

Chapter 3: Genesis Pseudepocryphon

As one of the first seven scrolls discovered in the Judean desert beginning in 1947, the Genesis Apocryphon is one of the more well-studied works among the Dead Sea Scrolls. When the scroll was initially analyzed by scholars, it could not be fully unrolled and only a small portion of the outer layer of the scroll could be read. These visible portions, however, written in Aramaic, referenced the ante-diluvian Lamech, the father of Noah, and his wife, Batanosh, known from the book of Jubilees. The text appeared to be written in the first-person from the perspective of Lamech leading Trevor to conclude that the scroll was a copy of the so-called “Book of Lamech” listed as an apocryphal work by a 7th century CE Greek canon list.¹ Once the scroll was completely unrolled, however, it became obvious that the scope of the scroll contained more than just a first-person account from Lamech and instead contained additional first-person accounts from figures found in the Genesis stories including Noah and Abram. Thus, the more descriptive title, *A Genesis Apocryphon*, was given to the scroll by Avigad and

1. This fact led Trevor to refer to the scroll as the “Ain Feshkha Lamech Scroll” and Milik to refer to it as the Apocalypse of Lamech for the publication of the fragment in DJD 1. See John C. Trever, “Identification of the Aramaic Fourth Scroll from ‘Ain Feshkha”, *BASOR* 115, 1949, 8–10 and “Apocalypse de Lamech” in DJD I, 86–87

Yadin in 1956 for the publication of its *editio princeps* in 1956.²

Although much of the scroll was very badly damaged, illegible, or missing, enough survived for Avigad and Yadin to make the generalized observations that Genesis Apocryphon followed the basic order and events of Genesis from the Flood into the Abram narrative. The events are generally (though, not exclusively) narrated in a series of three first person accounts by Lamech, Noah, and Abram, respectively and show a clear affinity with the roughly contemporaneous works of 1 Enoch and Jubilees.³ The literary relationship of Genesis Apocryphon to both 1 Enoch and (especially) Jubilees remains a matter of debate, with Avigad and Yadin suggesting that Genesis Apocryphon more probably preceded Jubilees, while the prevailing opinion more recently seems to prefer the opposite.⁴

2. Hebrew: מגילה חיצונית לבראשית. See Nahman Avigad and Yigael Yadin, *A Genesis Apocryphon: A Scroll from the Wilderness of Judaea* (1956). While the name Genesis Apocryphon remains in wide use, it is notable that the name has been criticized and a number of, perhaps more descriptive, titles have been suggested. “Book of the Patriarchs” (Hebrew: ספר אבות. As suggested by Mazar in D. Flusser, “GETTHIS”, KS GETTHESE [379 n. 2]), “Memoirs of the Patriarchs” (as suggested by T. H. Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures in English Translation*, 3rd ed. [Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1976], 358), and כתב אבהן (as suggested by Józef T. Milik, *Ten Years of Discovery in the Wilderness of Judea*, trans. John Strugnell [London: SCM Press, 1959], 14 n. 1.). Fitzmyer suggests כתב אבהתא would be, perhaps, even more suitable (Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave 1*, 3rd ed., BO 18a [Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 2004], 16).

3. Avigad and Yadin, *A Genesis Apocryphon*, 16–37.

4. *ibid.*, 38; cf. Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave 1*, 20–21. Fitzmyer cites Hartman’s suggestion, built on Fitzmyer’s own work, that the similarity between Genesis Apocryphon’s and Jubilee’s chronology of Abram’s life. Because the chronology seems to have been closely tied to Jubilee’s more rigid calendar, it fol-

Much of the attention given to the Genesis Apocryphon has focused on its literary genre and its relationship to (or resemblance of) the Targums and later midrashic works. Vermes, as already noted, treated the Genesis Apocryphon extensively in *Scripture and Tradition* and noted numerous apparent points of contact between Genesis Apocryphon, the Targums, and later midrashic traditions, ultimately declaring Genesis Apocryphon to be “the most ancient midrash of all.”⁵ Yet, as Fitzmyer observes, the roots of biblical midrash are now generally accepted to be found within the Hebrew Bible itself. Together with the fact that a number of targums have been found at Qumran makes the presence of targumic and midrashic qualities in Genesis Apocryphon less remarkable and, I think, frees us from any obligation to try and fit it cleanly within either category.⁶

What remains uncertain about the Genesis Apocryphon is what its function may have been for its original audience. I am in agreement with Fitzmyer that it seems unlikely that Genesis Apocryphon would have been used liturgically and that the general character of the work is “for a pious and edifying purpose,”⁷ yet, I can not help but feel somewhat dissatisfied with this answer. How might Genesis Apocryphon have edified its readers? Works such as Jubilees and 1 Enoch, perhaps, have more obvious rhetorical aims, but for all its similarities to

lows that Genesis Apocryphon drew from Jubilees. See Louis F. Hartman, review of *Qumran Cave 1, The Genesis Apocryphon*, by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *CBQ* 28 (1966): 495–98.

5. Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies*, StPB 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1961), 124.

6. Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave 1*, 20.

7. *Ibid.*, 20.

these texts, Genesis Apocryphon maintains a different character which has generally eluded commentators.

While I have no illusions that I will be able to offer a satisfactory answer to the question of Genesis Apocryphon's specific purpose, approaching Genesis Apocryphon as an object of cultural memory, I believe, is a useful heuristic for addressing the problem holistically. The advantage that a memory approach has in addressing this problem is that it offers a way to talk about the manifold ways that Genesis Apocryphon both builds from its social location and speaks back into it at a number of "discursive levels."

I have chosen to frame the discussion of Genesis Apocryphon around the ways that Genesis Apocryphon participates at three such discursive levels. First, and as a point of departure, I will discuss the ways that the Genesis Apocryphon engages with the biblical tradition. Second, I will discuss the ways that Genesis Apocryphon engages with its reader through the lens of genre and its shared formal characteristics with other similar texts. Finally, I will discuss Genesis Apocryphon as a work of pseudepigraphy and its direct engagement with the cultural memory of ancient Israel.

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