As is well known, Jubilees retells the biblical story in Genesis and the early chapters of Exodus, presenting an adapted version of the biblical narrative from the creation of the world to Moses’ life in Egypt. This author expands the biblical story in several ways, including the placement of much legislation from later parts of the Torah into the patriarchal narratives and many narrative expansions of the basic biblical story. But one aspect of this rewriting has received little explicit attention in previous studies: the prayer texts in Jubilees. Since none of these prayer texts has an exact biblical counterpart, we may consider them as compositions by the author of Jubilees. Like some of the speeches created for theological histories such as Joshua through 2 Kings and 1–2 Chronicles, these prayers may enhance the view of the theological and spiritual sensibilities of Jubilees’ author and his community.

Written in the mid-second century B.C.E., these prayers in Jubilees provide an important witness to early biblical interpretation and to notions of Jewish prayer. The plan of this paper is to offer a working definition of a prayer text, then survey those texts in Jubilees which we consider as prayers, and finally to determine the particular orientation of these prayers, and the theological contribution they make to the understanding of this text.

A few notes on the texts themselves precede the discussion. Although Jubilees was composed in Hebrew, none of these prayer texts appear among the surviving Hebrew manuscripts of Jubilees known to us, those discovered at Qumran. Additionally, only one of these prayers is witnessed in the Latin fragments of Jubilees found in the Ambrosian library in Milan and published by Ceriani.\(^1\) Thus, any study of these

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prayers must be based on the translation of the text into Ge’ez, i.e. classical Ethiopic. This study relies on the critical text most recently established by James VanderKam and (except where otherwise indicated) also uses his translation of Jubilees.

It is a pleasure to honor Betsy Halpern Amaru with this study because of her vigorous and innovative work on the Book of Jubilees. She has provided unique insights into the role of the covenant and land in this and other books of “Rewritten Bible” of this same general era, and also developed a sophisticated view of the ways in which the expanded roles of women in this work might be interpreted. Finally, I am still grateful for the opportunity to participate in a Ge’ez reading group in Jerusalem in spring 1997 with her and Esther Chazon, where I first read some of these texts. Those sessions provide a key ingredient in this study.

A Working Definition of Prayer

Several definitions of prayer emerge in the recent study of ancient prayer texts, especially those from the Second Temple and Qumran eras. A very broad definition prefaces a recent anthology of prayers from Jewish, Christian and Classical traditions: “An address to or celebration of a deity.” Eileen Schuller has written extensively on prayer texts from Qumran and recently she spoke of prayers as “words addressed

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2 James VanderKam, in Textual and Historical Studies in the Book of Jubilees (HSM, 14; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), discerned that in places where the Hebrew text from Qumran is extant, the Ge’ez translation offers a rather accurate translation of the Hebrew version.

3 James C. VanderKam, transl., The Book of Jubilees (CSCO 511, Scriptores Aethiopici, tomos 88; Louvain: E. Peeters, 1989). In cases of important words or motifs, we attempt to discern their significance through a limited comparison with other usages of the words in Ge’ez texts.


5 Betsy Halpern-Amaru, The Empowerment of Women in the Book of Jubilees (JSJSup 60; Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 1999).