

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*, 3 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*, 3 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-

The name given to the Genesis Apocryphon in the *editio princeps* set the agenda for scholarly inquiry on the work into the modern era by connecting it to the biblical book of Genesis while simultaneously categorizing it as apocryphal. Much of the attention given to the Genesis Apocryphon, therefore, has focused on its literary genre and its relationship to the Bible and resemblance of the Targums and later midrashic works. As already noted, Vermes's treatment of Genesis Apocryphon focused on the role that it played in showing the continuity between the interpretation of Jewish scripture during the Second Temple period and the aggadic traditions of early rabbinic Judaism. In Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies*, StPB 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1961), Vermes treats in detail the relationship between Gen 12:8–15:4 and Genesis Apocryphon cols. 19–22, ultimately declaring Genesis Apocryphon to be “the most ancient midrash of all” and the “lost link between the biblical and the Rabbinic midrash.”⁵ The result of this framing (whether one considers it appropriate or not) has been that much of the scholarly attention paid to Genesis Apocryphon has focused on its relationship to Genesis and especially how its author(s) may have been addressing exegetical issues found within the (later) biblical work. 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

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. Ibid., 124.

obligation to try and fit it cleanly within either category.⁶ However, the treatment of Genesis Apocryphon as primarily exegetical (or in the case of Vermes, as midrash) tacitly implies that the purpose of Genesis Apocryphon was to explain or interpret Genesis. Put another way, Genesis Apocryphon is often treated as if its purpose in antiquity was to say something *about how to read Genesis*. Placing Genesis Apocryphon under the rubric of “biblical interpretation,” for example, does not, to my mind, adequately appreciate the potential for Genesis Apocryphon to be a creative work in its own right.

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 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

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

7. Ibid., 20.

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 functions as social memory 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 and work of pseudepigraphy and its direct engagement with the cultural memory of ancient Israel.

3.1 GENESIS APOCRYPHON AND BIBLICAL MEMORY

Although it is anachronistic to suggest that the “Bible” existed during the late Second Temple period, insofar as the texts and traditions that later formalized as the “Bible”—especially those contained in the Pentateuch—were certainly present in a reasonably stable and even privileged state, I think it is a mistake to jettison any discussion of RwB texts as they relate to the texts that would later become the Hebrew Bible. On the other hand, restricting our discussion to those later biblical texts would likewise not do justice to the wide variety of texts and traditions in existence during the Second Temple period which undoubtedly influenced Genesis Apocryphon. In an effort to strike a middle ground, therefore, I have opted to refer to “biblical memory,” by which I simply mean the confluence of stories and traditions which relate to those

later formalized in the Hebrew Bible.⁸ In this section, therefore, I would like to discuss the ways that the Genesis Apocryphon participated in biblical memory.

3.1.1 What was the Genesis Apocryphon Rewriting?

Although the Genesis Apocryphon is generally touted as one of the more clear-cut examples of the RwB, it is noteworthy that its relationship to the biblical text is not, in fact, entirely uniform.⁹

The earliest columns of the Genesis Apocryphon (cols. 0–5), which are narrated from the perspective of Lamech, Noah’s father, essentially offer a rewriting of 1 Enoch 106–107.¹⁰ In this section, Lamech, recounts the birth of Noah and Lamech’s fear that his wife, Bitenosh, had conceived Noah by means of the עִירִין “Watchers.” Despite Bitenosh’s assurances, Lamech

8. I would like to emphasize that I am not suggesting that “biblical memory” represents a qualitatively unique form of memory, only that the scope of the traditions under consideration relate to texts that later became the Bible, and, in all likelihood, held at least some sort of special privilege within the memory of many Second Temple Jews.

9. Moshe Bernstein, “Genre(s) of the *Genesis Apocryphon*,” in *Aramaica Qumranica: Proceedings of the Conference on the Aramaic Texts from Qumran in Aix-En-Provence 30 June – 2 July 2008*, ed. Katell Berthelot and Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, vol. 94, STDJ (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 317–43.

10. George Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah*, 2 ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), 174. The birth of Noah seems to have been a matter of some interest; a number of other texts likewise discuss the exceptional qualities of Noah at his birth. See 4Q534[4QBN^{a-d}], 1QNoah^a as well as James C. VanderKam, “The Birth of Noah,” in *Intertestamental Essays in Honour of Józef Tadeusz Milik*, ed. Zdzisław Jan Kapera, QM 6 (Kraków: Enigma, 1992), 213–31.

petitions his father, Methusaleh to ask *his* father, Enoch, for further assurance, which he ultimately gives. Although this section is fragmentary, its close resemblance to 1 Enoch 106–107 makes the scholarly reconstruction of the missing sections quite plausible. While it may be tempting to suggest that this section of Genesis Apocryphon represents a variant edition of 1 Enoch 106–107, rather than a rewriting, the fact that the version of the story preserved in Genesis Apocryphon is told in the first-person from the point of view of Lamech, while 1 Enoch 106–107 is told in the third-person, makes this suggestion highly unlikely. Moreover, because both 1 Enoch and Genesis Apocryphon were composed in Aramaic, the differences between the two tellings cannot be attributed to translational issues. In other words, although cols. 0–5 deal, nominally, with events in Genesis 5:28–29, for all intents and purposes, the story recounted in these columns is a retelling of events known from the Enochic tradition.¹¹

The second major section of Genesis Apocryphon begins with a superscription identifying What follows as a כתב מלי נוח [פרשגן] or “[A copy of] the Book of the Words of

11. It is not clear what the precise relationship between the Enochic traditions and the Genesis Apocryphon actually were. Here I have more-or-less assumed the priority of 1 Enoch, but I wish to leave ambiguous whether Genesis Apocryphon represents a rewriting of the *text* of 1 Enoch, or whether they simply draw on a common tradition. Thus, I have chosen to refer to the tradition “known from” 1 Enoch, rather than 1 Enoch itself. See Nickelsburg’s concise but thorough treatment of the similarities and differences in Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah*, 173–74 as well as that of Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave 1*, 122–23.

Noah” (5.29) and continues onto the beginning of col. 18.¹²

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At the other end of the spectrum (and the scroll), cols. 19–22 represent the longest and most complete sustained narrative preserved in Genesis Apocryphon. Moreover this section of the text maps very closely to Genesis 12:10–15:14 which retells the stories of Abram and Sarai’s sojourn in Egypt (|| Gen 12:10–20), Abram’s subsequent conflict with Lot (|| Gen 13:1–18), the Elamite campaign (|| Gen 14:1–24), and the beginning of Abram’s vision (|| Gen 15:1–4). Genesis Apocryphon’s retelling of these stories follow the chronology of Gen 12–15 very closely, but Genesis Apocryphon embellishes and augments the narrative throughout. In particular, the narrative portion beginning in col. 21.23 and continuing to the end of the (extant) scroll at times borders on a word-for-word translation of Genesis into Aramaic.

The similarity of these retellings to their putative biblical *Vorlage*¹⁴

12. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah*, 174–75; On the topic of the so-called “book of Noah” see Devorah Dimant, “Two ‘Scientific’ Fictions: The So-Called Book of Noah and the Alleged Quotation of Jubilees in CD 16:3–4,” in *Studies in the Hebrew Bible, Qumran, and the Septuagint Presented to Eugene Ulrich*, ed. Peter W. Flint James C. VanderKam and Emanuel Tov, VTsup 101 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 230–49.

13. See also Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah*, 174 who suggests the Lamech narrative may be a rewriting of 1 Enoch 106–107.

14. Of course, we cannot be certain that the *Vorlage* of Genesis Apocryphon was, in fact, the same as the MT. That said, relative stability of (especially) the Torah texts during the Second Temple Period is widely accepted. For the purposes of this section, I will work under the assumption that the MT represents a very close approximation to the text that the authors/editors of Genesis Apocryphon were familiar with.

prompted some (esp. early) scholars to suggest that Genesis Apocryphon represented a sort of prototype for the later Pentateuchal Targums.¹⁵ While this may be a fair assessment for the very end of the scroll, the freer sections that precede it, and especially the earliest portions that deal with Lamech and Noah, really cannot reasonably be considered even “paraphrases.” Thus most treatments of Genesis Apocryphon have tended to discuss the the work, following Vermes, in terms of its relationship to the genre of “midrash.”¹⁶¹⁷

15. Matthew Black, *The Scrolls and Christian Origins: Studies in the Jewish Background of the New Testament* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 193.

16. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition*.

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