

# Studies in the Book of Jubilees

Edited by  
MATTHIAS ALBANI, JÖRG FREY  
and ARMIN LANGE

*Texte und Studien zum  
Antiken Judentum*  
65

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Mohr Siebeck

Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum

Herausgegeben von  
Martin Hengel und Peter Schäfer

65





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**Matthias Albani**

**Jörg Frey**

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*To Hermann Lichtenberger*



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## Preface

The official publication of the entirety of the Jubilees manuscripts from Qumran cave 4 in 1994 provided an improved textual basis for the study of the *Book of Jubilees*, a document of central relevance for the understanding of ancient Judaism. Facing these new possibilities, a research symposium on the *Book of Jubilees* was organized jointly by members of the Universities of Leipzig and Tübingen, which took place in Leipzig on March 1–3, 1996. The present volume contains most of the papers read at the Leipzig symposium, together with additional contributions.

On behalf of all the participants of the symposium, we would like to express our thanks to the Theological Faculty of Leipzig University, and particularly to Prof. Hans Seidel, for their support and warm welcome. We are also thankful to the “Vereinigung der Freunde der Universität Tübingen e.V.” for funding the translation of the article by F. García Martínez. The editors of TSAJ, Prof. Dr. Martin Hengel and Prof. Dr. Peter Schäfer, accepted the collection in their series, and Georg Siebeck ventured to publish a volume on a highly specialized subject, providing us also with unparalleled support. To all of them we would like to express our sincere thanks.

The volume is dedicated in gratitude to Prof. Dr. H. Lichtenberger, who not only provided his assistants, the two editors from Tübingen, time to organize the project and to work on the present volume but also supplied invaluable advice.

Leipzig / Tübingen, July 1997

Matthias Albani  
Jörg Frey  
Armin Lange



## I. Introductory Issues and Biblical Interpretation



# The Origins and Purposes of the *Book of Jubilees*

by

JAMES C. VANDERKAM

Recent discoveries of fragmentary Hebrew copies of the *Book of Jubilees* have made a significant contribution to our understanding of the book in a variety of ways. The Qumran manuscripts have, of course, given us the first real glimpses at parts of the text in its original language,<sup>1</sup> while the number of available copies of the Ethiopic version has also increased considerably.<sup>2</sup> These witnesses have contributed to the solution of a number of textual problems and in some cases have added new ones.

The Qumran discoveries in particular have also placed broader questions about the *Book of Jubilees* in a wider perspective. There can be no serious doubt that there was a connection of some kind between the author and his book and the Qumran community and its texts. *Jubilees* was almost certainly one of those older authoritative works inherited by the Qumran community and used for the insight it gave into the interpretation of Genesis and Exodus. It has become evident from more recently accessible texts that not every detail of *Jubilees* carried the day at Qumran. The parade example is its calendar which rejects any lunar calculations (6:17–38); the cave 4 calendars show that, while they share the 364-day solar calendar with *Jubilees*, they follow the practice of *1 Enoch* 72–82 in aligning solar and lunar sequences and harmonizing them with each other. In addition, 4Q252 (4QCommentary on Genesis<sup>a</sup>) rectifies *Jubilees'* error in claiming that the 150 days of Gen 8:3 constituted five months (compare *Jub.* 5:27 with 4Q252 1 i 8–10).

The Qumran corpus allows one to view *Jubilees* within more of its ancient context and invites fundamental questions regarding the circumstances in which the book arose and the purposes it served. These two inter-related issues are addressed in this paper. What circumstances led the author to recast

<sup>1</sup> The copies from caves 1, 2, 3, and 11, with one fragment from cave 4 (4Q221 1), are assembled in VanderKam, *Textual and Historical Studies*, 18–91. These texts may also be found in VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees*, vol. 1 where the textual evidence in all languages available at the time is collected. The official publication of the 4Q copies of *Jubilees* is by VanderKam and Milik, “*Jubilees*” in *Qumran Cave 4. VIII Parabiblical Texts Part I* (DJD 13; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994) 1–140.

<sup>2</sup> For these see VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees*, vol. 1.

Genesis 1 – Exodus 20 in the way he adopted for the book? Why did he choose to present the biblical story in somewhat different form, by contextualizing it by means of an introductory chapter, interpolating new material, and excising certain passages? With whom was he arguing, what was he defending, and why? These questions have occupied experts from the beginning of studies on *Jubilees* and they will no doubt continue to elicit discussion, but, in light of our present increased knowledge, what can be said about them? The essay first turns to the history of scholarship on the questions of origin and purpose; the second part sets forth what appear to be the primary characteristics of the book and offers my suggestions for answers to the questions of origins and purpose.

## I. A History of Scholarship

The survey that follows touches upon some of the more important treatments of the questions of origin and purpose and is not meant to be exhaustive.

### A. 1850–1900

The first western scholar to study the *Book of Jubilees* in detail was Dillmann who published both a translation and a critical text of *Jubilees*. At the end of his German translation which appeared in 1850–51 Dillmann included a section devoted to introductory issues concerning the work.<sup>3</sup> He noted that the author attached great importance to the chronology of the early history and the lives of the ancestors.<sup>4</sup> Also, all his extra-biblical information is said to have come through revelation. The author added material to the biblical base, solved problems in it, and read traits of later Judaism back into the earliest times, but he engaged in these exercises, “nicht um die kanonische Genesis zu verdrängen, sondern um sie zu ergänzen”.<sup>5</sup> He describes *Jubilees* as standing relative to Genesis-Exodus “im Verhältniss eines erweiterten Targum’s, eines Commentars zur Urgeschichte, wie er dem Geiste und den Bedürfnissen jener späteren Jahrhunderte entsprach.”<sup>6</sup> Dillmann also provided a list of contemporary ideas that the author read into the pre-history of his people: angelology and demonology, the patriarchs as models of virtue, Israel’s strong hatred for its ancient enemies, the pre-eminent position occupied by Israel, exaltation and deification of the law, improving the manner in which the stories are told, and contemporary views about increasing corruption, judgment, and the mes-

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<sup>3</sup> The introductory analysis is on pp. 72–96.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 72–73.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 76.

sianic age.<sup>7</sup> Dillmann concluded that the book was to be dated to the first century CE because the writer knew the *Book of Enoch* (also written in that century) yet presupposed an existing temple cult (hence it antedated 70 CE).<sup>8</sup>

One of the earliest treatments of the book was a brief contribution by Jellinek in his *Bet ha-Midrasch* in which he offered arguments for the position that *Jubilees* was originally written in Hebrew. He called it “eine essenische Tendenzschrift” directed against the Pharisaic view that one should determine the dates for the beginning of months and hence for festivals by observing the moon. He dated the work to pre-Christian times.<sup>9</sup>

In 1856 Beer advocated an unusual thesis for the book and author.<sup>10</sup> He found in *Jubilees* such a mixture of agreements and disagreements with the views of various groups that he concluded it had to be sectarian. He drew up a list of the book’s traits (e.g., solar calendar and the related chronology, the festival of weeks in the middle of the third month, laws traced to patriarchal times to separate the chosen people from gentiles, agrarian laws related to Palestine but applicable to other lands, a high view of the levitical priesthood, strong rejection of mixing with gentiles, emphasis on biblical passages from which non-traditional Jewish practices and interpretations could be derived, panegyric on Joseph, Levi, and Judah but the opposite for Esau, spiritual immortality without resurrection, angelology, demonology, dreams, and emphasis on the number seven).<sup>11</sup> He noted agreements in readings with the LXX and the Samaritan pentateuch and thought the author had both before him as he wrote. After a discussion of different kinds of Samaritans and their presence in Egypt, he concluded that the book arose from Dosithean, Samaritan-Essene and other analogous sources in Egypt and farther west in North Africa:

Das B. d. Jub. stellt das spezifische und sich abschliessende Judenthum in seiner grössten Starrheit und Exclusivität als Weltreligion hin, ausser welcher kein Heil zu finden sei. Die Geschichte aller Völker geht nach seiner Darstellung in die Urgeschichte der Juden auf; die Gesetze des Mosaismus sind für alle Menschen gegeben, sie sind der einzige Rettungsanker der Menschheit, um nicht in den Schlund heidnischer Sittenlosigkeit hinab gestürzt zu werden.<sup>12</sup>

Thus the book combined a claim to exclusivity with a much wider perspective.

Rönsch, whose major contribution to scholarship on *Jubilees* was his edition of and extensive commentary on the sections of the book preserved in

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 81–87.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 88–94.

<sup>9</sup> His treatment of *Jubilees* can be found in vol. 3, beginning at p. ix.

<sup>10</sup> *Das Buch der Jubiläen und sein Verhältniss zu den Midraschim*. Frankel also defended an Egyptian origin for the book and connected it with the temple of Onias in Leontopolis (311–16; 380–400).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 56–58.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 79.

Latin, also wrote regarding introductory issues. He agreed with Dillmann that *Jubilees* came from the first century CE and spotted several “Zielpunkte” in the book<sup>13</sup>: a critical approach to the biblical text (explaining what was not clear, filling in gaps, etc.), an apologetic aspect (presenting the patriarchs as pious and practicing the law before Moses), a concern to strengthen the law (e.g., sabbath rules). Yet, and most surprisingly, he discerned in it a conciliatory *Tendenz* (an attempt to bring divergent Jewish groups together by agreeing with one at one time, another at another time); moreover, he isolated a political concern (Esau represents Rome, while the book also opposes the growing sect of the Nazarenes or Christians by issuing warnings about spilling blood – a point directed against the Lord’s Supper, etc.) and a religious, edifying approach. He thought that if the writer belonged to any party, it would have been the Pharisees.<sup>14</sup> He wrote the following remarkable description of the book:

Es war das jüdische Unionsbuch, eine Formula Concordiae filiorum Israel. Offen gegen die Heiden und verhüllt, aber nicht minder energisch, gegen die Christen gerichtet, sollte es, indem es die einigenden Gebräuche auf die gemeinsamen Urväter zurückführte und ihnen das Siegel eines göttlichen Ursprungs aufdrückte, ein lauter Weck- und Mahnruf sein an die Israeliten aller Secten und Glaubensschattirungen und Stämme, das Banner ihres *levitischen* Monotheismus hoch zu halten Angesichts des auch die Heiden zum Bruderbunde mit aufrufenden *universalistischen* Monotheismus.<sup>15</sup>

In stark contrast to the views of Beer, Rönsch, and Singer that were so wide of the mark, Bohn appears to have been the first to defend what now appears to be the correct date for the *Book of Jubilees*; naturally, proper historical placement of the book opened different options for understanding the intent of the author in penning his work. His insightful remarks are worth quoting in full.

Das Buch der Jubiläen ist um die Mitte des zweiten vorchristlichen Jahrhunderts, nach der Makkabäischen Erhebung, geschrieben und zwar in der Zeit, während welcher die Partei der Chasidim, aus deren Kreise es hervorgegangen ist, mit dem neuen Herrscherhause noch Hand in Hand ging. Der Verfasser beabsichtigte, nach dem nivellierenden Druck der syrischen Religionsverfolgung, durch Erinnerung an die grosse Vergangenheit der Väter des Volkes dasselbe in sich national zu festigen, er wollte durch Einschärfung des Gesetzes und durch Ermahnung zur treuen Übung derselben, mit dazu beitragen, dass die väterliche Religion in alter Reinheit wiederhergestellt und die aus der Syrerzeit nachwirkenden fremden, heidnischen Einflüsse überwunden und ausgeschieden würden, um so die grossen äusseren Erfolge der gewaltigen makkabäischen

<sup>13</sup> Rönsch, 496–523. Singer also read the book against a Christian background, arguing that its insistence on exact obedience to the entire law was directed against the Pauline abrogation of the Mosaic law and his teaching about the universality of salvation (264–322).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 531.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 520–21.

Erhebung auch durch das Wiedererblühen eines rein jüdischen, nationalen und religiösen Volkslebens innerlich festigen zu helfen.<sup>16</sup>

Not all of Bohn's insights were to be accepted by scholars, but already on the fiftieth anniversary of western study of *Jubilees* he had, much as Jellinek had more than four decades before, correctly observed that it was hardly an anti-christian work but a Hasidic book aimed at concerns that arose in connection with the Hellenizing crisis in pre- and early Maccabean times. His studies may be seen as concluding an early period of research, in which there had been what turned out to be several misguided attempts to find the historical place of the book (Egypt, for example) and to identify the circumstances in which the author labored (e.g., debates with Christians).

### B. 1900 – the Qumran Discoveries

A second period in *Jubilees* scholarship is marked by influential translations of the text into German and English. Littmann, in the introduction to his translation of *Jubilees* for *Die Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments*, wrote a few words about the time and purpose of the work. He agreed with Bohn (then a student) that the book most likely came from Maccabean times (passages such as 38:14 were best explainable under this hypothesis), but he added some unusual thoughts about the ways in which the book betrays the priestly status of the author:

Der jerusalemische Priester kennzeichnet sich m.E. besonders auch dadurch, dass er durchaus auf dem Boden des Priesterkodex (P) steht, dass er die von jenem eingeschlagene Richtung weiter verfolgt, seine genealogischen und chronologischen Spekulationen aufnimmt und bis ins Extrem fortsetzt. Ja, auch im biblischen Texte muss er, vielleicht unbewusst, seine Verwandschaft mit dem Verf. des PC gefühlt haben, da er sich in seiner Darstellung der Jub. meist an P in der Genesis anlehnt, die Erzählungen von J und E aber nur summarisch behandelt oder ganz auslässt.<sup>17</sup>

Martin, the scholar who translated *Jubilees* into French, devoted a long essay to introductory questions about the book and its author.<sup>18</sup> He offered the following comprehensive description of the writer's goal in composing the book:

Le but final, que l'auteur ne perd jamais de vue, la pensée qui inspire et anime toute son œuvre, c'est l'exultation de la loi, du sacerdoce lévitique et d'Israël: de la loi et du sacerdoce, par la mise en relief de la divinité et de l'antiquité de leur origine, et des

<sup>16</sup> Bohn, 172.

<sup>17</sup> Littmann, 2.37. He cites as an example the fact that *Jub.* 32:17 reproduces the story about the change of Jacob's name to Israel from Gen 35:10 (P), but the book omits the other story about the new name in Gen 32:25–32 (J or JE). See the negative comments of Martin on this point (343–44).

<sup>18</sup> Martin, "Le Livre des Jubilees," 321–44; 502–33.

autres motifs qui doivent porter Israël à observer l'une et à honorer l'autre; – d'Israël, par sa glorification et celle de ses Patriarches, surtout au regard des Gentils. Il impose et célèbre le présent par le passé.<sup>19</sup>

Among the most important teachings in the book Martin singled out these: 1. legal observances (circumcision, sabbath); 2. God, creation, and revelation; 3. angels and demons; 4. humanity and sin; 5. judgment and retribution; messianic kingdom and messiah.<sup>20</sup>

Charles, as one might expect, made crucial contributions to the subjects under consideration. Already in the introduction to his edition of the Ethiopic text, published in 1895, he called *Jubilees* “a haggadic commentary on Genesis … the chief and practically sole monument of legalistic Pharisaism” with its “hard and inexorable legalism under whose yoke … creation was subject from the beginning and must be subject for evermore.”<sup>21</sup> Charles was following a tradition of identifying the author as a Pharisee, despite Jellinek’s early proposal that he was an Essene. Some time later, in his English translation and commentary on the book, Charles described the frustration he had felt in his earlier endeavors to understand *Jubilees*. He had hoped that the commentary would appear shortly after the edition (he had already published a translation of *Jubilees*), but its appearance was delayed:

… I felt that somehow I had failed to give a satisfactory interpretation of the text, though at the time I could not understand wherein my disability lay. A year or two later when making a special study of the Testaments of the XII. Patriarchs, I came to discover that the source of my failure lay in my acceptance of the traditional view that *Jubilees* was written in the first century of the Christian era. So long as I wrote from this standpoint, my notes became more and more a laboured apologetic for the composition of this work in the first century.<sup>22</sup>

By this time Charles had determined that *Jubilees* came from Hasmonean times (his section called “Previous Inquiries” [xxii–xxvii] shows that he knew Bohn’s article) and that the dynasty was important for understanding the author’s purpose: “The difficulties that beset almost every page of *Jubilees* vanish for the most part when once we understand that it was written by a Pharisaic upholder of the Maccabean dynasty, who was probably a priest.”<sup>23</sup> Thus Charles continued to think the book was a pharisaic work despite the fact that he now viewed it as a product of a much earlier period in Jewish history. As

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 322. He phrases the point more briefly on p. 323: “Les Jubilés sont donc l’apologie de la loi et d’Israël par l’histoire du peuple de Dieu depuis la création jusqu’à l’exode.”

<sup>20</sup> The second part of his essay (pp. 502–33) is dedicated to explicating these topics.

<sup>21</sup> Charles, *Maṣḥafa kufālē or the Ethiopic Version of the Hebrew Book of Jubilees*, ix.

<sup>22</sup> Charles, *The Book of Jubilees or the Little Genesis*, vii. It is puzzling that he writes this because in his 1895 volume (in the passage quoted above) he had dated the book to the first century BCE.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., viii.

for its defence of Maccabean rulers, he found that the book reflected the activities, accomplishments, and offices of John Hyrcanus in particular.

Charles's most programmatic statement about the origins and purpose of *Jubilees* came in the introduction to his commentary, under the heading "Short Account of the Book".

The Book of Jubilees was written in Hebrew by a Pharisee between the year of the accession of Hyrcanus to the high-priesthood in 135 and his breach with the Pharisees some years before his death in 105 B.C. It is the most advanced pre-Christian representative of the midrashic tendency, which had already been at work in the Old Testament Chronicles. As the Chronicler had rewritten the history of Israel and Judah from the basis of the Priests' Code, so our author re-edited from the Pharisaic standpoint of his time the history of events from the creation to the publication, or, according to the author's view, the republication of the law on Sinai. In the course of re-editing he incorporated a large body of traditional lore, which the midrashic process had put at his disposal, and also not a few fresh legal enactments, that the exigencies of the past had called forth. His work constitutes an enlarged Targum on Genesis and Exodus<sup>24</sup>, in which difficulties in the biblical narrative are solved, gaps supplied, dogmatically offensive elements removed, and the genuine spirit of later Judaism infused into the primitive history of the world. His object was to defend Judaism against the attacks of the hellenistic spirit that had been in the ascendant one generation earlier and was still powerful, and to prove that the law was of everlasting validity. From our author's contentions and his embittered attacks on the paganisers and apostates, we may infer that Hellenism had urged that the levitical ordinances of the law were only of transitory significance, that they had not been observed by the founders of the nation, and that the time had now come for them to be swept away, and for Israel to take its place in the brotherhood of the nations. Our author regarded all such views as fatal to the very existence of Jewish religion and nationality.<sup>25</sup>

As we will see below, despite the mistaken pharisaic, pro-Maccabean thesis proffered by Charles, his understanding of the background and purpose of the book are accurate and insightful.

Charles enlarged on the midrashic character of the work and its parallels with 1–2 Chronicles in the section of the introduction entitled "Jubilees – A Product of the Midrashic Tendency at Work in the Old Testament Chronicler, but Represented by Its Author as an Esoteric Tradition".<sup>26</sup> Here again he highlights the notion that the patriarchs had observed the law, as David is depicted in Chronicles as observing the priestly code before its actual existence. As another midrashic feature he adds that, with Chronicles, "our author found many statements in Genesis that did not square with his presuppositions, and accordingly we find that in many instances he alters the text before him, and in others he simply omits."<sup>27</sup> The demands of his historical context compelled

<sup>24</sup> This recalls Dillmann's use of the same term.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., xiii–xiv.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., xlvi–li.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., xlviii.

the author to present “the law as superior to time, though revealed in time, and valid not only unto eternity but from eternity.”<sup>28</sup> Like the heavenly pattern of the tabernacle (Exod 25:9–40; 26:30), the stipulations of the law had been engraved on heavenly tablets from the beginning, later to be revealed to chosen individuals from time to time. As for the esoteric tradition, Charles thought that the book presents itself as “a supplement to, and an interpretation of, the Pentateuch, which it calls ‘the first law’ (vi. 22).”<sup>29</sup> This tradition had been handed down in the priestly line from father to son since the time of Enoch.

In the section called “Object of Jubilees – the Defence and Exposition of Judaism from the Pharisaic Standpoint of the Second Century B.C.” (li–lvi) Charles again claimed that “the object of our author is to defend Judaism against the disintegrating effects of Hellenism” (li) and this, he wrote, the author accomplished in three ways: “(a) by glorifying the law as an eternal ordinance and representing the patriarchs as models of piety; (b) by glorifying Israel and insisting on its separation from the Gentiles; and (c) by denouncing the Gentiles generally and particularly Israel’s national enemies.”<sup>30</sup> He expatiated on each of these points by citing numerous examples to document them (li–lvi).

It is interesting that despite the work of a number of scholars, now including Charles himself, in situating *Jubilees* historically, Büchler could revert to a nineteenth-century view and write two essays, published in 1926 and 1930, in which he argued that a Greek translation of the pentateuch was a source of *Jubilees* which was itself a work composed in Greek and one that contained Jewish Hellenistic ideas and beliefs.<sup>31</sup>

In 1930 the great scholar of halakhah, Albeck, published a study in which he systematically if briefly examined the legal material in *Jubilees* in comparison with what is found in rabbinic sources. It is fair to say that prior to his time the legal material in *Jubilees* had been relatively neglected. As a preface to the study he isolated what he took to be the basic points of *Jubilees*’ teachings about the Torah:

Die Grundanschauung des Buches ist, dass die ganze Thora auf den ‘himmlischen Tafeln’ vom Anfang der Welt aufgezeichnet war, dass ihre Gesetze von den Patriarchen noch vor der Offenbarung am Sinai durch schriftliche und mündliche Überlieferungen

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., xl ix.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., l.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., li. Note his comment under this heading: “With the immeasurable arrogance of Judaism there went necessarily, hand in hand, an immeasurable hatred and contempt of the Gentiles.” (ibid., lv)

<sup>31</sup> Büchler, “Studies in the Book of Jubilees,” *REJ* 82 (1926) 253–74; “Traces des idées et des coutumes hellénistiques dans le Livre des Jubilés,” *REJ* 89 (1930) 321–48.

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