*mashafa kufālē*].¹

Because the name followed the common convention using a work's first few (key) words as its title (in this case, ዝንቲ፡ ነገረ፡ ክፋሌ [*zentu nabara kufālē*]), Ewald suggested that this manuscript may have been a copy of the work known from antiquity as both τὰ Ἰωβηλαῖα, “the Jubilee,” and Λεπτὴ Γένεσις, the “Little Genesis.”² Although the work had been in continuous use within Ethiopian Christianity since antiquity, European scholarship only knew of the work through secondary references in a few classical sources.³

1. All translations are my own. Geʿez citations are from VanderKam's critical edition, *The Book of Jubilees*, 2 vols., CSCO 510-11; SA 87-88 (Leuven: Peeters, 1989).

2. Heinrich Ewald, “Ueber die Aethiopischen Handschriften zu Tübingen,” *ZKM* 5 (1844): 164-201.

3. VanderKam offers a concise summary of the various late-antique citations and allusions in his commentary, most notably in the works of Epiphanius (*Panarion, Measures and Weights*) and Syncellus (*Chronography*). James C. VanderKam, *Jubilees: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2018), 1:10-14. See also Annette Yoshiko Reed, “Retelling Biblical Retellings: Epiphanius, the Pseudo-Clementines, and the Reception-History of Jubilees,” in *Tradition, Transmission, and Transformation from Second Temple Literature through Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity*, ed. Menahem Kister et al., *STDJ* 113 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 304-21

The work was published and supplemented by additional manuscripts by August Dillmann in 1859⁴ and R. H. Charles in 1895.⁵ More recently, VanderKam's 1989 edition utilized twenty-seven copies of the text⁶ and since its publication over twenty more copies have been cataloged and imaged.⁷

Save for the rediscovery of the text itself, the most significant find for the study of Jubilees was the discovery of several Hebrew fragments of the work among the Dead Sea Scrolls which attest to the work's antiquity and likely original language of composition. Although the Hebrew and Ethiopic versions are—to the degree that we can tell—very close to one another, the Ethiopic text appears to be a granddaughter translation of the Hebrew through a Greek daughter translation, though no such text has been found.⁸ This fact was convincingly demonstrated by Dillmann who observed several Greek forms preserved as transliterations in the Ethiopic text.⁹ By the end of the 19th century, partial copies of Jubilees had been uncovered

and Anne Kreps, "From Jewish Apocrypha to Christian Tradition," *CH* 87.2 (2018): 345–70.

4. August Dillmann, *Maṣḥafa Kufālē sive Liber Jubilaeorum* (Keil: C.G.L. van Maak; London: Williams & Norgate, 1859).

5. Robert Henry Charles, *Maṣḥafa Kufālē or the Ethiopic Version of the Hebrew Book of Jubilees* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1895).

6. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees*, 1:xiv–xvi.

7. Ted Erho, "New Ethiopic Witnesses to Some Old Testament Pseudepigrapha," *BSOAS* 76 (2013): 75–97. VanderKam helpfully lists the twenty-seven manuscripts he used for his critical edition in the introduction of his commentary where he also notes the additional manuscripts photographed since its publication. See VanderKam, *Jubilees*, 1:14–16.

8. See especially VanderKam's treatment of the textual history of Jubilees in *Textual and Historical Studies in the Book of Jubilees*, HSM 14 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 1–18.

9. Specifically: δρϹς, βάλανος, λίψ, σχῖνος, and φάραγξ. August Dillmann, "Das Buch der Jubiläen oder die kleine Genesis," *JBW* 3 (1850–1851): 1–96. Charles later added ἡλίου to the list. Robert Henry Charles, *The Book of Jubilees or the Little Genesis* (London: Adam & Charles

in Latin translation which similarly appear to be daughter translations of the Greek text.

Finally, although no manuscript evidence has been found, Jubilees scholars posit that a Syriac translation of Jubilees was made in antiquity based on what appeared to be a number of Syriac citations of Jubilees which lacked any apparent influence from Greek.¹⁰ Despite all of these finds, however, the Ethiopic text remains the only tradition to preserve Jubilees in its entirety. Thus, in my treatment of Jubilees I will be relying primarily on the Ethiopic text and will be supplementing from the Hebrew where available.

4.1.2 Content and Character

The book of Jubilees offers a rewriting of the book of Genesis and the first part of Exodus (Gen 1–Exod 12). The work is presented as a revelation from Yahweh given to Moses atop Mt. Sinai, framed by a brief prologue and epilogue.¹¹ The prologue gives a short description of the work as an account concerned with the division of time into units of years, weeks, and jubilees:

ዝንቱ ፡ ነገረ ፡ ኩፋሌ ፡ መዋዕላተ ፡ ሕግ ፡ ወለስምዕ ፡ ለግብረ ፡
ዓመታት ፡ ለተሳብዖቶም ፡ ለኢየሴልውሳቲሆም ፡ ውስተ ፡ ኩሉ ፡
ዓመታተ ፡ ዓለም ፡ በከመ ፡ ተናገሮ ፡ ለሙሴ ፡ በደብረ ፡ ሲና ፡
አመ ፡ ዐርገ ፡ ይንሣእ ፡ ጽላተ ፡ እብን ፡ ሕግ ፡ ወትእዛዝ ፡ በቃለ ፡
አግዚአብሔር ፡ በከመ ፡ ይቤሎ ፡ ይዕርግ ውስተ ፡ ርእሰ ፡ ደብር ፡

Black, 1902), xxx.

10. See especially E. Tisserant, “Fragments syriaques du Livre des Jubilés,” *RB* 30 (1921): 55–86, 206–32 and Charles, *Book of Jubilees*, xxix but also A. M. Ceriani, *Monumenta Sacra et Profana*, 2 vols. (Milan: Bibliotheca Ambrosiana, 1861–1863), 2:ix–x and Charles, *Maṣḥafa Kufālē*, x.

11. VanderKam, *Jubilees*, 1:17.

zentu nagara kufālē mawāṣelāta [la-]ḥegg wa-la-samʿ la-gebra ṣāmatāt la-tasābeṣotomu la-ṯiyyobēlewesātihomu westa kʷellu ṣāmatāta ṣālam ba-kama tanāgaro la-Musē ba-dabra Sinā ṯama ṣarga yenšā? ṣellāta ṯebn—ḥegg wa-teṯzāz—ba-qāla ṯagziṯabḥēr ba-kama yebēlo yeṣreg westa reṯsa dabr.

These are the words¹² of the division of the days for the law and for the testimony for the event[s] of the years; for their weeks, for their Jubilees in all the years of the world just as he spoke (them) to Moses on Mount Sinai when he went up to receive the tablets of stone—the law and the commandment—at the command of God, as he had said to him that he should ascend to the top of the mountain.

Following this prologue, the setting of the story is established as the during the “first year of the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt, in the third month, on the sixteenth of the month” when Yahweh called Moses atop Mt. Sinai.

The bulk of the work (Jubilees 2:1–50:13) is dedicated to the recounting of Jewish history, following the basic narrative provided by Gen 1–Exod 12, with special concern for halakhic matters and the division of time according to a 364 day calendrical system.¹³ The particulars of the revelation are mediated by the “angel of the presence” (Eth. **መልአከ ገጽ** [*mal’aka gaṣṣ*]) who dictates its contents to Moses, the fastidious scribe. The treatment of Moses as a scribe places him within a chain of tradition—along with Enoch and Noah—which emphasizes writing and written works as essential sources of tradition and revelation.¹⁴ The work closes with a terse statement declaring the work complete (Jubilees 50:13):

12. Lit. “This is the word.” I’ve chosen to follow VanderKam and others by rendering this construction in the plural based on the probable underlying Hebrew **אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים**. See VanderKam, *Jubilees*, 125

13. TODO: Reference

14. TODO: Get refs and say something here/

ተፈጸመ ፡ በዝየ ፡ ነገር ፡ ዘኩፋሌ ፡ መዋዕል ።

tafaṣṣama ba-zeyya nagar za-kufālē mawāṣel

Here the account of the division of time is ended.

4.1.3 As RwB

4.1.4 Thesis on Memory

4.2 RESTRUCTURING THE PAST

One of the most notable features of the Book of Jubilees is its preoccupation with the correct division of time—both with respect to a 364 day year as well as longer units encompassing multiple years. This concern with the proper division of time is reflected throughout the work and provides the central organizing principle for the rewriting of Gen 1–Exod 12.

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