

THE BOOK OF JUBILEES AND THE MIDRASH

PART 2: NOAH AND THE FLOOD

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INTRODUCTION

The Book of Jubilees is a retelling of Genesis and the beginning of Exodus in the form of an angel speaking to Moses. It was written by a Jew in Hebrew some time around the early second century BCE, perhaps even earlier. The original Hebrew is lost to us today; our translations are based primarily on Ethiopic texts. Like the Midrash, Jubilees often supplements the Biblical narratives with additional information; at other times, Jubilees provides a resolution to a difficulty in the biblical text, another concern of Midrash. As such, the Book of Jubilees may be categorized as an early form of midrashic literature.¹ Some of the interpretations in Jubilees are in fact preserved in the later midrashic literature. The title, "Book of Jubilees," reflects the author's particular way of viewing the chronology of the world as a series of 49-nine year cycles, but it was also sometimes referred to as "The Little Genesis" (*Bereshit Zuta* in Aramaic),² since it is an abbreviated retelling of Genesis.³ Jubilees was not incorporated into rabbinic literature, as it differs in some very fundamental legal points – most famously the insistence on a purely solar calendar, as opposed to the rabbinic lunar/solar model,⁴ and stringencies regarding Shabbat observance.⁵ In a previous article ("The Book of Jubilees and the Midrash on the Early Chapters of Genesis", *The Jewish Bible Quarterly*, 41:3, July 2013) we saw how the Book of Jubilees dealt with various difficulties in the text of the early chapters of Genesis in ways occasionally similar and sometimes very different from the later rabbinic midrashic literature. In this article we will focus on how Jubilees dealt with the narratives of Noah and the Flood, as compared to the rabbinic Midrash.

THE ELDEST SON OF NOAH

The Bible first introduces Noah's sons in the order of Shem, Ham and Japhet (Gen. 5:32), the order followed in Genesis 9:18 and 10:1. However, when the three sons and their offspring are listed, Japhet comes first (Gen.

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10:2), followed by Ham (Gen. 10:6) and lastly Shem (Gen. 10:21). Genesis 10:21 refers to the relative ages of Shem and Japhet in an ambiguous way: *And to Shem, also to him [sons] were born...ahī Yefet ha-gadol*. This last phrase can be understood as either *the brother of Japhet the elder* or *the elder brother of Japhet*. Jubilees gives a detailed account of the birth of Noah's sons and states that Shem was the firstborn, being three years older than Ham and seven years older than Japhet (Jub. 4:33). Josephus also lists Shem as the eldest in his *Antiquities* (1:108-111). The standard syntax of Genesis 10:21 and its cantillation indicate that Shem was in fact the oldest of Noah's children.⁶

A problem arises from the assertion that Shem was the eldest of Noah's children. We are told that Noah was 500 years old when he began having children (Gen. 5:32), and that the Flood began in the 600th year of his life (Gen. 7:11). We are further told that *Shem was 100 years old when he begot Arpachshad, two years after the Flood* (Gen. 11:11). If Shem was the oldest, he should have been 102 (not 100) years old two years after the Flood. Thus the verses listing the names of the brothers indicate that Shem was the oldest, but the calculation based on these verses would indicate that he was not the oldest. However, as Ibn Ezra points out in his commentary to Genesis 10:21, there are a number of ways to interpret these figures so as to preserve Shem as the eldest, an approach also followed by Abrabanel.

In contrast, *Genesis Rabbah* 26:3 explains that Japhet was actually the oldest; however, Shem is written first when the brothers are listed because he was chosen by God, born circumcised, and the ancestor of Abraham, and because the Temple was built in his land. While Japhet was born first, Shem was more holy and significant. This approach is followed in *Genesis Rabbah* 37:7 and is the conclusion in TB *Sanhedrin* 69b. Based on this, Rashi in his commentary to Genesis 5:32 explains that Japhet was the eldest, but Shem was more righteous.

Seeing that the majority of verses put Shem first, implying that he was the eldest, it is not hard to see where Jubilees got the idea that Shem was born first. Why, then, would the Rabbis reject this approach? The Bible consistently presents a theme of reverse primogeniture, where the firstborn is rejected in favor of a younger son.⁷ This is explicit with regard to Ishmael/Isaac, Esau/Jacob, Reuben/Judah or Joseph, Manasseh/Ephraim and, later, David/his brothers and Solomon/his brothers. Similarly, Cain, the firstborn, is

villainous and murders Abel, his younger brother. It seems that the Rabbis of the Midrash read this idea into the sons of Noah as well, and understood that since Shem is the ancestor of the Israelites, he must follow the pattern of other biblical heroes and be a younger brother who usurps an unworthy older one.⁸

There may be an additional factor operating here as well. Japhet is presented in a positive way in the Bible, taking honorable care of his father Noah and receiving a blessing from him, just as Shem did (Gen. 9:23, 27). This seemingly places Japhet on an equal footing with Shem. Since Japhet is the ancestor of Javan, Greece (Gen. 10:2), there may be an implication that the dueling cultures of the Israelites and Greeks are in some way equally meritorious. However, by casting Japhet as a rejected firstborn, Japhet (and by extension his offspring) can be seen as unworthy of the birthright and somehow morally inferior to Shem, placing the Israelites in the superior position.

NOAH'S WIFE

In the Bible it is not unusual for wives not to be mentioned and, if mentioned, not to be named. By contrast, Jubilees commonly gives the names of the wives of biblical personalities: one of the characteristics of Jubilees is the large number of proper names it supplies, particularly of women.⁹ In the case of Noah's wife, in Jubilees it is given as Emzara, his cousin (Jub. 4:33).

Genesis Rabbah 23:3 identifies Naamah, the daughter of Lemech and sister of Tubal-cain (Gen. 4:22), as Noah's wife. This is consistent with the rabbinic approach to identify unnamed biblical characters with pre-existing, named biblical characters.¹⁰ Since it is rare for the Bible to mention daughters by name, it was understood that Naamah must be significant. Additionally, since her name implies "pleasantness", and perhaps because her father had the same name as Noah's father Lemech, she was deemed an appropriate wife for Noah. Identifying Naamah as Noah's wife also serves to give purpose to the detailed list of Cain's offspring in Genesis 4:17-22, particularly since Naamah is the very last person mentioned in the genealogy, hinting that in some sense she is the culmination of the offspring of Cain. Also, it was important to find a name for Noah's wife to parallel the original first man and woman, Adam and Eve, who were both named.¹¹

Based on the different identifications of Noah's wife, we have two different views of the current ancestry of mankind. According to Jubilees, all of humanity is now descended only from Seth, Cain's offspring having been completely obliterated in the Flood. From the rabbinic perspective, humanity is descended from both Seth (on Noah's side) and Cain (his wife's side), and some Cain element still exists in the world. R. Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, in his commentary *Ha'amek Davar* (Gen. 4:22), states that Naamah represents any good attributes in Cain that were considered important to preserve and contribute to the future of humanity. It is also worth noting that in the older amoraic literature of the Midrash (*Gen. Rabbah* 22:13, *Lev. Rabbah* 10:5) Cain is portrayed as a penitent, who then inspired his father Adam to repent as well. Thus, in the rabbinic view, there was some redemptive feature in Cain which may have been preserved through Naamah as Noah's wife.

THE PURPOSE OF NOAH'S SACRIFICE

The Bible records that Noah offered a sacrifice after leaving the ark: he *took of every clean animal and every clean bird and offered burnt-offerings on the altar* (Gen. 8:20). The exact purpose of these offerings is not stated explicitly, but we know that God was pleased with them (Gen. 8:21). In Jubilees we are told that two types of sacrifices were actually made. The first was a kind of sin offering: *and he made atonement for the land. And he took the kid of a goat and he made atonement with its blood for all the sins of the land because everything which was on it had been blotted out except those who were in the Ark with Noah* (Jub. 6:2). Noah also offered a calf, a goat, a lamb, kids, salt, a young dove, and a turtledove as burnt offerings (Jub. 6:3).

Genesis Rabbah 34:9 records a dispute as to whether the sacrifices of Noah were burnt offerings (*olot*) or peace offerings (*shelamim*); however, there is no mention of the possibility that they were sin offerings (*korbanot hattat*). Both burnt offerings and peace offerings can function as a way for an individual to demonstrate a connection with God, and the rabbinic view is that this is what Noah sought to achieve with his sacrifices. Noah was successful in this endeavor, for immediately after the sacrifices we read of God's decision never again to destroy all living beings (Gen. 8:21).

In Jubilees, Noah offered sacrifices for atonement. The concept of sacrificial blood achieving atonement is emphasized in Leviticus 17:11, while Jubi-

lees predates this practice to Noah, in accordance with its readiness to find pre-Sinai precedents for Torah commandments.¹² The episode might also be viewed as Jubilees finding an early precedent for the Day of Atonement.¹³ The concept of the land being defiled as a result of sin is also found in the Bible: Leviticus 18:26-28 emphasizes this in connection with prohibited sexual relations and Numbers 35:33-34 does so with reference to murder. It is a theme that runs throughout the Book of Jubilees.¹⁴ The concept of the land being defiled in some way may also be found in God's statement before the Flood, *the earth is filled with violence* (Gen. 6:13), and after the sacrifice when God proclaims, *I will not curse the ground any more because of man* (Gen. 8:21). However, the concept of a sacrifice effecting atonement for the defiled land is not found in the Bible. Indeed, Numbers 35:34 specifically states that *the land can have no expiation for the blood that was shed on it, except through the blood of the one who shed it*. Similarly, regarding the ritual of the *eglah arufah*, a heifer slaughtered when a body is found in a field and the murderer is unknown, the Bible speaks of atonement for the people (Deut. 21:8), not for the land. Thus, from the rabbinic perspective, there was no point in Noah bringing an atonement sacrifice; it was the destruction of the evildoers during the Flood that provided the necessary atonement.

THE FEAST OF WEEKS

Just after God promises not to destroy the earth again with a flood and shows Noah the rainbow as a sign of this covenant, Jubilees states: *Therefore it is ordained and written in the heavenly tablets that they should observe the feast of Shavuot in this month, once per year, in order to renew the covenant in all (respects), year by year* (Jub. 6:17). Jubilees then goes on to describe how this festival was observed until the death of Noah, after which it was forgotten except for Abraham who observed it, as did Isaac and Jacob, after which it was forgotten again until the Israelites were told about it at Sinai (Jub. 3:18-19). Although this holiday is also associated with the first fruits, Jubilees understands that *this feast is twofold and of two natures* (Jub. 6:21), having an agricultural and historical component just like the other pilgrimage festivals, the historical aspect being a commemoration of God's covenant with Noah. According to Jubilees, then, the name of the holiday, Shavu'ot, refers to the oath (*shevu'ah*) God made to Noah, as well as the weeks

(*shavu'ot*) leading up to the festival mentioned in the Bible. God's covenant with Abraham would take place on this day as well (Jub. 14:20, 15:1-9).¹⁵

The Bible does not mention a historical component to Shavu'ot, but from the rabbinic perspective, this holiday commemorates the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Jubilees also maintains that the giving of the Torah took place then (Jub. 1:1); however, it is just one of a series of covenantal events that took place on the original festival of Shavu'ot from Noah's time. Thus, while there is agreement that the giving of the Torah is commemorated on Shavu'ot, Jubilees believes that the holiday has its roots in Noah's time, a notion rejected by the Rabbis. From the rabbinic perspective, the pilgrimage festivals are all related to events unique to the experiences of the Israelites, and do not relate to pre-Abrahamic history. While Shabbat and Rosh Ha-Shanah do relate to the creation of the world, Shabbat explicitly in the Bible and Rosh Ha-Shanah rabbinically (Mishnah *Rosh Ha-Shanah* 1:1), this concept does not extend to the pilgrimage festivals, which are understood to be exclusively Israelite.¹⁶

It should be noted that Jubilees does not accept the rabbinic view as to the date on which Shavu'ot is celebrated. Jubilees understands that the Torah was given on the sixteenth of Sivan (Jub. 1:1), as opposed to the rabbinic view that this took place on the sixth or seventh of Sivan (TB *Shabbat* 86b). Thus, Jubilees has Abraham celebrating Shavu'ot on the fifteenth of Sivan (Jub. 15:1), in accordance with the approach of its author that Shavu'ot begins 50 days after the Shabbat following Passover (the 25th of Nisan).¹⁷ This way of calculating the date of Shavu'ot stood in opposition to both the Pharisees, who counted 50 days from the second day of Passover, and the Sadducees, who counted from the first Sunday during Passover, and is in line with the Dead Sea sect.¹⁸

ON WHICH DATE DID THE FLOOD BEGIN?

The Bible states that the Flood began *in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month* (Gen. 7:11). TB *Rosh Ha-Shanah* 11b records a dispute about what this date represents. R. Yehoshua says it was the seventeenth of Iyyar, the second month counting from Nisan, whereas R. Eliezer contends that it was the seventeenth of Marheshvan, the second month counting from Tishri. The different dates place the Flood's occurrence either during the nat-

ural rainy season (Marḥeshvan) or once the rainy season ends (Iyyar). In the discussion of these two approaches in the Talmud, R. Eliezer is on the defensive, the opinion of R. Yehoshua being considered more reasonable, since the Bible always refers to Nisan as the first month. Nevertheless, the debate concludes with the statement that the Jewish sages follow the opinion of R. Eliezer, while the gentile sages follow that of R. Yehoshua. *Seder Olam Rabbah* (ch. 4) likewise states that "the Sages accept the words of R. Eliezer regarding the Flood." The Jerusalem Talmud (*Rosh Ha-Shanah* 1:1) only records the view of R. Eliezer,¹⁹ as does *Genesis Rabbah* (33:7). Josephus, too, quotes only the Marḥeshvan opinion (*Antiquities* 1.3.3).

Jubilees does not explicitly place the beginning of the Flood in either Iyyar or Marḥeshvan, simply declaring (like Genesis) that it began on the seventeenth day of the second month (Jub. 10:23). However, Jubilees, like the Bible, always calculates the months from Nisan. Accordingly, Jubilees follows the opinion of R. Yehoshua, that the Bible always calculates the months in terms of Nisan being the first.²⁰

The reason why R. Eliezer's opinion became the accepted rabbinic view was because it implicitly rejected any association of Noah with Shavu'ot. This has to do not with the date when the Flood began, but rather with the last date recorded in the narrative, the day the earth finally dried – *in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month* (Gen. 8:14). According to R. Eliezer's interpretation, this month was Marḥeshvan, over half a year away from the Shavu'ot festival. However, according to R. Yehoshua (and Jubilees), it meant the end of Iyyar, enabling Noah's sacrifice upon leaving the ark to coincide with Shavu'ot in Sivan. It should be noted that the Torah never states that Tishri is the first month of the year,²¹ and it would seem more logical to follow the view of R. Yehoshua, that the Bible consistently uses the same reference point (Nisan) for calculating months throughout the text. Yet the view of R. Eliezer was accepted by the Sages, because it refuted any possible Noah/Shavu'ot connection, a connection dismissed in rabbinic literature.

PLANTING THE VINE

After the covenant of the rainbow and the list of Noah's sons, the Bible relates: *Noah the husbandman began, and planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered himself within his tent* (Gen.

9:20-21). The fact that this is written immediately after the passage about Noah's sons emerging from the ark, and with no other indication as to when Noah planted the vineyard, gives the reader the impression that this was one of the first things Noah did once the Flood ended. Now that the danger has passed and God is appeased, Noah seems to shirk any further responsibility and gets drunk.

The Book of Jubilees puts a more positive spin on this episode. First of all, it provides a timeline, informing us that Noah planted the vine many years after he came out of the ark. The vine took four more years to produce fruit (Jub. 7:1), and another year was needed for the wine to be ready (Jub. 7:2). Jubilees further states that Noah drank the wine as part of a feast that included many burnt offerings as an atonement for him and his sons (Jub. 7:3). The wine was sprinkled on the altar, along with frankincense (Jub. 7:5), and it was only afterwards that Noah drank some of the wine (Jub. 7:6).²² Noah thus became drunk in the context of a religious festival. While this was certainly improper behavior, Jubilees is far kinder than the biblical account, which provides no ritual context for Noah's drinking of the wine. According to Jubilees, Noah planted the vine to produce wine for ritual use during the festival; becoming drunk was an unfortunate and unintended result of his good intentions. Furthermore, according to Jubilees 7:7, Noah *lay down and slept, and was uncovered in his tent as he slept*. This means that Noah could hardly be blamed for his nakedness, as this occurred when he had already fallen asleep, a detail not mentioned in the Bible.

The Midrash is very critical of Noah, interpreting the phrase "Noah began" (*va-yahel*) in Genesis 9:20 as "Noah profaned himself" (the word *hol* means "not holy") by planting a vineyard: he should have planted something more beneficial instead (*davar aher shel takkanah*), such as figs or olives (*Gen. Rabbah* 36:3). TB *Sanhedrin* 70a states that Noah should have known that wine causes problems, as the forbidden fruit responsible for Adam's downfall was a grape vine. Other midrashic sources go even further, having Noah agree to join Satan in planting the vineyard.²³ *Genesis Rabbah* 36:4, in direct opposition to Jubilees, states that the wine was ready and that Noah became drunk on the day he planted the vineyard, implying a hasty and thoughtless action. Later rabbinic literature places the drunkenness episode on the very

day Noah emerged from the ark (*Zohar Hadash, Midrash ha-Ne'elam*, No'ah, 38a).

Jubilees casts the episode of Noah's drunkenness in as positive a light as possible, in accordance with its general approach – seeing Noah as very righteous and even acting as a priest in terms of the sacrifices he offers.²⁴ Jubilees is interested in making Noah serve as an exemplary righteous person, one to be emulated, for example, through the holiday of Shavuot that he established. He is given similar prominence in Qumran literature. Noah is cast in the role of the first priest sacrificing on a mountaintop (a prefiguration of the Temple Mount?), surveying the land from Lubar, and later walking through its length and breadth, thus linking Noah with Abraham (see Gen. 13:14-17). None of these ideas can be found in rabbinic literature. Jubilees adds extra-biblical heroic episodes to Noah's life as well, such as his battle with the demons (Jub. 10:1-14).²⁵ The Rabbis did not view Noah as a wholly righteous figure, most famously in TB *Sanhedrin* 108a, where R. Yoḥanan states that Noah was righteous only in comparison with his own dreadful generation. The Rabbis looked instead to Abraham for their earliest role model.

We have seen that the Book of Jubilees deals with many of the same questions and ambiguities in the biblical text that concerned the later rabbinic literature. Some of the interpretations found in Jubilees were accepted, some rejected and others suppressed. Much of the rejected material concerning Noah in Jubilees has to do with his elevated status, crediting him with the Shavu'ot festival's inauguration. The choice of Noah, or indeed any pre-Abrahamic figure, as a role model was rejected by many rabbinic thinkers, and this is reflected in their attitudes toward Noah. The Book of Jubilees affords us a glimpse of how the Bible was interpreted in ancient times, centuries before the midrashic literature we are familiar with today came into existence.

NOTES

All translations of the Book of Jubilees are from O. S. Wintermute, *Jubilees: A New Translation and Introduction*, in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1985).

1. Wintermute, pp. 39-40.

2. S. Herr and S. Shrira, *Toledot ha-Sifrut ha-Talmudit* (Tel Aviv: Haskalah la-Am, 1937) p. 247.

3. Wintermute, p. 41.
4. See A. Z. Aescoly, *Sefer ha-Falashim* (Jerusalem: Reuven Mass, 1943) pp. 29, 60; and Michael Stone, "Astronomy in the Apocrypha", *Maḥanayim*, vol. 125 (Tishri 1971) p. 108 (Hebrew).
5. Avraham Goldberg, "Rabbinic and Biblical Shabbat Prohibitions", *Sinai*, vol. 46 (Tishri 1959) p. 183 (Hebrew).
6. Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Bible Commentary – Genesis* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989) p. 78.
7. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981) p. 6; Laurence Turner, *Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 2009) pp. 206-7.
8. There may be a textual hint that Shem was more worthy in that he is listed before Japhet when they cover Noah (Gen. 9:23) and received a blessing from Noah before Japhet (Gen. 9:26-27). However, this could just as easily indicate that Shem was older than Japhet.
9. R. H. Charles, *The Book of Jubilees* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1902) p. xiv. See also Meir Bar-Ilan, "Personal Names in *Divrei Gad ha-Hozeḥ*", *Sinai*, vol. 114 (1994) p. 119, note 40. Jubilees also records the names of the wives of Noah's sons (Jub. 7:14-16). Similarly, Jubilees names the mountain on which Noah landed, Lubar (Jub. 5:28), as opposed to the more general description in Genesis 8:4. On the etymology of Lubar, see Richard C. Steiner, "The Mountains of Ararat, Mount Lubar and *Har HaKedem*", *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 42:2 (Autumn 1991) pp.247-250.
10. See Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chajes, *A Student's Guide to the Talmud* (New York: Philipp Feldheim, 1960) p. 172 ff.
11. See Yonah Bar Maoz, "The Wife of Noah", Bar-Ilan University: *Daf Parashat ha-Shavu'a*, No'ah, 1996.
12. James Kugel, *The Bible As It Was* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997) pp. 38-9.
13. Dorothy M. Peters, *Noah Traditions in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008) p. 83.
14. Harry Alan Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2006) p. 71.
15. On the elevation of the status of the Shavu'ot holiday in Jubilees, see Stephen Barton, *Holiness: Past and Present* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2003) p. 158.
16. Modern rabbinic writing ignores any role Noah may have played in establishing Shavu'ot, as information from the Book of Jubilees is usually disregarded. A notable exception is Nahman Tzelnik, *Sefer Atzeret* (Jerusalem: Makhon Harry Fischel, 1989) pp. 51-2, 56, 61, 334, 340.
17. Regarding the calculation of the date of Shavu'ot in Jubilees, see J. van Goudoever, *Biblical Calendars* (Leiden: Brill, 1961) pp. 65-68.
18. Elias J. Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988) p. 110.
19. TJ *Avodah Zarah* 1:2 records that there are two opinions as to when the world was created, in Tishri or Nisan, but even there R. Yehoshua's name is not mentioned. See Heinrich Guggenheimer, *Seder Olam: The Rabbinic View of Biblical Chronology* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1998) p.48.
20. See Dov Ber Rotner, *Midrash Seder Olam* (Jerusalem: Makhon Tal Orot, 1988) p. 82.

21. See Allan M. Langner, "The History of the Tishrei Conundrum", *The Jewish Bible Quarterly*, 40:2 (April 2012) pp. 131-4.
22. On the significance of this, see Esther G. Chazon and Michael E. Stone, eds., *Pseudepigraphic Perspectives: The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden: Brill, 1997) p.174.
23. *Yalkut Shimoni*, Remez 61; *Tanḥuma*, No'ah, 13. See Menahem Kasher, *Torah Shelemah* (Jerusalem: The Torah Shelemah Institute, 1992) vol. 2, p. 485, note 124.
24. See Theodore A. Bergren and Michael E. Stone, *Biblical Figures Outside the Bible* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998) p. 139
25. Bergren, p. 139; and Daniel A. Michiela, *The Dead Sea Genesis Apocryphon* (Leiden: Brill, 2009) pp. 91-92.



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