CHAPTER 4

Book of Jubilees: Timeless Dimensions of a Covenantal Relationship

The book of Jubilees, one of the classic examples of “Rewritten Scripture,” begins as a dialogue between God and Moses at Sinai.1 In 1:27, God addresses the angel of the presence and instructs him to “dictate to Moses (starting) from the beginning of the creation until the time when my temple is built among them throughout all the ages of eternity.” Beginning with ch. 2, the angel purports to inform Moses of the events of history beginning with creation. Most scholars situate the book in the context of the events that ran from the ascension of Antiochus IV to the throne in 175 until the investiture of Jonathan as high priest in 152.2

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1 On Rewritten Scripture, see Molly M. Zahn, Rethinking Rewritten Scripture: Composition and Exegesis in the 4QReworked Pentateuch Manuscripts (STDJ 95; Leiden: Brill, 2011); Sidnie White Crawford, Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008).

The relationship between time and history is of fundamental importance in *Jubilees*, whose opening chapter addresses the central theological challenge of the exilic and postexilic periods: has God abandoned his people? In order to resolve this problem, the author of *Jubilees* suggests that creation marked the temporal beginning of Israel’s relationship with God, reassuring the book’s audience that redemption will eventually come. *Jubilees* links creation to the future redemption by describing the shape of history between those two poles as “timeless,” a conception of historical time according to which “events, actors and status [are] all reduced, effectively, to reincarnations of earlier historical dynamics. The distance of time had brought nothing new—nothing different—to its observers and subjects.”3 In the case of *Jubilees*, the divine commitment to Israel that began at creation found expression at specific moments in Israel’s history, particularly during the lifetimes of Noah, the patriarchs, and at the exodus. Those past events confirm the plan formulated by God at creation and foreshadow the end-time, when God will implement that plan in its entirety. The inevitability of the future redemption should therefore not surprise the author’s audience, because it is “neither radical nor entirely unprecedented.”4

At the same time that characterizing history as timeless reinforces the inevitability of the redemption, it diminishes the possibility that the exile had marked a temporal rupture. The exile simply represents another historical moment when demonic forces led Israel astray, delaying the full realization of the covenantal relationship in place from creation. As in all previous instances, God suppressed the negative impact of the demons, thereby restoring his commitment to Israel.

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3 Jarvis, *Times of Terror*, 40.
4 Ibid.