

# PRAYER FROM ALEXANDER TO CONSTANTINE

A critical anthology

*Introduced and edited by  
Mark Kiley et al.*



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- 8 Daniel 6.  
 9 Jonah 2. Jonah's restoration to his family is not contained in the biblical account, but compare the account in *Lives of the Prophets* 10 in which he returns to his district after the fish spews him out and his mother accompanies him on his subsequent travels.  
 10 Alexandrinus reads *dikasta*, or 'judge'.  
 11 The statement quoted is almost an exact reproduction of the divine promise in Leviticus 26:44. Quotations of divine speech from scripture, especially divine promises, is a common literary device in many apocryphal and pseudepigraphical prayers.

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## PRAYER OF NOAH: JUBILEES 10:3-6

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#### INTRODUCTION

In the Book of Jubilees there is a remarkable prayer in which Noah prays to God to preserve him and his descendants from the influence and the power of the evil spirits, known as the Watchers. Known from old traditions about Enoch (now found in the Books of Enoch), these Watchers were fathered through the offspring of the improper sexual unions between divine beings and human women, described in Genesis 6:1-4 (with parallels in 1 Enoch 15:8-16:1 and in Jubilees 10:1-2, 8-11). In this prayer Noah reminds God of the pattern of divine mercy already shown to the patriarch's offspring and then he implies that God should live up to that image in the present generation. Specifically, he wants God to neutralize the power of evil spirits and even to imprison them; he also prays that God bless his sons that they might continue to populate the earth and may not be corrupted, as the Watchers were before them.

The Book of Jubilees contains a retelling of the story of Israel's origins, paralleling the Book of Genesis and the early chapters of Exodus. It presents an adapted version of the stories of the creation, the patriarchs and matriarchs, and Moses' life in Egypt. Jubilees expands the biblical version in several ways, often including rationales for Israel's festivals and laws in events before the revelation at Sinai. This author also composed some prayers for important biblical personages, which amplify one Jewish view of these figures and their theology of prayer. Written in the second century BC, probably between 170 and 140 BC,<sup>1</sup> this Palestinian work provides an important witness to early biblical interpretation, especially by its inclusion of prayer texts.

#### Attestation

The Book of Jubilees is attested in Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, Latin and Ethiopic manuscripts, though the complete text appears only in Ethiopic

versions. Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls many thought that Jubilees was written in Hebrew, and the remnants of fourteen or fifteen Hebrew manuscripts of Jubilees found at Qumran made a Hebrew original much more likely.

The Prayer of Noah (10:3–6) is attested only in Ethiopic manuscripts, since the extant portions of other versions do not contain this section of the text. There are also allusions to Noah's actions (in ch. 10 of Jubilees) in George Syncellus' *Chronographica*, but there is no trace of the prayer text.

Three editions of Ethiopic Jubilees have appeared:

- (1) August Dillmann (1859), based on 2 MSS (38 and 51);
- (2) R. H. Charles (1895), based on Dillmann's MSS 38 (D, d) and 51 (C, c) plus 2 additional MSS 12 (A, a) and 25 (B, b), which he favoured;
- (3) James VanderKam (1989) based on a collation of 15 MSS (9, 12, 17, 20, 21, 25, 35, 38, 39, 42, 44, 47, 48, 58, 63), with special preference given to MS 25 (= B in Charles). This translation relies on the critical edition of VanderKam (1989).

#### Sources of this prayer

Jubilees 10:1–17 incorporates traditions which probably developed parallel to those in the Bible but which were not directly derived from the Genesis account of Noah. R. H. Charles claimed that much of the narrative surrounding this prayer developed from an ancient book, the Book of Noah.<sup>2</sup> Some contemporary scholars agree, based on analysis of fragments of several manuscripts at Qumran about Noah.<sup>3</sup> Although there are remnants of this hypothetical book in a Hebrew text<sup>4</sup> as well as in a Greek version,<sup>5</sup> neither of them contains a prayer text as we have it in Jubilees. However, both the Greek and Hebrew witnesses to the story indicate that Noah prayed on this occasion, so this prayer has been deftly introduced into a traditional story. Davenport suggests that 'the prayer in v. 3 may originally have been a part of a collection of prayers and blessings of the ancestors. . . . A liturgical fragment has been expanded.'<sup>6</sup> Whether the prayer is a composition by the author of Jubilees or whether it derives from an earlier stream of tradition is difficult to determine; in either case it well represents an early Jewish awareness of the malignant effect of active evil spirits descended from the offspring of the Watchers.

#### Literary context in Jubilees

Noah is a very important figure in Jubilees. After his birth notice in 4:28, Jubilees lists his sons and progeny and then describes the Flood and the subsequent covenant, his celebration of the Feast of Shebuot, reasons for using the solar (364-day) calendar, the problems faced by his descendants,

and the partitioning of the land between Shem, Ham, Japheth and Cainan. It concludes with Noah's death in 10:15–17. In Jubilees 10:1–17, the narrative deals with the problem of evil spirits active in the world; they present grave difficulties for human beings. Noah begs God to remove their influence (10:3–6) and God responds by restricting nine-tenths of them. At the conclusion of this arrangement Noah died and 'slept with his fathers' (10:15).

#### Comparison with biblical and other Jewish prayers

The tone of these requests seems milder than the brusque, concrete language of many biblical Psalms, especially the Laments. Noah appeals to God's abundant mercy (v. 3) and God's knowledge of the lives of those humans saved from the Deluge: these sentences remind us of the confession of trust found in many Psalms of Lament.

In this prayer Noah responds to the terrible corruption of human beings by these unclean demons spawned by the Watchers. He begs God to remove these agents of corruption to humans, evils that are externalized by this imagery of the Watchers and their offspring. His appeal to God encompasses the great motifs from the scriptures, God's 'mercy and compassion' as well as the fulfilment of the divine blessing and commandment 'to increase and multiply' on the face of the earth.

Prayer to restrict the power of evil spirits is otherwise attested in Jewish literature from this era.<sup>7</sup> First, there are two texts of rewritten Bible, like Jubilees, which contain prayers against demons as they retell stories of Israel's heroes, David and Solomon. In the *Biblical Antiquities* of Pseudo-Philo (#60), David utters a prayer against the evil spirits affecting Saul. Josephus attributes to Solomon prayers (incantations and exorcisms) against demons, 'for the benefit and healing' of human beings (*Antiquities* VIII, 45–7). Also, at the end of the Qumran Psalms Scroll the writer attributes to David four songs 'for making music over the stricken' (11QPs<sup>a</sup> xxvii. 9–10); these have been considered prayers against evil spirits. Other Qumran texts, the *Songs of the Maskil* (4Q510 and 4Q511) also contain language against evil spirits, but their literary genre is quite different from the prayer of Noah. Similarly, a Greek papyrus from Cairo, dated to first or second century CE, contains a prayer requesting God to send the saving angel (from the time of Exodus onward) to ward off the power of evil spirits.<sup>8</sup>

#### TRANSLATION OF JUBILEES 10:3–6

3. [Noah] prayed in the presence of God his Lord and he said: 'Lord of the spirits<sup>9</sup> which are in all flesh, You, who have shown me mercy and saved me and my sons from the water of the Flood and did not make me perish (as You did to the children of destruction) since Your kindness toward me has been great, and great has been

Your mercy to my soul.

May Your kindness be raised high over Your children's children,<sup>10</sup> and may the evil spirits not rule over them lest they destroy them from the earth.

4 Now bless me and my sons so we might increase and grow numerous and fill the earth.<sup>11</sup>

5 And You know how Your Watchers acted – the fathers of these spirits – during my days.

Now these spirits who are still alive – lock them up and keep them captive in the place of judgement, so they may not cause corruption among the children of Your servant, my Lord, since they are vicious and were created for corrupting.

6 Do not let them rule over the spirits of the living since You alone know their judgement.<sup>12</sup>

Let them have no power over the children of the just from now on and for evermore.'

## NOTES

- 1 James VanderKam, 'Jubilees, Book of', in D. N. Freedman (ed.), *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. III, New York, Doubleday, 1992, p. 1030.
- 2 R. H. Charles (ed.), *The Book of Jubilees or the Little Genesis, Translated from the Editor's Ethiopic Text*, London, Adam & Charles Black, 1902, pp. 78–80.
- 3 Florentino García Martínez, *Qumran and Apocalyptic: Studies on the Aramaic Texts from Qumran*, Leiden and New York, E. J. Brill, 1992, pp. 36–43.
- 4 cf. Charles, *Jubilees*, 1895, p. 179.
- 5 cf. Charles, *Jubilees*, 1902, p. 78n.
- 6 Gene L. Davenport, *The Eschatology of the Book of Jubilees*, Leiden; E. J. Brill, 1971, p. 86 n. 5.
- 7 cf. Bilhah Nitzan, *Qumran Prayer and Religious Poetry*, Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah, vol. XII, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1994, especially ch. VIII, 'Magical Poetry', pp. 227–72. She provides the summary of Jewish prayers for protection against evil and demonic spirits.
- 8 Pierre Benoit, 'Fragment d'une prière contre les esprits impurs?' *Revue Biblique* 58, 1951, pp. 549–65.
- 9 'Lord of the spirits': an expression known from the Torah as well as early Jewish literature and Greek Christian inscriptions from Egypt and Nubia. For example Num 16:22, 'They fell on their faces, and said, "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one person sin and you become angry with the whole congregation?"' Num 27:16, "Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint someone over the congregation." NJPS: 'LORD/ God, Source of the breath of all flesh.' In *Numbers*, The JPS Torah Commentary, p. 135, J. Milgrom explains this epithet: 'elohei, literally "God of"'. He translates it as 'Source of' and comments: 'God gives man His breath at birth, and withdraws it at death . . . since God is Creator of life, He alone determines who is to live and who is to die.' Compare Klaus Berger, *Das Buch der Jubilaea*, Juedische Schriften aus hellenistisch-roemischer Zeit, Band II, Lieferung 3, Guetersloh, Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1981, p. 378 n. 3c. Revelation 22:6 'And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true, for the Lord, the God of the spirits of

the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."

- 10 'Your children's children.' O. S. Wintermute, 'Jubilees', in J. H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Garden City, NY, Doubleday and Co., 1985, vol. 2, p. 76, translates 'Let your grace be lifted up upon my sons', following the critical text of Charles (*Jubilees*, 1895). Charles had emended his base text at this point, but VanderKam considers the manuscripts which feature this reading to be of inferior (12 = A) or nondescript quality (35, 58). VanderKam's reading (*weluda weludeka*), which I have translated, derives from MS 25 (= B in Charles), which was Charles's base text and which VanderKam describes as 'the greatest authority' for his edition, since 'none of the newer copies surpasses 25 in textual value' (VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees*, translated by James C. VanderKam, Louvain, E. Peeters, 1989, p. xxi). The present translation might suggest God's care for all humankind ('your children'), rather than understanding Noah as praying for his own grandchildren, as the context of the prayer might suggest. See James VanderKam (ed.), *The Book of Jubilees: A Critical Text*, Louvain, E. Peeters, 1989, p. 58, ad loc.
- 11 Berger, op.cit, p. 378 n. 4a: 'In the Prayer against the Demons this clause/sentence is a conspicuous insertion in the form of a common blessing formula. Its citation simply indicates protection and blessing.'
- 12 'their judgement'. O. S. Wintermute, op. cit., p. 76, translates: 'because you alone know their judgement'. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees*, p. 59: 'for you alone know their punishment'. Berger, op. cit., p. 379: 'Since you alone know their power. And you should maintain no power over the children of the righteous.' Charles (1902 and 1913) emended *ta'mr kuennanehomu* to *ta'mr kuanneno lomu*, translating: 'for Thou alone canst exercise dominion over them.'

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## JUDITH PRAYS FOR HELP (JUDITH 9:1–14)

*Toni Craven*

### INTRODUCTION

Judith is an anonymous fictional story, probably written by a Palestinian Jew. Written in Greek that imitates Hebrew idiom and syntax, Judith intermingles uncertain and even imaginary details with facts drawn from Palestinian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, and Greek history and geography, and most especially Jewish religious customs of the second century BCE.

#### Texts

Judith is extant in four Greek codices: Vaticanus (LXX<sup>B</sup>), Alexandrinus (LXX<sup>A</sup>), Basiliano-Vaticanus (LXX<sup>N</sup>) and Sinaiticus (LXX<sup>S</sup>); four translations: Old Latin, Syriac, Sahidic and Ethiopic; and other relatively late abridged and modified Hebrew versions. Despite Jerome's claim in the Vulgate to have translated an Aramaic text, no ancient Aramaic or Hebrew manuscripts have been found. The oldest extant text of Judith is probably a third-century CE potsherd on which Jdt 15:1–7 is preserved.

#### Date

Although the exact date of the book's composition cannot be determined, Judith was probably written in the first century BCE, during the late Hasmonean period. A reference to Judith in the first epistle of Clement of Rome in the first century CE makes it clear that the story was composed before this time.

#### Narrative organization and prayer

Prayer is important throughout the sixteen chapters of the Book of Judith. Part I (1:1–7:32) is like a communal lament gone awry. Faced with the