

Aspects of Halakah and the Calendar in *Jubilees*

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Jubilees was written with the intention of providing an authoritative and divinely inspired account of what God revealed to Moses during the 40 days Moses was on Mt. Sinai. It is an example of a “rewritten Bible” and “presents itself in no uncertain terms as an absolutely authoritative work whose divine message compels acceptance and obedience.” (VanderKam 2001, 12) *Jubilees* was originally written in Hebrew and preserved in Ethiopic as well as in fragmentary form in Greek and Latin texts by the Church Fathers. It was not until the mid 1800’s that missionaries discovered the complete book of *Jubilees* among Ethiopic manuscripts. A number of copies of *Jubilees* have been found in caves 4Q, 1Q, 3Q and 11Q, the earliest among them dating to approximately 125-100 BC. It was clearly an important document for the *Yahad* and possibly for other groups as well if caves 3Q and 11Q were used to store scrolls brought from Jerusalem by the Zealots during the Great Revolt.

Davenport argues that *Jubilees* was redacted several times and contains material from three different periods, the earliest being pre-Maccabean. VanderKam sees the book as the essential work of one author who remains unidentified in the text. Halpern suggest that the ‘land theology’ of the book indicates that it was written in a period of expansion “in opposition to a complacent, automatic anticipation of the end-time.” (Halpern-Amuru, 5) For this reason she favours a later dating. The *Damascus Document* refers to a “Book of the Divisions of the Times into their Jubilees and Weeks” which provides convincing evidence that the book must have existed before 100 BC. R.H. Charles sees in the description found in *Jubilees* of Jacob’s battle

with Esau parallels with the description found in 1 Maccabees of a battle fought by Judas Maccabees. VanderKam notes that *Jubilees* polemic against nudity may reflect the construction of a gymnasium in Jerusalem in 175 BC. Furthermore, he suggests that *Jubilees* is aware of *Book of Dreams* found in the Enoch corpus and written sometime after 164 BC. *Jubilees* gives no evidence of separating from the broader community suggesting that it was written before the formation of the *Yahad*. If the wicked priest mentioned in *Yahad* documents is identified with Jonathan (154-42 BC) or Simon (142-34 BC) then *Jubilees* must date around 160-150 BC. (VanderKam, 21) As noted by Talmon, “Whoever does not observe the festivals of the year at the same time as the community in which he lives, ceases to be a member of the social body to which he hitherto belonged.” (Talmon, 149) It seems likely that some kind of separation would have soon resulted over the diverging calendars. Sacchi suggest that the reference to a boastful king who attempts to change “times and law” may reference an attempt by Antiochus IV to make changes to the calendar, perhaps resulting in divisions. However, this suggestion relates the fourth beast of Daniels vision to Greece when the third beast which was a four headed leopard is a better candidate.

The revelation contained in *Jubilees* came through an angel of the presence. According to the author, the angel of the Presence was the most elite of angels that were created on the first day of creation. (*Jubilees* 2:2) The term is not found in the Bible although an allusion to such an angel may be found in Isa. 63:9. *Jubilees* identifies this angel with the “angel of God” mentioned in Exodus 14:19 that went before the Israelite army. In another passage in Exodus, God commands the people to obey this angel, “for he will not pardon your transgression; for my Name is in him.” (Exodus 23:20-23) These references to the ‘angel of God’ in Exodus, “suggests a near identification of the angel and God” (VanderKam, 88) and so it is not surprising that the author

of Jubilees attributes to the angel of the Presence what is directly attributed to God in the Biblical narrative.

Jubilees encompasses the time from “[the time of creation until] the time of the new creation.” (Jubilees 1:29). It establishes a chronological system based on the division of history into periods of years, weeks and jubilees. According to this scheme, (a) seven days constitute a week, (b) seven weeks constitute a pentecontad cycle, (c) seven pentecontad cycles constitute a year, (d) seven years constitute a sabbatical cycle, (e) and seven sabbatical cycles constitute a jubilee. (Pfann 2009, 109) These divisions make a theological statement about the importance of the Sabbath. According to Jubilees, the people of Israel were specially entrusted with the keeping of the Sabbath as Gods covenant community. The division of time and history into seven is central to the author of Jubilees in understanding Gods plan for the ages. Unlike the year and the month, the week has no basis in nature but was mandated by God as a part of the creation week. The division of time is found in a number of places in the Penteteuch. The Feast of Weeks, the Day of Jubilee and the length of Passover are based on the number seven. Aspects of the temples service incorporated the number seven, such as the number for sacrifice, the length of time until purification and the number of lamps on the menorah. Seven is also a part of the narrative sections of the Bible, such as the length of Jacob’s service in Haran, the length of the drought in Egypt and the number of times Israel was to march around Jericho. Sacchi suggests that the division of time into sevens is found in a Mesopotamian omen text dating (coincidentally?) to the 7th century BCE. This omen text lists the 7th, 14th, 21st and 28th days as “inauspicious”. He adds in a footnote that the 19th was also included in the list of inauspicious days “but it was a day of mourning”. (Sacchi 2007, 114) There are some significant problems with this theory because it assumes that the first of every month is the first of every week with

the result that we have days unaccounted for at the end of each month. Jubilees measures time in “weeks of years”, a precedent for which is found in the “weeks of years” in Daniel 9.

The emphasis on divisions of time in Jubilees is tedious, but as noted by VanderKam, the point made is quite profound. In *Jubilees*, the events of the Exodus and Conquest take place in the 50th jubilee since the founding of the world. According to Leviticus 25, two events were to take place in the year of Jubilee: the release of Israelite slaves and the return of ancestral property to their original owners. The author of Jubilees transfers these commands for individual Israelites and applies them to the nation of Israel. On the 50th jubilee, Israel was released from captivity in Egypt and returned to their land; the land promised to Shem but stolen by Canaan. Thus, the entire book leads the reader to understand that Israel’s history and actions are a part of a foreordained plan of cosmic proportions and revealed through the divisions of time.

(VanderKam 2001, in loc)

The organization of history into periods based on sevens did not start with *Jubilees*. For example, K. Koch has put forward the following scheme summarized below:

- 480 years from Exodus from Egypt to the 1st temple (40 x 12)
- 480 years from 1st temple to the *end* of Babylonian exile (40 x 12)
- 430 years from 1st temple to *beginning* of Babylonian exile
- Exiled for a period of 50 years = one jubilee (7x7 years) base on *deror* in Jer. 34:17 equal to 50 years (cf. Lev 25:10, 2 Kings 25,27)
- Chronicler puts the Exile at 70 years according to Jer. 25:11 (cf. 2 Chr 36:21)
- 430 years + 70 years = 500 years from building of 1st temple to end of Exile

- 500 years + 480 years = 980 years from Exodus to end of Exile
- 980 years = 2 x 490 – 490 years is a basic unit of time in Daniel 9:24 (Kvanvig 1983, 58)

However, this scheme is somewhat speculative. Why were the initial periods 480 years instead of 490? And what about the discrepancy for the length of exile? This being the case, it is notable that the total period is divisible by “weeks of years”. Based on this evidence, it can be argued that there is precedence in the Bible for *Jubilees* method of dividing and interpreting history.

The content of *Jubilees* is said to be recorded also on heavenly tablets that contain, “the divisions of the years from the time the law and the testimony were created-for the weeks of their jubilees, year by year in their full number, and their jubilees from the time of the new creation. (*Jubilees* 1:29) The existence of these tablets support the idea that all is foreknown and preordained by an all-wise God. Enoch also makes mention of heavenly tablets that contain “all the deeds of men” (1 En. 81:2)

VanderKam notes that, “the writer introduces a significant amount of legal material into the patriarchal narratives.” (VanderKam 2001, in loc) Besides enabling the writer to establish a calendar, it also makes a theological statement - the law is applicable for all generations. It is for this reason that *Jubilees* was thought to have been written after the time of Christ before copies of *Jubilees* was discovered at Qumran. *Jubilees* takes a much more stringent position on the Law than that found in rabbinic sources and shares more in common with *halakha* identified with the Sadducees and the Essenes.

For example:

- 1 Jubilees forbids war on the Sabbath whereas the Rabbis permit defensive warfare and an attack on a besieged city was allowed if it was begun 3 days before the Sabbath.
- 2 Jubilees forbids sex on the Sabbath. The Rabbis do not.
- 3 Drawing water on the Sabbath is forbidden whereas the Rabbis allow the drawing of water in certain cases.
- 4 All travel is forbidden whereas the Rabbis allow travel up to 2000 cubits beyond city wall and on ship if one boarded before the Sabbath. (Sussman)

This *halakah* shares similarities with the Damascus Covenant which similarly prohibits drawing water into a vessel, speaking in vain and walking more than 1000 cubits outside the city on the Sabbath. However, *Jubilees* is unique in demanding death as the penalty for Sabbath desecration.

A primary concern of *Jubilees* is intermarriage. The author takes pains to show that the priestly and royal lines are pure. The only way to be sure is to have a record of who the wives of the patriarchs were. Genesis does not give us this information so *Jubilees* fills in the gaps. For example, we discover that the wife of Levi was Melcah, “one of the daughters of Aram”, a nation on the approved list. By identifying the wife of Levi, the purity of the Levitic priesthood was established. (VanderKam 2001, 114) *Jubilees* tries to explain away those aspects of the genealogy that do not fit with its strict idea of intermarriage. In the case of Judah’s marriage to the Canaanite woman, Betusel, *Jubilees* informs us that two of her sons died and the 3rd never married. Somewhat ironically, only the children of Tamar are counted in the 70 that go to Egypt. Similarly, according to Genesis, Simeon married Debba, another Canaanite woman, but *Jubilees*

add that Simeon “changed his mind later and married another woman from Mesopotamia like his brothers” (Jub 34:20, Vanderkam 2001, 115)

Jubilees also elaborates on Biblical narratives in order to shed light on difficult laws. The story of the creation of man and women is expanded in order to explain the reason for the difference in length of impurity for women after giving birth to a son as opposed to a daughter. The scroll 4Q265, also known as Serekh Damascus, uses a similar argument.

Of particular concern for Jubilees was the dating of the Feast of Weeks, a feast that Jubilees associates with the covenants made by God with Noah, Abraham and Israel. The Pentateuch does not date the feast but only states that it was to begin fifty days from “day after the Sabbath” (Lev. 23:15) *Jubilees* interpreted this passage to refer to the first Sabbath after Passover. This agrees with the calendar in the *MMT* which states that “on the fifteenth thereof [the third month] is the festival of Weeks.” According to the Rabbinic calendar, the day for the count of the Sabbath was to begin the day after the Passover, interpreting ‘Sabbath’ as ‘Festival’ and thus starting the count on the day after the final day of the feast. Sussman states that this difference in dating the beginning of the Feast of Weeks is reflected also in the calendar of the Sadducees as well as in the *MMT* and the *Temple Scroll*. These sources understand the Sabbath from which to start the count for the Feast of Weeks not as “the day after the festival, as interpreted by the Rabbis, but rather means ‘Sunday’ the first day of the week (after the Sabbath).” (Sussman) The Rabbinic interpretation meant that the ‘raising of the Omer’ could fall on a Friday. This difficulty was addressed in Rabbinic. According to the Mishna, “The rule is to harvest it at night, but if it is done by day it is valid, and it overrides the Sabbath.” (m. Menah 10:9, Talmon 1989, 172) It further adds, “The Boethusians also opposed the raising of the Omer on the Sabbath... because the Boethusians who used to say that the Omer may not be reaped at the close

of a festival.” (Talmon 1989, 172) It is clear then those controversies of *halakah* alluded to in Jubilees are also discussed in later rabbinic literature and in sectarian documents.

At the heart of the disagreement over *halakah* was the calendar. The calendar in *Jubilees* was rigid, with no room for compromise or error, its origin based on the heavenly tablets. *Jubilees* is vehemently opposed to the lunar calendar. It warns that, “There will be people who carefully observe the moon with lunar observations because it is corrupt (with respect to) the seasons and is early from year to year by ten days. (Jub. 6:35b-36) In retelling of the story of creation, *Jubilees* removes the moon from the list of celestial bodies that regulate time. “God gave the sun as a great star on earth (to indicate) the days, the weeks, the months, the holy days, the years, the Sabbaths, the jubilees and all the periods of the year.” (Jub 2:9, Sacchi 2007, 101) The sun became the determiner, even of months!

The conflict over the use of the moon in regulating time is also evident in later rabbinic sources. According to one midrash, “‘Because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of His hands, he shall destroy them and not build them up’... ‘the operation of His hands,’ these are the new moons, as is written, ‘And God made the two great luminaries’ (Gen 1:16); it is also written, ‘He appointed the moon for seasons’ (Ps 104:19). These are the heretics, who do not reckon either appointed days or periods; ‘He will destroy them and not build them up’; He will destroy them in this world and He will not build them up in the world to come.”Midr. Ps. 28:5 (Talmon, 168)

Jubilees makes use of a 364 day solar calendar. Because 364 is divisible by 7, it was possible to celebrate the feasts on the same day of the year, each year. An additional advantage of this system is that none of the feasts fell on a Sabbath. *Jubilees* divides the bringing of first fruits

into three, separated by 50 days. These were the feasts of first fruits of the barley, wheat and fruit harvests. This calendar, with its memorial days and pentecost feasts share elements in common with the calendars found in the Temple Scroll and 4QMMT.

A primary objective of Jubilees is to establish the date of the Biblical and non-Biblical feasts by retroactively inserting them into earlier narratives. Because the flood narrative is the first narrative that contains a series of dates, it provided an opportunity to incorporate important information about the solar calendar. Jubilees correlates the divisions of the year with the stages of the flood. It agrees with the MT (as opposed to the LXX) that the flood began 17/2 and ended 27/2 or exactly 364 days. (354 days of lunar calendar + 10 days). On 1/1 Noah began to build an ark, on 1/4 the abyss was closed, on 1/7 the abyss was opened and on 1/10 the mountain tops became visible. These noteworthy events in the flood narrative were tweaked by the author of Jubilees in order to correspond with the 4 *tequfah* which marked the turn of the season and theoretically corresponded with the solstices and equinoxes. Thus the year was divided into 4 periods of 13 weeks for a total of 52 weeks or 364 days. The 4 days that mark the turn of the season are referred to as memorial days, "On the first of the first month, the first of the fourth month, the first of the seventh month, and the first of the tenth month are memorial days and days of the seasons. They are written down and ordained at the division of the year... Noah ordained them as festival for himself... and they enter them on the heavenly tablets. Each one of them consists of 13 weeks." Jub 6:23-29 The *tequfah* days stood outside of the count of the month but inside the count of the year. Thus each month was 30 days, perhaps reflecting its derivation from a 360 DY.

The 364 day calendar and the division of the year into four *tequfah* is also found in the *Astronomical Book of Enoch*. That *Jubilees* is aware of Enoch is indicated not only by the

shared characteristics of their calendars but also by the additional information *Jubilees* provides about Enoch. *Jubilees* describes Enoch as learned sage who gave to men the knowledge of writing and “recounted the weeks of the jubilees, and made known to them the days of the years, and set in order the months and recounted the Sabbaths of the years as we made known to him.” (*Jubilees* 4:18) Although Enoch supports a solar calendar, it does not polemicize against a lunar calendar in the way that *Jubilees* does.

The division of the year into four is also found in the ‘*Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*’ which contain 13 songs, one for each of the Sabbaths in a *tequfah*. Likewise, the *Aramaic Levi Document* states that Levis four sons, Qehat, Yocheved, Gershom, Merari were born in months 1,7,10 and 3 (4). As in *Jubilees* the calendar was central to the theology of the *yahad* and a source of friction with other groups. According to the *Damascus Document*, God raised up the Teacher of Righteousness and his followers and, “revealed to them the secrets of the calendar (CD iii 13, Talmon 1987, 166) *Jubilees* is mentioned specifically in CD which states that “the exact account of their epochs...behold, it is accurately defined in the book of the Divisions of Times into their Jubilees and Weeks” (xvi 2-4) It is clear from these references to *Jubilees* and by the number of copies found at Qumran that *Jubilees* exercised significant influence on that sect.

Jubilees is a fascinating book that raises many questions about the nature of the community to which the author belonged and to what extent it influenced later debates about halakah and the calendar.

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