Chap. 23 of Jubilees has attracted the attention of numerous scholars. After narrating the events surrounding Abraham's death, the angelic speaker of Jubilees discourses in this chapter on the subject of human longevity, noting that before the flood humans lived far longer than in Moses' own time, and informing Moses of a time to come when the maximum human lifespan will be shortened even more. Specifically, the angel refers to a wicked generation to come and the series of afflictions—shortened lifespan, premature aging, and other ills—that this wicked age will bring down on humanity (Jub. 23:12-25). However, the angel goes on to suggest that these afflictions will in turn be followed by a period of restoration and renewal, in which the human race will regain its former glory and in which the human lifespan will even surpass the nine hundred-plus years enjoyed before the flood.

This lengthy digression has been seen by many students of Jubilees as the principal eschatological passage in the book. Indeed, it is sometimes described as an "apocalypse" within the book itself, since this passage uniquely and specifically reveals events to come about long after the period of the book's alleged composition (the time of Moses), events that presumably were taking place or about to take place in the time of Jubilees' actual date of composition, somewhere near the start of the second century BCE. The revelation to Moses about the wicked age to come—as

* Quotations from Jubilees are from J.C. VanderKam, The Book of Jubilees (CSCO 510-11, Scriptores Aethiopici 87-88; Louvain: Peeters, 1989) vol. 2.

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well as the future repudiation of that wickedness and Israel's eventual restoration—would seem to connect Jubilees with other apocalyptic writings of the second temple period, some of which similarly foresee a period of decline to be followed by a radical restoration of Israel's fortunes.

The Genre of Jubilees 23

I do not wish to deny the eschatological character of this chapter nor, consequently, the connection between it and other second temple apocalypses. And yet, I believe that something remains to be seen about the overall nature, the genre, one might say, of Jubilees 23. The clue to its nature is to be found at the very end of the chapter. There, having finished his grave predications about Israel's future history, the angelic speaker of Jubilees turns to Moses and says:

Now you, Moses, write down these words, because this is how it is written and entered in the testimony of the heavenly tablets for the history of eternity. .

Jub. 23:32

One might well wonder at the purpose of this commandment. For, surely, the angel is not telling Moses to write down the contents of Jubilees as a whole—he had told Moses to do that long before, at the beginning of the book (Jub.1:27-29; 2:1). Besides, the angel tells Moses to write down "these words"; the reference is apparently to specifically those things that have just been imparted to Moses, namely, the dire predictions that make up the bulk of Jubilees 23. But why should the angel stipulate here the writing down of this chapter, this revelation?

The act of writing referred to here, in my opinion, is not that of a chapter of the book of Jubilees per se, but of another of Moses' reported compositions, namely, Psalm 90 (which begins, "A prayer of Moses, the man of God"). In other words, I believe that what Jubilees is proposing to give us in chap. 23 is the "raw material" of a revelation which Moses was then urged to write down and restate in his own words: that restatement, says Jubilees, is none other than our canonical Psalm 90. If so, then Jubilees 23 is in some sense a "commentary" on Psalm 90 (or, at least, part of it), but a commentary of a rather backhanded sort: instead of taking a verse