

# 119

## MINISTRIES

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### Testing the Book of Jasher

Often we’re asked about our position on some of the books that are not included in the standard 66 books of the Bible. How should we approach these extra-biblical books? Are there additional books that should be considered inspired by God and on the same level as the rest of the books contained in what we call “Scripture”?

We’ve already looked at one these books called the Book of Jubilees. You can learn more about our position on that particular book by watching our teaching, [Testing the Book of Jubilees](#).

In this teaching, we will be looking at the Book of Jasher.

In the Bible there are two references to an “extra-biblical” book called the Book of Jasher. This book is mentioned in Joshua 10:13 and 2 Samuel 1:18.

#### **Joshua 10:13**

“And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies. [Is this not written in the Book of Jasher?](#) The sun stopped in the midst of heaven and did not hurry to set for about a whole day.”

#### **2 Samuel 1:18**

“And he said it should be taught to the people of Judah; behold, [it is written in the Book of Jasher.](#)”

Jasher is the transliterated form of the Hebrew *Yashar*, which means “upright” or “just.” So an English translation of *Sefer HaYashar* would be the “Book of the Upright” or the “Book of the Just.”

The fact that this book is mentioned twice in the Bible is fascinating, especially considering the context of the two passages. It certainly seems that the book was meaningful and well known among the biblical authors and their original audience.

Regardless of your view of biblical inspiration and the canon of Scripture, you would have to admit that

Jasher would be highly significant with regard to biblical study—at least in terms of giving us a window into the biblical authors’ cultural context and the literature they were familiar with.

The problem, however, is that this book has unfortunately never been found. Indeed, the book of Jasher mentioned in Scripture has been lost to history. All we know of this lost book is what has been recorded for us in Joshua 10:13 and 2 Samuel 1:18.

So what *do* we know about Jasher? Not much.

Scholars have speculated that the book was most likely a gradual collection of Hebrew songs and poems about heroic individuals in Israel. In his peer-reviewed article, “The Mysterious Book of Jasher,” scholar and rabbi, Arthur Chiel, wrote this:

*“It was traditionally assumed that the title referred to historical, heroic figures of the Biblical period who were the subjects of this work. Yet the actual character of the ancient Sefer ha-Yashar remains uncertain. Some scholars have theorized that it was a written collection begun in pre-monarchic Israel and that it was subsequently expanded. Others have suggested that it was a compilation of oral tradition of a very much later period. Possibly, it was part of sacred literary archives begun during the monarchic period to preserve some of the epics of Israel.”*

-Rabbi Arthur Chiel, *The Mysterious Book of Jasher* (Judaism: A Quarterly Journal, Issue No. 103, Vol. 26,) p. 368

As we can see, not much is known about Jasher. Since the book has never been found, scholars can only speculate what it was about.

Some might say, “*But wait! It’s not lost! I’ve read the Book of Jasher!*”

It’s true that some people might have encountered a book by the name of Jasher. In fact, there are at least two books by that name. These books are sometimes said to be the “lost biblical book of Jasher.”

However, none of these books are the same “Book of Jasher” that is mentioned in the Bible since, again, that book has never been found.

The first so-called “Book of Jasher” we’ll look at is a Hebrew Midrash, which was written around the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century. It is essentially a retelling of many early biblical stories, beginning with the events leading up to Cain’s murder of his brother Abel, and ending with the death of Joshua.

Chiel writes:

*“In total, the Book of Jasher is a richly embellished story of the early part of Biblical history, from Adam to Joshua. Its author had resourcefully collected sundry legends and tales connected with events and persons of the early period and had woven them together with a skillfully constructed narrative.”*

-Rabbi Arthur Chiel, *The Mysterious Book of Jasher* (Judaism: A Quarterly Journal, Issue No. 103, Vol. 26,) p. 371

According to scholars, this so-called Book of Jasher is comparable to other Jewish literature that was

written around the same time, such as the Zohar. In the middle ages, there was a lot of literature that was produced and then touted as “older tradition.” One of the ways we know that this Book of Jasher is a later rabbinic invention is that it contains anachronisms. For instance, in Jasher 10, the author describes where the descendants of Noah settled, but includes European names from many centuries after the time of Messiah.

Not only that, there are direct contradictions between this book of Jasher and the Bible. Here are just a few among many:

- Jasher claims that Abram left Haran at the age of 50 (Jasher 13:5). But the Bible says that Abram left Haran at the age of 75 (Genesis 12:4)
- Jasher claims that Jacob fled to Eber’s home to escape Esau (Jasher 29:11). But the Bible says that Jacob went to the home of his uncle, Laban (Genesis 28:5).
- Jasher claims that God sent 15 plagues upon Egypt (Jasher 80:2-51). But the Bible says that God sent 10 plagues (Exodus 7-12).
- Jasher claims that the Red Sea was divided into 12 parts (Jasher 81:38). But the Bible says that the Red Sea was divided into two (Exodus 14:22).

In addition to contradicting the Bible, this book of Jasher also contains some problematic teachings.

For instance, in Jasher 42:30-41, Joseph visits his mother’s grave, and cries out for her to speak to him. Joseph then hears the voice of his mother Rachel from the grave, reassuring him and telling him to trust in the Lord.

Obviously this is problematic considering the fact that necromancy is considered an abomination to the Lord and it’s forbidden in the Torah (Deuteronomy 18:11-12). To consider that Joseph committing such an extreme sin and for it only to be recorded in the book of Jasher is rather absurd.

There is another book by name of Jasher, which was written by a man named Jacob Ilive (*ee-liv*). Ilive ran a printing establishment in London, and in 1751 he published a book titled “The Book of Jasher,” which he falsely claimed to have been translated into English from a Hebrew scroll discovered in Gazna.

Ilive was a deist who rejected orthodox Christian theology. He often printed and handed out pamphlets promoting his unorthodox views. Ilive’s *Book of Jasher* was simply another outlet for him to express his ideas.

Chiel writes:

*“Ilive’s The Book of Jasher consists of thirty-seven chapters which begin with the Creation story and extend to the rule of “Jasher, the son of Caleb who judged Israel in Shiloh.” Jasher is represented as an adjutant of Moses, along with Joshua. But even a casual reading of this work reveals the book’s real purpose: the rejection of Revelation. Jethro emerges as the “founding father” of Israel’s law code. It is Jethro who convokes Moses and the seventy elders on Mt. Sinai where he instructs them about the governance of Israel. Here, then, was the real intent of The Book of Jasher: to challenge the credibility of the Pentateuch and to diminish altogether the role of Moses.”*

-Rabbi Arthur Chiel, *The Mysterious Book of Jasher* (Judaism: A Quarterly Journal, Issue No. 103, Vol. 26,) p. 373

Ilive's book was quickly recognized as an obvious fabrication, and he was actually sentenced to three years in prison in 1756 for his fraudulent claims.

In conclusion, there is no evidence that we've ever found the book of Jasher mentioned in the Bible. There are no quotes from a book of Jasher and no mention of it throughout early Jewish and Christian history. There's nothing in the Dead Sea Scrolls, early rabbinic writings, or the Christian church fathers. It's not until the Middle Ages that Jasher comes on the scene, which not-so-coincidentally was right around the time when lots of other mysterious religious texts were being produced and falsely passed off as older tradition.

When we examine the books that are called "Jasher" today, it's easy to see that neither of them are the "lost biblical book." One is a later rabbinic writing from the Middle Ages, and the other is an obvious hoax written by a heretic to push an anti-biblical agenda. If anyone says they've read the Book of Jasher mentioned in the Bible, they haven't. It's probably one of these two later books.

Indeed, it seems that all we can really know about the true book of Jasher is what's recorded for us in Joshua 10:13 and 2 Samuel 1:18.

*We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at [www.testeverything.net](http://www.testeverything.net)*

**Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.**

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