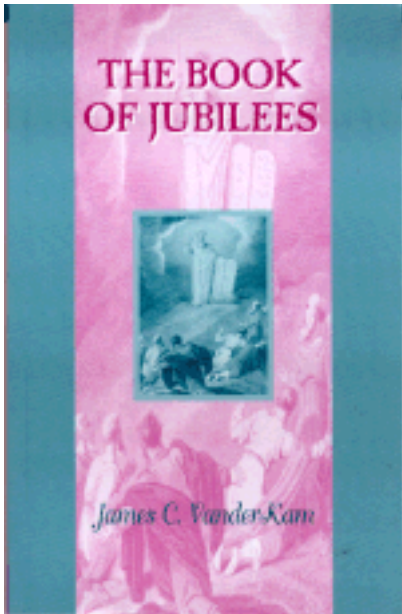


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Vander Kam, James C.

The Book of Jubilees

Guides to Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001. Pp. 166.
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James VanderKam, the leading authority on the book of *Jubilees*, has produced an introductory text on *Jubilees* that is written with both the student and the scholar in mind. In his discussion, VanderKam addresses the date of composition, a history of the extant texts, authorship, and theological issues and also provides a brief commentary of the text.

VanderKam divides his work into three main chapters: “Introduction” (11–22); “Survey of the Book of *Jubilees*” (23–85); and “Aspects of the Book of *Jubilees*” (86–149). Each chapter ends with a section of further reading, in which the reader can examine, from a list of other works, the main issues of each chapter. There is also comprehensive bibliography provided on the recent scholarship on *Jubilees* (150–54) along with an index of references for the biblical texts (155–66), Pseudepigrapha, and Qumran texts as well as an index of authors (167).

The introductory chapter is divided into three main sections: “Description”; “Text of the Book of *Jubilees*”; and “Approximate Date of Composition.” The first section gives a general description of the book that VanderKam describes as a “retelling of the material found in Genesis and the first half of Exodus.” The retelling of the biblical story is done from the particular theological standpoint of the author within the second-century B.C.E.

historical setting. VanderKam introduces five main points that underscore the differences between the story told in *Jubilees* and that of Genesis and Exodus. The second section details the textual history of *Jubilees*. VanderKam discusses the origin of the book, including the original composition in Hebrew and the subsequent translation into Greek. He also gives a brief history of the past 150 years of scholarship, highlighting those who did the primary translation work of the Ethiopic manuscripts and those who have done the translation work of the Qumran fragments. In the third section he points out the problems that exist concerning the date of composition. One problem of dating the book comes from the question of its unity. VanderKam argues for a single composition that is supported by the Greek translation (of *Jub.* 1:27) and, more recently, the discovery of the Qumran fragments. Based on various documentary evidences, VanderKam dates the composition between 160 and 150 B.C.E.

The chapter entitled “Survey of the Book of *Jubilees*” provides a basic analysis of *Jubilees* in which VanderKam seeks to explain the meaning of the book and draw attention to the narrative differences between *Jubilees* and Genesis and Exodus. The survey chapter is divided into three major sections of text: *Jub.* 1 (“An Introduction to the Bible”); 2:1–11:13 (“The Primeval Stories”); and 11:14–50:13 (“From Abra(ha)m to Moses”). In the first section VanderKam spells out the author’s primary purpose in writing *Jubilees*: it is a book of the revelation of God to Israel through Moses. He also calls attention to the key terms that the author uses throughout the book to expound his theological message. In the second section, VanderKam provides brief a section-by-section commentary on *Jub.* 2:1–11:13, in which the author of *Jubilees* has taken the biblical text and in a majority of the narratives has altered it by omission, rearrangement, and additions of text to help clarify the biblical story according to his theological framework. Some of the features of the passages include revelation through direct speech by God or by an angel of the presence, a distinct angelology, and a theological chronology. VanderKam sees within this framework an attempt by the author to protect the image of God in particularly troublesome texts. A significant addition to the *Jubilees* text is the prominence of demonic activity within the Genesis stories and the emergence of a leader of this group of demons—Mastema. In the third section of chapter 2, VanderKam takes a similar approach in his discussion of *Jub.* 11:14–50:13, from Abraham to Moses. The author continues the similar pattern of altering the biblical text to fit his theological framework. VanderKam notes the major addition in this section is the extensive eschatological outlook of the author.

In the third chapter VanderKam explores the principal characteristics and teachings of the book. The chapter is divided into five sections: “*Jubilees*’ Self-Presentation”; *Jubilees* in Relation to Genesis-Exodus”; The Theology of the Author”; The Book of *Jubilees* and Its Author”; and *Jubilees*’ Influence on Later Literature.” Each of these major sections is

divided into numerous subsections. Within each of these sections VanderKam details the theological issues of the book that are being stressed by the author.

In “*Jubilees*’ Self-presentation” VanderKam outlines the author’s attempt to establish the authority of *Jubilees* to his readers. The book is described as a revelation that is “the word of God himself.” The two methods of delivery (direct from God or through an angel) of the revelation are central to the author’s presentation of a hierarchy of angels. The angels play a vital role in the delivery the message of the heavenly tablets, a central principle in the author’s theology. In “*Jubilees* in Relation to Genesis-Exodus” VanderKam describes *Jubilees* as rewritten Bible in which the author has adapted the biblical text to speak to current issues. VanderKam suggests that the biblical text used by the author followed traditions that are found in the LXX and the Samaritan Pentateuch. The issues discussed include chronology and calendar, the law (twenty subsections are dedicated to this area), the three main patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), and the role of women. In the third section (“The Theology of the Author”) VanderKam provides in greater detail a systematic presentation of the author’s theology. In “The Book of *Jubilees* and Its Author” VanderKam attempts to draw conclusions on the nature of the book and the character of the author based on the previous discussion. As previously noted, VanderKam describes *Jubilees* as rewritten Bible. He states that *Jubilees* is similar in character to the books of Chronicles; both expand an authoritative text and enhance the image of the characters. *Jubilees*, however, is primarily a revelation from God. VanderKam identifies the author as an educated person, most likely a priest (possibly Essene). The final section of this chapter (“*Jubilees*’ Influence on Later Literature”) outlines the use of *Jubilees* by early Jewish communities, in particular Qumran. He argues that *Jubilees* was likely considered an authoritative text at Qumran, based on the fourteen copies (some argue that this number could be as high as seventeen) that have been found there. He discusses, although without much detail, several cases of the Qumran documents that are thought possibly to cite *Jubilees* as authoritative (e.g., 4Q228). This is one section of the book that could have been expanded, considering the importance of the Qumran documents to biblical studies. VanderKam also offers a brief discussion of the possible influence of *Jubilees* in *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, the New Testament, later rabbinic writings, and some early Christian works.

VanderKam provides in this work an excellent introductory text that allows the student to gain an extensive understanding of this important early Jewish writing. He has taken into consideration the pertinent new material (e.g., the Qumran fragments) and raised to a new level the relevance of *Jubilees* in the study of early Judaism. Although this is by no means an exhaustive examination of *Jubilees*, it should prove to be one of the best introductory commentaries on the text from its leading authority.