THE BOOK OF JUBILEES

The *Book of Jubilees* is a quintessential example of a genre of ancient literature known as ‘rewritten Bible.’ Also included in this genre are the fragmentarily preserved *Genesis Apocryphon* and the *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* of Pseudo-Philo. The term ‘rewritten Bible’ was coined by Geza Vermes, who by it describes the texts which anticipate questions and solve problems in advance by the midrashic insertion of haggadic developments into the biblical narrative.¹ ‘Rewritten Bible’ is the result of the regular reading of Scripture and constant meditation on it, supplementing its stories, resolving its textual and doctrinal difficulties, which resulted in a pre-rabbinic *haggadah* that was eventually introduced into the scriptural narrative itself.² The *Book of Jubilees* rewrites the biblical version of Genesis 1–Exodus 14 as if it were dictated to Moses on Mt. Sinai by an ‘angel of the presence’ who speaks of himself to Moses.³ This fiction carries to the end, with the angel drawing on ‘heavenly tablets’ (1:29) to which he constantly refers. The writer, in this way, grants his version of the primeval history special authority, and seeks to undercut those parties within Israel that would disagree. The author’s treatment of the biblical materials varies widely. One finds examples of verbatim reproduction, deletion, additions, re-ordering, all with a view to recasting the narrative in line with his interests and purposes. The author freely alters or omits what appears scandalous to him or simply omits what has no interest to him.⁴

Since its introduction to Western scholars at the end of the 19th Century, *Jubilees* has been dated to the second century B.C.E. A considerable number of fragments of it have been identified at Qumran, a fact that, when taken together with the similarities in teaching between *Jubilees* and those of the Essenes (most obviously the 364-day solar calendar), its association with the precursors of the Qumran community is made likely. Explicit citation of *Jubilees* in the Damascus Document

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¹ *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*, 95.
³ The angel usually addresses Moses in the 1st person plural (I and the other angels) and sometimes in the first person singular. This is evident in the context we will discuss, *Jub* 48:4, 13.
(CD 16:3f.) indicates a terminus ad quem of 100 B.C.E. A terminus a quo is provided by *Jubilees*’ reflection of details of the Hellenistic reform early in the second century.  

VanderKam and Nickelsburg differ as to exactly when in the 2nd Century B.C.E. *Jubilees* was composed. VanderKam has placed the terminus a quo at 161 B.C.E., since 34:2–9 refers to Judas Maccabaeus’ victory over Nicanor at that time. The terminus ad quem is determined by numerous factors. While *Jubilees* has many points of similarity with Qumran theology, the author worships in Jerusalem (49:21 refers in the third person to those who live elsewhere), yet there is no hint of a wicked high priest. *Jubilees* neither advocates nor knows of any separation from the broader society and cult of Israel. Its provenance therefore predates the schism of the Essene community, which occurred no later than 140. The ‘glowing terms’ with which *Jubilees* describes the Jerusalem priesthood indicate the author knows nothing of the Hasmonaean high priesthood, suggesting a date before Jonathan’s accession in 152 B.C.E.  

Nickelsburg has criticized VanderKam’s dating noting that the identification of *Jubilees* 34:2–9 and 37–38 as descriptors of the Maccabean wars is far from certain, and depends on a number of textual emendations. Second, many of the additions to the biblical text concern tensions in Jew-Gentile relationships (for instance, strictures against nakedness and uncircumcision in 3:31 and 15:34). This would indicate a time before the Maccabean wars, when these questions heated the religious anxieties of the day. The apocalypse in *Jubilees* 23:16ff. makes no reference to the person of Antiochus IV or to his pollution of the temple and his edict. This is a highly unusual omission for a document written by a person of the period, especially with its anxious concern for the threat posed by the Hellenists. These considerations lead Nickelsburg to the conclusion that *Jubilees* was written during the time of the Hellenistic reforms close to 168 B.C.E. The writer pre-dated Antiochus’

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7 It surprises me that Nickelsburg does not see 23:21 as an indication of the desecration of Antiochus IV; “and they will pollute the holy of holies with their pollution.” While this passage describes specifically the activity of the hellenized Jews, this could speak to their participation with the Syrians.