Mastema in the Qumran Literature and the Book of Jubilees

James C. VanderKam

Top-ranking evil figures go by various names or titles in Second Temple Jewish literature—Belial and Satan are just two of them. It is not always clear why a particular designation is dominant in a work, but presumably ancient writers had their reasons. Among the texts found at Qumran, the preferred name is Belial. It occurs some 88 times as a proper noun, while it figures as a noun meaning “worthlessness” or the like just four times. “Mastema,” in contrast, appears eighteen times, and, according to M. Abegg, it is always an abstract noun (“hatred”), never a name. The author of the book of Jubilees, however, normally calls the leader of the forces of evil by a name consisting of Mastema alone or with a title—leader/angel or prince—prefaced to the word used as an abstract noun; and he mentions Belial just once (1:20). With the differences in nomenclature, there are nevertheless, some interesting overlaps between the usages of the Qumran texts and Jubilees.

The purpose of this essay is to examine how the writer of Jubilees presents Mastema—the associations he makes with him and the kinds of actions he attributes to him. The subject of Mastema is worth studying in itself because he is a relatively important character in the book, but there is an additional reason for pursuing the topic. Two experts on the book of Jubilees, Michael Segal and James Kugel, have argued that Mastema is presented inconsistently in the book; the point is one part of their larger (differing) theses that Jubilees does not come from a single writer. In order to test whether their views fit the

---

1 It is a pleasure to contribute this essay to a volume in honor of John Collins, who has been a scholar’s scholar through his numerous and rich contributions to our field. That I have written about Mastema in this context is purely coincidental!

2 The figures come from M. Abegg, The Dead Sea Scrolls Concordance, vol. 1: The Non-Biblical Texts from Qumran [Part One] (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 146–47 and 489. The term נטן appears just five times (see Abegg, The Dead Sea Scrolls Concordance, vol. 1: The Non-Biblical Texts from Qumran [Part Two] [Leiden: Brill, 2003], 696), but broken contexts make it difficult to tell how it is used.

evidence, I will survey the information about Mastema in *Jubilees*. To set that information in a wider context, I will review first how the term מָשְׁטַמָּה is used in texts found in the caves near Khirbet Qumran.4

**1 מָשְׁטַמָּה in the Qumran Literature**

In the Qumran texts, the term מָשְׁטַמָּה is in most, if not all, cases a noun meaning “hostility.” It is possible that it is also the name of an evil being, but that is not certain.

A. מָשְׁטַמָּה as an Abstract Noun: In some cases, the context leaves no doubt that the word is to be rendered “hostility.” Consider these instances.

1. 1QM 13:4 and 4Q286 (4QBer4) 7 ii 2. In the thirteenth column in the cave 1 copy of the *War Scroll* there is a curse against Belial: מָשְׁטַמָּה. Virtually the same expression appears in 4Q286 7 ii 2, although it lacks the conjunction at the beginning and places a suffix on the final word (מָשְׁטַמָּהְו). The passage in the *War Scroll* is part of a section in which various leaders bless God “and curse Belial and all the spirits of his lot” (131–2). The context for the malediction on Belial reads: “And cursed be Belial for the plan of hatred, and accursed in his guilty authority. Cursed be all the spirits of his lot for their wicked plan, and accursed be they for all their works of filthy uncleanness; for they are the lot of darkness, but the lot of God is for light eternal” (13:4–6).5 The passage is especially interesting for associating Belial with the noun מָשְׁטַמָּה.

---


5 The translations are from Y. Yadin, *The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 320. I have italicized the words that translate the Hebrew expression cited above.