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April 18, 2011

**‘I will become their God’: Blessing in the *Book of Jubilees***

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## Abstract

### **'I will become their God': Blessing in the *Book of Jubilees***

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Blessing is one of the primary means by which Israel's relationship with God is articulated in *The Book of Jubilees*. By reinterpreting the biblical concept of blessing in a Second Temple context, the authors of *Jubilees* have innovated a means by which Israel is able to assert its superiority over other nations. In this essay, close textual analysis reveals complex attitudes toward gentiles, the land, and covenant which are negotiated both by means of blessing and of being blessed. The first chapter explores origins of blessing in *Jubilees*, and how these origins differ from the biblical text — especially vis-à-vis the character of Noah. Subsequent chapters examine the blessing of Israelites, gentiles, and land by God and by human beings themselves; these sections illustrate the mechanism of blessing which, in *Jubilees*, takes the form of a positive feedback-loop in which only God and Israel are able to participate. This study highlights the means by which Israel has been separated from other nations both in terms of power and morality. The final chapters demonstrate that the authors of *Jubilees* see Israel as not only bound to God by means of the covenant, but also as able to affect the state of God's being in meaningful ways. As such, blessing becomes not only an indication of goodwill between two parties, but a means of separation and exclusion.

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## *'I will become their God': Blessing in the Book of Jubilees*

### **Introduction**

*The Book of Jubilees* (hereafter simply '*Jubilees*') or ספר היובלים, rendered in Ge'ez as *Maschafa Kufale* ("The Book of Divisions"), is a rewriting of the events of Genesis 1 through Exodus 19. Rather than being an exegesis of the biblical text, *Jubilees* is an interpretation of the text of Gen 1 through Ex 19 which, as such, presents these narratives in a novel way. Based on discoveries at Qumran, it is evident that the text of *Jubilees* was composed in Hebrew and then translated into Greek and, from Greek, into Ge'ez.<sup>1</sup> The only complete extant version of *Jubilees* is in Ge'ez; no complete Hebrew version has been recovered to date despite the number of fragments recovered. *Jubilees* is a Jewish text from the Second Temple Period, typically dated to the second century BCE — after the Maccabean Revolt (164 BCE)<sup>2</sup> and before 100 BCE. The lower limit to this dating is based on the manuscripts recovered at Qumran, the oldest of which has been dated to about 100 BCE. It seems that though the Ethiopic version is not in the original language of *Jubilees*, it more or less a literal rendering of the Hebrew.<sup>3</sup> As such, all references to and translations of *Jubilees* throughout this essay are based on the Ethiopic text with the understanding that it is a fairly accurate reflection of the original Hebrew.

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<sup>1</sup> VanderKam, James C. *Textual and Historical Studies in the Book of Jubilees*. Scholars' Press: 1977. pp. 1-91.

<sup>2</sup> Both J. VanderKam and R. H. Charles agree that *Jubilees* supposes knowledge of the events narrated in 1 Maccabees. VanderKam has upheld a dating of approximately 170-150 BCE, though he has further refined his dating to between 161-152 BCE (VanderKam 1977, 1989, 2001). However, both G. Nickelsburg and J. Goldstein have argued for a dating just prior to 167 BCE based on the author's apparent ignorance of Antiochus IV's 167 BCE edict, cf. *Jub* 23 (Nickelsburg 1981; Goldstein 1983). Apparently in light of these arguments, VanderKam has conceded an upper limit of 170 BCE.

<sup>3</sup> J. VanderKam, *Textual and Historical Studies in the Book of Jubilees*, 1977: 18-88.

*Jubilees* is in large part polemical in nature. The major concerns of *Jubilees* center on the calendar,<sup>4</sup> festival observance, covenant,<sup>5</sup> revelation of the law, segregation of gentiles, and what we might call “general priestly concerns” such as sacrifice, the Levites, and legitimation of the priesthood. As such, we can understand *Jubilees* as an implicit criticism of other Second Temple Jewish sects — these issues were central concerns of many Second Temple groups. However, it is important to note that the authors of *Jubilees* are careful to construct the text as genuine revelation to Moses at Sinai in order to conceal these concerns. *Jubilees* is presented to its audience as a text equal — or greater — in authority to the biblical texts of Genesis and Exodus. The basic narrative structure of the book makes this fairly obvious: because text is a private revelation to Moses at Sinai written down by the angels, the authors are therefore explicitly challenging the authority of Genesis and Exodus (neither of which have clear authorship). That is, whereas the biblical books are *not* explicitly of Mosaic authorship, there can be no question — given the way that the *Jubilees* is structured — that it is intended to reflect divine or Mosaic authorship. By giving the book an explicit position of authority over and against Genesis and the beginning of Exodus, the authors are free to make claims about Second Temple concerns. As I will demonstrate, much of *Jubilees*’ ideology is influenced by the authors’ context.

Distinctive to *Jubilees* is not only its narrative structure (beginning with the revelation to Moses at Sinai), but also its extensive incorporation of new material. The authors of *Jubilees* did not simply rework the biblical narrative to highlight their own narrative concerns; rather, they often innovated material to further reinforce their distinctive ideology. Despite *Jubilees*’

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<sup>4</sup> *Jubilees* unequivocally condemns the lunar calendar; cf. U. Gleßmer, 137, 1997; VanderKam, 154f, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> W. Gilders, “The Concept of Covenant in Jubilees,” *Enoch and the Mosaic Torah: The Evidence of Jubilees*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009, pp. 178-192.

innovation, though, it seems that the authors were also concerned with preserving the biblical framework — presumably, deviating too far from the biblical narrative would have compromised the authority of their new text. Given that this will be a discussion of blessing in *Jubilees*, though, and not the Bible, it is helpful to first review the biblical concept of blessing. We will then be able to see more clearly where the authors of *Jubilees* have agreed with the biblical worldview and, perhaps more interestingly, where they disagree with the biblical text or innovate altogether new material.

Blessing in the Bible<sup>6</sup> reflects a positive relationship between the bestower of the blessing and the recipient of the blessing. This may mean a positive relationship between human beings and God, or humans and other humans. The root בָּרַךְ (*barakh*) is often associated with greetings, benedictions, promises, and praise. This means that the semantic range of בָּרַךְ (*barakh*) is substantial: within the entirety of the biblical corpus, the root can be associated with passive praise or active blessing of either man or God. Westermann has argued that blessing consists of three key components: prosperity, fertility, and the power of life.<sup>7</sup> Westermann also points to magical functions of blessing in the earliest redactional strata of the Bible.<sup>8</sup> Westermann argued that the primary function of blessing is to promote what is essentially a prosperous life, and this general observation seems to be the scholarly consensus.<sup>9</sup> Scharbert has rejected the idea that victory is a not major theme of blessing; a successful life necessarily entails prosperity and,

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<sup>6</sup> Here I should note that wherever I refer to the “biblical” concept of blessing in this essay, I refer not only to the books on which *Jubilees* is based (Gen and Ex), but also the entirety of the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>7</sup> C. Westermann. *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press. 1978. pp. 54.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53-59.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* Also on this cf. J. Scharbert, “Blessing,” *Sacramentum Verbi*, 1.69-75. New York: Herder and Herder. 1970; G. Wehmeier, “Deliverance and Blessing in the Old and New Testament,” *Indian Journal of Theology*, 20.30-42. C. W. Mitchell, *The Meaning of BRK, “To Bless,” in the Old Testament*. 1987.

therefore, victory and dominion — a promise repeatedly made to the Israelites; Scharbert has also noted that the theme of deliverance and blessing are closely intertwined, refuting Westermann's claims that they are discrete concepts.<sup>10</sup> I agree with Mitchell and Scharbert that deliverance and blessing are intimately related concepts in the Bible, though this does not seem to be the case in *Jubilees* — as I will explain in greater detail below.

The biblical understanding of blessing is also rooted in the power of the spoken word. In both the biblical world and in Second Temple times, the power of spoken blessing was connected to the understanding that both blessing and curse have inherent power. Blessing is more powerful when done by God, though the appropriate actor (for example, a patriarch) may perform similarly effective acts of blessing. The biblical understanding of blessing does not seem to be a self-fulfilling prophecy but, rather, an acknowledgement that actors with the appropriate level of “prestige,” (that is, God or a very important figure like Abraham) will always be effective in their bestowal of blessing because there is no possible scenario in which these actors would be unsuccessful. Though lesser characters bless in a way that might imply a “magical” understanding of blessing, the primary actors are always successful in blessing concurrently with the utterance of the blessing itself. In other words, the blessing and the success of the blessing are not discrete concepts — to bless is to succeed.

The biblical usage of בָּרַךְ (*barakh*) is typically associated with the bestowal of fertility (especially Gen 1 and 12), though it may also have been a giving of prosperity or power.<sup>11</sup> Mitchell has argued that in the biblical period these were traits needed for survival and that, as such, these were the traits bestowed on the Israelites as a mark of God's devotion to the chosen

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<sup>10</sup> J. Scharbert, “Blessing,” *Sacramentum Verbi*, 1.69-75.

<sup>11</sup> Mitchell includes “dominance;” C. W. Mitchell, 1987. pg. 165.

people. Mitchell also argues that “God’s blessing is a visible sign of his favor that attracts the attention of others and makes them desire God’s blessing too.”<sup>12</sup> On this particular point the authors of *Jubilees* agree with the biblical worldview; however, as in much of Second Temple literature, the use of בָּרַךְ (*barakh*) in *Jubilees* often varies from the biblical usage. Often, in *Jubilees*, the semantic range has been somewhat narrowed. This makes logical sense; the uses of בָּרַךְ (*barakh*) in the Bible are from different periods in history and from different authors and redactors, while *Jubilees* — despite the redactional processes it underwent — is from a comparatively specific timeframe and limited authorship. Van Ruiten notes that “many Hebrew words have acquired a different meaning in the course of centuries... at the end of the biblical period, they could have meant something different than at the beginning.”<sup>13</sup>

In the biblical usage, the root בָּרַךְ (*barakh*) is often used in the blessing of humans by other humans — though these individuals are almost always Israelites or patriarchs. Mitchell has noted the special use of בָּרַךְ (*barakh*) in the Psalms, though, which he translates as “praise.” Mitchell typically translates the Piel of בָּרַךְ (*barakh*) as “to praise” rather than “to bless,” though he does sometimes take the Pael of בָּרַךְ (*barakh*) to mean “[he] praised,” rather than “[he] blessed,” (cf. Dan 4:31)<sup>14</sup>. In *Jubilees* where the equivalent root בָּרַכָּה (*baraka*) is used as a direct translation of בָּרַךְ (*barakh*), I agree with both VanderKam (1989) and Charles (1917) that this is best understood as blessing rather than the less powerful “praise.” Even where the use of בָּרַךְ (*barakh*) is not used in a spoken blessing (e.g., “I blessed you”), it is clear that this root refers to an act which, in English, is “blessing.” While I will not be treating each individual usage of the

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pg. 166; cf. Gen 26:28, 39:2-6.

<sup>13</sup> J.T.A.G.M. Van Ruiten, *Primaeval History Interpreted: The Rewriting of Genesis I-II in the book of Jubilees*. 2000, pgs. 3-5.

<sup>14</sup> C. W. Mitchell, *The Meaning of BRK, “To Bless,” in the Old Testament*. 1987. p 135.

root ብርክ (*baraka*), I do typically defer to VanderKam's usage of "bless," "blessing," etc., in an effort to render the meaning of this word in English. I do not believe that translating this root as "praise" captures the most natural sense of the word in the Ethiopic. That the Ethiopian scribes understood בָּרַךְ (*barakh*) and ብርክ (*baraka*) to be equivalent terms — and that the most natural sense of בָּרַךְ (*barakh*) in the Torah is indeed associated with "blessing" — is why I have chosen not to refer to the Ge'ez root in the sense of "praise." While I do agree with Mitchell that many of the usages in the Psalms seem to lend themselves to a meaning closer to "praise," I see few places in which this translation might represent what is meant in the Ethiopic text of *Jubilees*. Rather, the use of "blessing" in *Jubilees* implies a very real capability to affect one's world (divine or otherwise) whereas blessing in the myriad biblical usages can imply simply an expression of appreciation without a tangible effect on the world of the one doing the blessing.

It is also worth noting that as a Second Temple text, *Jubilees* has often been connected with 1 Enoch given that, in particular, Avigad, Yadin,<sup>15</sup> Vermes,<sup>16</sup> and Machiela<sup>17</sup> have linked these texts explicitly. Davenport has argued that the authors of *Jubilees* may actually have known of 1 Enoch and based *Jubilees* in part on that text, though he concedes that the similarities could, in fact, have come from another source.<sup>18</sup> In this study I have not noted parallels (or disagreements) between 1 Enoch and *Jubilees*, though I tend to agree that these texts share a common source. Despite their commonalities, however, I do not think that *Jubilees* is constructed as a reaction against ideas specific to 1 Enoch, but rather as a polemic against more

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<sup>15</sup> N. Avigad and Y. Yadin, *A Genesis Apocryphon*, pg. 38.

<sup>16</sup> Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*. 1997.

<sup>17</sup> D. A. Machiela, *The Dead Sea Genesis Apocryphon*. Boston, MA: Brill. 2009, pgs. 8-17.

<sup>18</sup> G. L. Davenport. *The Eschatology of the Book of Jubilees*. Leiden: Brill, 1971. pg. 83, n.1-2.

general Second Temple concerns. Specific references to parallel concepts in 1 Enoch are not, in a study of this nature, especially helpful and so I have omitted them. However, as *Jubilees* is also a Second Temple apocraphal work, it is worth noting that it and 1 Enoch share a similar context.

Given, then, the importance of blessing in the Bible and the amount of scholarly attention it has received, it is curious that in the current literature on *Jubilees* there is little special attention to the concept of blessing. Much of the current debate about *Jubilees* is centered on the redactional process and on whether it is indeed meant to be a replacement for the first two books of the Torah.<sup>19</sup> Its status as an example of the apocalyptic genre<sup>20</sup> has also been treated. Extensive energy has been devoted to discussion of the calendar system in *Jubilees* and its relationship to cultic festival, the importance of these festivals,<sup>21</sup> etc. While festival observance is undoubtedly a central concern for the authors of *Jubilees*, I have only referenced calendar and festival observance where they relate directly to blessing. Scholarship has also been focused on the differences between the biblical text and *Jubilees*; namely, where *Jubilees* has chosen to quote directly from the Torah and where the authors have written new material.<sup>22</sup> I will note places in which *Jubilees* is quoting directly from the Torah both for reference and to point out ideological parallels with the Torah. Where I do not mention a specific biblical parallel, it may be assumed that the material is either unique to *Jubilees* or sufficiently reworked that I do not find it

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<sup>19</sup> M. Segal, *The Book of Jubilees: Rewritten Bible, Redaction, Ideology, and Theology*. 2007. Cf. J. VanderKam, "The Origins and Purposes of the Book of Jubilees," *Studies in the Book of Jubilees*, ed. Albani, 1997. Cf. also R.H. Charles, *The Book of Jubilees or the Little Genesis*, 1902. G. Vermes was first to use the phrase "rewritten Bible;" Vermes, "The Life of Abraham," *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*. 1973.

<sup>20</sup> J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 1984. Cf. also A. Lange, "Divinatorische Träume und Apokalyptik im Jubiläenbuch," *Studies in the Book of Jubilees*, ed. Albani, 1997.

<sup>21</sup> L. Doering, "The Concept of Sabbath in the Book of Jubilees;" F. G. Martínez, "The Heavenly Tablets in the Book of Jubilees," *Studies in the Book of Jubilees*, ed. Albani, 1997.

<sup>22</sup> J.T.A.G.M. Van Ruiten, *Primeval History Interpreted: The Rewriting of Genesis 1-11 in the Book of Jubilees*. 2000.

helpful to point to the biblical source material. Moreover, it is where *Jubilees* innovates new material that we can most clearly see the authors' unique ideology — accordingly, I will note where material is “new” below.

This is primarily an exegetical exercise in which I will examine selected passages from *Jubilees* in detail and refer to, when helpful, other examples of these types and forms of blessing. I would like to demonstrate that the centrality of blessing to the ideology of *Jubilees* cannot be understated; that as a Second Temple polemic against gentile influence on Judaism, the authors of *Jubilees* sought to innovate new understandings of Israel's special status vis-a-vis their special relationship with God. I will be attempting to describe this innovative mechanism by which the authors of *Jubilees* understood blessing to be transmitted from God to humankind, humans to other humans, and from humankind back to God.

All citations from *Jubilees* are from VanderKam's 1989 translation with minor changes of my own where I have attempted to bring out a feeling more natural to the Ethiopian text; I have also referred to Goldmann's Hebrew retroversion of *Jubilees*.<sup>23</sup> These changes are typically minor in character and are simply meant to more closely reflect the syntax of the Ge'ez. Though some of the changes may flow less naturally in English, I have made these changes only where I believe that more literal translation of the Ge'ez may help the reader to understand what I have taken the text to mean. As such, any mistakes in the English translation of *Jubilees* are my own. Additionally, any citations from the Bible are my own translation of the Hebrew text and, again, any translational errors are my own.<sup>24</sup> I have attempted to translate as much text as possible into English, retaining the original languages only when necessary. All comparison herein is with the

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<sup>23</sup> M. Goldman, “ספר היובלים”, in הספרים החיצונים. ed. A. Kahana, Makor: 1978.

<sup>24</sup> Based on the Masoretic Text as it appears in the most recent edition of the BHS.

Hebrew MT, not the LXX. VanderKam has noted that the Ethiopic *Jubilees* more often agrees with LXX and SamP,<sup>25</sup> but because *Jubilees* was originally composed in Hebrew, I have made the assumption that it is worth noting variations from, in particular, the Hebrew semantic range of בָּרַךְ (*barakh*).

The overarching purpose of this study is to outline the means by which the authors of *Jubilees* have interpreted the biblical text and to highlight the ideological concerns of these authors.<sup>26</sup> My goal is to demonstrate that while the calendar and covenant are certainly central ideological concerns in *Jubilees*, one of the most fundamental aspects of how the authors of *Jubilees* understand the relationship between God, Israel, and the rest of the world is related to blessing. Blessing not only sets Israel apart, but also defines their unique ability to both enter into a relationship with God and to manipulate this same relationship. A primary component of that understanding of blessing is reflected in the limited semantic range of בָּרַךְ (*barakh*) in *Jubilees*.<sup>27</sup>

In particular, I will argue that the primary means by which blessing is transferred is contingent upon a structure of reciprocity between human beings and God. It takes the form of a positive feedback loop — blessing is part of a *causal* system which, by its own existence, is capable of continually modifying itself. In other words, the act of blessing actually *modifies* the initial act of blessing. I will also demonstrate that *Jubilees* reinvents the biblical concept of blessing in such a way that human beings are able to affect the state of God through the manipulation of blessing. However, I will also argue that all blessing must originate from God —

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<sup>25</sup> J. C. VanderJam, *Textual and Historical Studies in the Book of Jubilees*, 1977, pgs. 136-138.

<sup>26</sup> In deference to Segal, Davenport, et al., I refer to “authors” rather than a single author of *Jubilees*; however, I do think it is worth noting that despite changing hands many times throughout its complicated history, *Jubilees* does retain a coherent message — and it is this message that I am addressing herein.

<sup>27</sup> That is, narrow in contrast to the biblical text in which the semantic range of the root is quite broad.

whether or not the source of blessing is made explicit by the text. Further, I will show that this system of blessing is not only reciprocal, but also — as I have said — a system of *positive* feedback, such that blessing produces, in turn, further blessing.

## Chapter One — The Origin of Blessing

*Jubilees* begins not with creation but, rather, “during the first year of the... exodus from Egypt, in the third month on the sixteenth of the month” (1:1). *Jubilees* is in its entirety a record of the revelation to Moses on Sinai. Readers familiar with the biblical narrative will recognize that *Jubilees* begins after Ex 24; the story of creation through the exodus is then told to Moses by the Angel of the Presence, who is with God on Sinai. As I have noted above, this lends the text a unique legitimacy. It is not until the second chapter of *Jubilees* that we are told of the creation of the world itself. As in Genesis, there is no mention of blessing itself having been created; rather, the idea of blessing seems to preexist creation. The first three mentions of blessing in *Jubilees* are all, directly or indirectly, blessings of Israel (1:16, 29, 2:19). In 2:19 we have what is ostensibly the first blessing after creation, God’s blessing of Israel both by the giving of the Sabbath and by direct blessing. Indeed, it is not until Noah’s blessing of Shem (7:11) that any human is said to possess the power of blessing. From a strictly temporal point of view, *Jubilees* seems to understand blessing as originating with God alone; only later do humans possess the power to bless — a power they possess because it has been given to them by God, a point to which I will return below.

Though Noah is not himself an Israelite, he is certainly central to the biblical idea of righteousness and is a part of the larger Israelite genealogy — it is fitting, as such, that he is the first human to possess the power of blessing. While it might be strange given *Jubilees*’ perspective on gentiles to find someone like Esau or Ishmael possessing the power of blessing (*Jubilees* is often fairly anti-gentile), I think it is safe to argue that Noah is identified with Israel

ideologically — Noah is clearly understood by the authors of *Jubilees* to be the moral predecessor of the Israelites. So, though he is neither a Hebrew nor an Israelite in strictest terms, I think it is possible to conceptualize Noah as belonging to the larger nation of Israel (*Jub* 19:27). In light of Noah's identification with Israel, we can trace the first initiation of blessing by a human to an Israelite. Even if we were to exclude Noah, the next human to initiate blessing is Abraham; there is little evidence of God's willingness to give the power of blessing to gentiles (though, as I will below, he may be willing to *bless* them while withholding the *power of blessing*).

The most salient feature of blessing's origin is that blessing originates with God alone. Blessing by humans (whether of God or other humans) is not *sui generis* — it is based in a system of imitation of divine blessing, which in turn yields further blessing. Blessing, as I will demonstrate, is simultaneously a phenomena of imitation (*of* God) and of received capability (*from* God), which is concurrently owed to God. Additionally, blessing is sustained in a closed system of positive feedback which constantly refers back to its point of origination (God) either by blessing God directly or by participating in the act of blessing another human being (an act to which God is always either implicitly or explicitly linked). Participation in the cycle of blessing is also the primary means by which authority is generated; it is no accident that the authors have excluded all others from the cycle of blessing so that Israel alone can harness this power and, as such, authority over other nations (that is, the gentiles). I will explore the two major types of blessing below: the blessings of God and the blessings of humankind. I have divided these major types into several subgroups which focus on the relationship between God and Israel, God and

gentiles, and God and the land. Because *Jubilees* understands blessing as originating with God alone, I will begin with a discussion of God's blessings of both people and places.

## Chapter Two — The Blessings of God

The blessings of God in *Jubilees*, rather than the blessings of humankind, seem to have the most in common with the biblical conception of God's blessings. Indeed, the majority of instances in which God blesses human beings in *Jubilees* (Israelite or otherwise) are either identical in form or quoted in full from the biblical text. However, as I will outline below, the authors of *Jubilees* do in fact innovate several new ideas about blessing. These are most notably: the giving of the *power* of blessing (rather than giving blessing itself) and the blessing of land (rather than the people of the/a land). In the biblical worldview, blessing by God indicates a favorable relationship between the recipient of the blessing and God. Likewise, in *Jubilees* we find that God's blessing of both humankind and land indicates that he has entered into a favorable relationship with these individuals or peoples and places.

### 1. *Blessing Israel*

The power of God to bless Israel, concepts, states of being, and individuals is seemingly endless. The authors of *Jubilees*, however, understand God's *tendency* to bless, rather than his *capacity* to bless, as definitive of Israel's special status among the nations of the world. In other words, while God could bless the other nations, he has blessed Israel alone. *Jubilees'* reworking of the narratives in Genesis and Exodus reflects a concern with explaining why Israel is more qualified to receive this blessing than the other peoples of the earth; there is some anxiety on the part of *Jubilees'* authors about proving that though Israel is already blessed over and against all

the other nations of the world, Israel also *deserves* that blessing. Moreover, the authors of *Jubilees* see the giving of God's blessing to Israel as a key part of Israel's subsequent ability to bless — and therefore to both control and effect their relationship with — God.

The most illustrative passage of this point is the retelling of the election of Jacob over his twin Esau (*Jub* 19:16-31). The Esau and Jacob narrative is presented in a dramatically different form than Genesis. Key structural differences include:

- (a) No prophecy about Esau and Jacob is delivered to Rebecca before the twins' birth (cf. Gen 25:22-24).
- (b) Abraham, recognized as a more important patriarch than Isaac even in the biblical sources, is still alive to elect and bless Jacob.
- (c) Isaac's love of Esau is assigned a value (negative) versus in the biblical text in which his favoritism of Esau seems to be practical rather than emotional (Esau can hunt and therefore provide for his family while Jacob stays with his mother much of the time, Gen 25-27).
- (d) Jacob does not deceive his father and brother for the blessing and birthright, respectively (Gen 26-27).

While these are fairly substantial deviations from the biblical narrative, these variations are less relevant to the authors' understanding of blessing than the ideological differences reflected in *Jub* 19:16: "As Abraham observed Esau's behavior, he realized that through Jacob he would have a name and descendants."

The authors of *Jubilees* are aware that Esau and Jacob are fundamentally equal — they are twins and so of the same womb, but it is Esau's *behavior* that excludes him from blessing.

Esau has made a choice; though Jacob is “perfect and upright” in contrast to the “harsh, rustic, and hairy man” (19:13) who is his brother, it is apparently less so their inherent traits than their behavior that sets them apart. Esau is, after all, Jacob’s twin brother — but each has made a choice, and through this expression of free will Jacob comes to be loved (by Abraham) and Esau to be not only despised, but also cursed. That the authors see choice as playing a key role in the receiving of blessing implies that the blessing of Jacob, and therefore of Israel, is based not simply on (perhaps random) divine selection but also, and perhaps more importantly, on merit.

In the biblical narrative, the election of Jacob is confusing: Jacob deceives his family — both his brother Esau and father Isaac — and is far from being a moral exemplar, in addition to being the weaker of the two brothers (Gen 27). The authors of *Jubilees* were faced with a tension between the biblical portrayal of Jacob (which is not wholly positive) and the reality of Jacob’s importance as a patriarch. The authors of *Jubilees* have subsequently discarded all record of Jacob’s deceit (he does not trick his brother out of the birthright or trick his blind, aged father into giving him a blessing) and replace it with extended accounts of Jacob’s favor in the eyes of Abraham and God. As such, the biblical issue of Jacob’s intervention on his own behalf is quickly dealt with by simply erasing these troubling passages and replacing them with something quite the opposite. Jacob is suddenly the favorite of his still-living grandfather Abraham, who personally blesses Jacob. However, though Jacob is praised by the authors of *Jubilees*, it is not enough to simply compliment the “better” twin; instead, the authors also highlight Esau’s shortcomings: “Esau was a man of the field and a hunter and he learned war and all his deeds were fierce” (*Jub* 19:14). The original verse in Genesis merely reads: “Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field...” (Gen 25:27). Here, the description of Esau is particularly noteworthy

because it demonstrates the prevailing attitude in *Jubilees* toward gentiles. Esau represents the archetypal brutish, unchosen gentile to whom no blessing is given or deserved. If there were remaining concerns about Jacob's character, the audience has been sufficiently distracted by Esau's flaws — the favorite twin has become obvious. It is no surprise, then, that blessing is given to Jacob and not to Esau. While God has the *capacity* to bless Esau, he blesses Jacob instead because Jacob is more worthy.

The election of Jacob is worth highlighting because it introduces two key features of blessing in *Jubilees*: first, that Israel has earned God's blessing because it (and its individual components) are superior to other nations and, second, that God often secondarily blesses individuals through human beings themselves. While I will return to the concept of secondary blessing in greater detail below, here I use the term "secondary blessing" to mean that God has blessed someone or something through a human or other medium (here, through Abraham's blessing of Jacob, though blessing can occur through, for example, the Sabbath). As a model for God's blessing of Israel, the election of Jacob highlights that blessing is tied to merit in the eyes of the authors of *Jubilees*. God's tendency to bless Israel over and above other nations is directly linked to the extent to which Israel has earned — and deserves — God's blessing. Similarly, the sabbath, which has been blessed and sanctified with Israel in *Jub* 12, further reinforces the special status of Israel's blessing by God.

Much as the sabbath has been "sanctified" (set apart) and Israel has been sanctified, the authors of *Jubilees* gradually develop the idea that blessing is in itself a means of separation — a theme directly related to the idea that Israel is superior to the other nations:

And he said to us: “I will now separate a people for myself from among the nations. They also will keep the sabbath. I will sanctify the people for myself, and will bless them as I have sanctified the sabbath day. I will sanctify them for myself, in this way I will bless them. They will be my people and I will become their God (2:19).

In this verse from the end of the creation account, God tells the angels that he will create a nation for himself. Here, relatively close to the beginning of *Jubilees*, the authors make their view of Israel and its relationship to blessing fairly explicit. The phrase “in this way” creates an analogy between one state and another which, here, are sanctification and blessing. That is, even as the sabbath is sanctified, like this the people of Israel are *also* blessed. For the authors of *Jubilees*, the sanctification *is* the blessing, and it is the separation of Israel — and the subsequent revelation of a hierarchy among the nations — that is to be a blessing for Israel. Moreover, we are told that this state of blessing (and sanctification) has a very specific meaning: that those who are blessed are God’s people and God is their God.

The blessing in *Jub* 2:19 may also be a secondary blessing of Israel insofar as sabbath is also a blessing to Israel, though the link between sabbath observance and blessing is not made explicit in this passage. However, given that in 2:21 the authors of *Jubilees* do eventually make the link between sabbath and blessing, it may be assumed that the audience is to incorporate their knowledge of the relationship between Israel and the sabbath in their understanding of this 2:19. In 2:21, it is made clear that sabbath observance is intimately related to *Jubilees*’ understanding of Israel’s role in creation and Israel’s blessing by God. The authors have reworked the material in Genesis to reflect their own ideas about blessing and sabbath observance and, relatedly, holiness:

And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that he had done (Gen 2:3).

The authors of *Jubilees*, however, understand the significance of the sabbath — as well as the duty to observe it — quite differently than it is understood in Genesis:

And he created a sign in accordance with which they should keep sabbath with us on the seventh day, to eat and to drink, and to bless him who created all things as he blessed and sanctified for himself a particular people above all peoples, and that they should keep sabbath together with us (*Jub* 2:21).

The biblical authors make no explicit connection between the observance of sabbath and the blessing of Israel. The authors of *Jubilees*, however, see the blessing of the sabbath and the blessing of Israel as intimately bound together. For the authors of *Jubilees*, the blessing of the sabbath seems concurrent with the blessing of Israel — and, more importantly, these blessings are equal in power and significance. Moreover, the observance of the sabbath by the people of Israel actually serves to bless God; as such, we might understand the actions of the people of Israel to be connected to their relationship with God. Several aspects of this verse point to the interrelationship between God and Israel: first, Israel keeps the sabbath “with us” (here, the angels). Second, the sabbath and Israel are connected with the particle “as,” that is, “as God blessed Israel, so he blessed the sabbath for them to observe.” The authors go on to clarify yet another aspect of Israel’s relationship with God, though: keeping the sabbath is “to bless him who created all things.”

If the (earthly) sabbath is made for Israel (as the authors argue that it is) and the purpose of the (earthly) sabbath is to observe the (heavenly) sabbath with God but also to bless God, then

it follows that sabbath observance yields the blessing of God by Israel. In Genesis, the sabbath is blessed directly (as it is in *Jubilees*). In *Jubilees*, however, it is Israel that is blessed and it is Israel that, in turn, blesses God. The biblical idea of sabbath observance seems to be that the sabbath is holy because of something God has done; its holiness is not tied to Israel's actions in any way. However, the authors of *Jubilees* do reinforce the multidirectional nature of God's relationship with Israel — a relationship both catalyzed and reinforced by sabbath observance.

Yet again, we might think of this cycle of blessing as a system in which the ability to bless is contingent upon the previous giving of blessing. The sabbath can bless Israel, as Israel can bless God, as God can bless Israel and the sabbath though God, too, is understood as keeping the sabbath (thereby blessing himself). In each of these systems of blessing, God is the originator of the blessing. In 2:21, then, we have a basic outline of *Jubilees*' core understanding of the mechanism of blessing. Blessing originates with God, and God can therefore also bless himself vis-a-vis the blessing of the sabbath and Israel (which results in the blessing of "him who created all things" by Israel). In other words, from God blessing can then be transferred to the sabbath — but because the sabbath is created for Israel, it is Israel *alone* that can be blessed (like the sabbath) by both God and the sabbath. Indeed, God's power of blessing is so powerful that the blessing upon Israel is twofold: they receive God's blessing indirectly through the sabbath and directly from God. This twofold model of blessing underscores Israel's superiority over other nations of the world — though God *could* bless other nations, he has not — and any potentiality has not been acted upon.

Again, it is especially important that the blessing of the sabbath can *only* be received by Israel because the sabbath has been created for Israel alone:

There (were) two and twenty heads of mankind from Adam to Jacob, and two and twenty kinds of work were made until the seventh day; this is blessed and holy; and the former is also blessed and holy; and this one serves with that one for sanctification and blessing (2:23).

Here, both Jacob and the sabbath are blessed — and Jacob is blessed like the sabbath. Their blessing is equal, though Jacob can in a sense be blessed twice by sabbath observance. Here, too, sanctification and blessing are linked in the minds of the authors; the sabbath has been set apart (sanctified) as a day like Jacob (Israel) has been as a people. In the next verse we also see evidence of this same theme:

And to these it was granted that they should always be the blessed and holy ones of the first testimony and law, as he had sanctified and blessed on the seventh day (2:24).

Here again, Israel is capable of secondarily blessing itself by observing the sabbath (or, put another way, the sabbath can bless Israel — though it is Israel's choice to receive the blessing). Additionally, the authors have created an additional parallel between the blessedness of Israel and the blessedness of the sabbath (yet again using the preposition “as”). I think it is clear that here Israel can be blessed “like us,” that is, like God and the divine presence — implying that though the blessing may be indirect, it is still linked to divine favor. Even secondary blessings of people or things are always linked in the minds of the authors to the original source of blessing: God. Blessing not only originates with God at the beginning of time, but also continues to flow from that same locus of authority (God) in all processes of blessing (even in the interrelationship between sabbath and Israel).

The language in 2:24 also reinforces that Israel, in its blessing by God, is blessed and sanctified because the law (and, therefore, their relationship with God) is unique among the nations (“always be the blessed and holy ones of the first testimony and law...”). The authors of *Jubilees* do not, however, simply state Israel’s superiority — they are also careful to reinforce that Israel is superior to other nations *because* Israel is blessed like the sabbath and the sabbath is blessed for Israel. It might be useful to think of Israel as possessing “exclusive rights” to the cycle of sabbath observance and blessing. By being given God’s blessing, Israel is able to participate in a process often catalyzed by the sabbath observance.

Blessing can also be catalyzed by relationship to one whom God has blessed. In the verse below, Abraham is blessed by the angel of the Presence (though here, I would argue that this is the same as being blessed by God because “divine blessing” carries the same power regardless of which divine actor is doing the blessing)<sup>28</sup> — and Israel is also blessed as a result:

And we blessed him forever and all the descendants after him throughout all the history of the earth because he celebrated this festival in its season in accord with the testimony of the heavenly tablets (16:28).

Here again emphasis is placed on the blessing of Israel by God (here represented by the narrator, the angel of the Presence) by the giving of the sabbath (and other holidays). Connection of festival celebration and blessing reflects *Jubilees*’ overarching concern with ritual observance.

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<sup>28</sup> To make clear, I am not arguing that the angels in *Jubilees* are the same as God -- the author clearly sees them as distinctive entities -- but their power of blessing is the same. The angel of the Presence can speak with authority on God’s behalf and, much like other instances of blessing throughout *Jubilees*, no blessing can occur without it being derivative of God’s capability to bless. To argue that the angel of the Presence cannot bless in the same way seems to imply that the angels are not divine which, of course, is incorrect -- especially given that the angels in *Jubilees* always represent God and are the voice of God. I would also note that the division of divine power makes little logical sense: to suggest that the angels possess a power distinct from God suggests a theism not consistent with *Jubilees* ideas about absolute divine authority.

The blessing of God is also, as I have said, more powerful than the blessings of humankind:

May the blessings with which the Lord blessed me and my descendants belong to Jacob and his descendants forever (19:23).

In this verse, Abraham tells Rebecca of his wishes for Jacob — as well as his blessing of Jacob (he will later bless Jacob in person, though he blesses Jacob in his absence here). Abraham makes clear that God’s *initial* blessing is transferable. Those who have been blessed, moreover, have the capability of transferring this blessing from themselves to others, so that God and the person who transfers the blessing are simultaneously blessing the recipient of the blessing. In a sense, the blessing of God is “too big” for just one person — blessing therefore spreads from the initial recipient of the blessing to all those with whom they are intimately connected or might wish to bless (such as offspring). The power of blessing by God is so great that it can also be retroactively applied to ancestors:

In his descendants my name will be blessed, and the name of my fathers, Shem, and Noah, and Enoch, and Mahalalel, and Enos, and Seth, and Adam (19:24).

In these verses, we again see that the power of blessing can spread outward from the recipient once they have been blessed by God; there is little evidence that the blessing of a person by another human has this same power of transferability. In the blessing of Abraham in 19:24 (an allusion to an early blessing by God, implying that Abraham — after his initial blessing — can exist in a state of being blessed long after the act of blessing has occurred, see *Jub* 13:19-21), all of his forefathers can *also* be blessed — simply because the power of blessing is so great when God is doing the blessing.

Though I will discuss Rebecca's blessing of Jacob in greater detail below (see "Blessings of Humankind"), we can use her extensive blessing as an illustration of God's power to bless:

Now, my son, listen to me. Do as your mother wishes. Do not marry any of the women of this land but (someone) from my father's house and from my father's clan. Marry someone from my father's house. The most high God will bless you; your children will become a righteous family and your descendants (will be) holy (25:3).

In this verse, Rebecca admonishes Jacob not to marry Canaanites but, rather, someone of her father's family. In so doing, Rebecca promises that God will bless Jacob. This rather interesting construction refers to the promise of blessing that the person promising the blessing (Rebecca) will not herself deliver. Rather, Rebecca promises Jacob that in doing what she asks, God will bless him. The blessing, however, is not simply an acknowledgement of an altered state (that is, the state of being blessed). Rather, Jacob's blessing will result in the *righteousness* and *holiness* of his family. Blessing is not only an isolated state unto itself but can also bring about other morally valued states. While being "blessed" does not in itself imply a moral hierarchy, I would argue that righteousness and holiness unequivocally do imply a superiority that is ethical in nature. Particularly because Rebecca's promise of blessing is immediately preceded by the mention of who Jacob is forbidden to marry (gentiles) it logically follows that this theme may be carried into the second portion of Rebecca's promise to Jacob. That is, unlike "the women of this land," Jacob will be blessed if he marries someone of Rebecca's "father's house" because their offspring can be holy and righteous. The blessing that will follow this marriage, though, seems to be connected not to the act of marriage itself. It seems that Jacob has little choice. That is, it is less that Jacob will *earn* a blessing if he marries who he is supposed to; instead, he is *cut off from*

*the possibility of blessing* if he does not. Because Jacob ultimately does as he is told, we are yet again reminded that blessing is based on merit. Jacob (and Israel) have not been arbitrarily selected for God's blessing; rather, Israel has earned God's blessing by being inherently superior in character.

It is plausible to suggest that the authors of *Jubilees* understand Israel's superiority to have a moral component. The authors are careful to develop the idea that Israel has earned its blessing by God. So, the tendency of God to bless Israel is not based on whimsy or luck — instead, Israel has set itself apart as a *better nation*, one qualified to have a special relationship with God. They are also exceptional enough to have a relationship with God which is multi-directional and reciprocal. Rather than a relationship of vertical generalized reciprocity in which nothing is owed by lesser actors to the originators of blessing (or money),<sup>29</sup> God expects blessing in return from Israel not only because he has blessed them, but also because they are *capable* of blessing God whereas other nations are not. Unlike in Genesis and Exodus, Israel is presented by the authors of *Jubilees* as being a more worthy nation based on their behavior and, specifically, moral superiority, rather than simply a nation chosen at random.

## 2. *Blessing Gentiles*

These other unworthy nations, the gentiles, are a subject on which the authors of *Jubilees* have spent considerable thought. The attitude towards gentiles is complicated: while a superficial reading of *Jubilees* may make it seem wholly anti-gentile, the authors of *Jubilees* seem to nuance

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<sup>29</sup> Gowler, David B. *What Are They Saying About the Historical Jesus?* New Jersey: Paulist Press. 2007. p. 142.

their attitude toward gentiles somewhat in their understanding of gentiles' ability to be blessed. Tellingly, the authors of *Jubilees* do *not* rework the Genesis 12:1-3 blessing of Abraham; it is quoted directly in the text (*Jub* 12:23). The blessing in Genesis 12 is by far one of the richest examples of the power which blessing was understood to have in the biblical world. While it is possible to argue that the authors are simply quoting Genesis and, therefore, that this passage does not reflect the authors' specific ideology, I would argue that the authors' choice to quote in full the biblical text instead of paraphrasing it is significant of their agreement with the biblical idea of blessing. In Genesis 12 God blesses Abraham and therefore blesses *all the families of the earth* who are blessed through Abraham's state of being blessed (by God). So, God is also blessing the gentiles (though if they curse Abraham, they will be cursed).

If the decision to quote in full from Gen 12:1-3 indicates agreement on the part of the authors of *Jubilees* with the ideology of the biblical authors, it seems that *Jubilees* has a relatively complicated approach to the blessing of gentiles.<sup>30</sup> *Jubilees* not only implies that other nations may be blessed through Abraham (as in Genesis), but also records the blessing of an individual gentile: Ishmael. It is certainly surprising that not long prior to the negative views of Esau presented in *Jub* 19, a blessing is presented to Ishmael by God:

Regarding Ishmael I have listened to you. I will indeed bless him, increase him, and make him very numerous. He will father twelve princes and I will make him into a large nation (15:20).

It may seem from this verse that gentiles and Israelites have equal access to blessing. In a sense this is true: a special gentile, Ishmael (who is circumcised *and* the son of Abraham) can be

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<sup>30</sup> See introductory remarks on *Jubilees* and gentiles above.

blessed and will be made relatively prosperous. However, there is no record anywhere in the text of *Jubilees* that gentiles can participate in the cycle of blessing which characterizes Israel's relationship with God. The ability to affect the divine world and access to divine power is completely cut off from the gentiles. As I have already argued, this is because Israel is a better and more worthy nation than all the other nations of the world. Though Ishmael is special because he is part of the covenant and the son of one of the most important figures in Israelite history, he is still excluded from the relationship which God and Israel share. For the authors of *Jubilees*, then, gentiles can be blessed, but with a caveat: they tend not to be, and they have no access to the power of blessing which is bestowed upon Israelites by God (see below). Ishmael also has a special status because he technically fulfills the prophecy in *Jub* 14:2-4 (he is from Abraham's loins), but he is not the son actually promised to Sara and Abraham (Isaac).

To highlight gentiles' inability to access the cycle of blessing in which Israelites can participate and their removal from the source of blessing (God), the authors note that Ishmael may cause Abraham to bless God, though Ishmael himself does not do so:

And Ishmael, the son of Hagar, the Egyptian, was before the face of Abraham, his father, in his place, and Abraham rejoiced and blessed God because he had seen his sons and had not died childless. And he remembered the words which he had spoken to him on the day on which Lot had parted from him, and he rejoiced because the Lord had given him generations upon the earth to inherit the earth, and he blessed the creator of all things with his mouth (17:2-3).

That Ishmael triggers the blessing of another is the closest he can come to himself being a part of the system of blessing of which Abraham, Isaac, and other Israelites are members.<sup>31</sup> We can therefore infer that the blessing of God to the gentiles is *weaker* than the blessing given to Israelites. Whereas Israelites can be blessed (see above) and transfer that blessing to others (see below), gentiles can only receive minimal blessing. Moreover, the blessing of gentiles is *not* equated with sanctification, whereas the blessing of Israel is concurrently the sanctification of Israel. The blessing of gentiles by God in *Jubilees* is, then, significantly less powerful than the blessing of Israel in *Jubilees*.

### 3. *Blessing Land*

The authors of *Jubilees* innovate the direct blessing of land by God. As Mitchell has argued, בָּרַךְ (*barakh*) is used in the praise of God by man, the blessing of man by man, and the blessing of man by God, but reference to the direct blessing of land by God, rather than the promise of land by God, is conspicuously absent from the biblical canon.<sup>32</sup> Mitchell notes that the use of בָּרַךְ (*barakh*) may reference land (Gen 12:3, 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14, etc.), but always in reference to *people of the land* and not land itself. In *Jubilees*, however, the usage of בָּרַךְ (*barakh*) is significantly different:

And he knew that a blessed portion and a blessing had come to Shem and his sons to the generations forever -- the whole land of Eden and the whole land of the Red Sea, and the whole land of the east, and India, and on the Red Sea and the mountains thereof, and all

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<sup>31</sup> Below I will discuss in greater detail the process by which gentiles can bless in Abraham's name.

<sup>32</sup> C. W. Mitchell, 1987.

the land of Bashan, and all the land of Lebanon and the islands of Kaftur, and all the mountains of Sanir and Amana, and the mountains of Asshur in the north, and all the land of Elam, Asshur, and Babel, and Susana and Maedai and all the mountains of Ararat, and all the region beyond the sea, which is beyond the mountains of Asshur towards the north, a blessed and spacious land, and all that is in it is very good (8:21).

As demonstrated above, blessing is an ongoing state which can be passed through generations. However, in 8:21, blessing is also tied to spaces. Rather than existing as some abstract concept, blessing must be tied to people or places — and people and places can be thought of as existing in one of three states: blessing, curse, and a “neutral” state.

The authors of *Jubilees* have adopted the idea that land can be directly blessed by God and not simply indirectly blessed (through ownership, Deut 33:13)<sup>33</sup> or promised (Gen 12). The holiness of land has serious ownership implications — if the land is blessed, can those who are not blessed own it?<sup>34</sup> Perhaps the answer lies in another of God’s blessings of Abraham, which is more or less a direct quotation of the promise to Abraham in the *Akedah* (Gen 22:16-18). This blessing is not directly concerned with the blessing of land, but it answers important questions about who can inherit land — even enemy land which, given that the land addressed in 8:21 is the land of Shem, far exceeds the actual land of Israel. It is clear in 18:15-16 that Israelites can inherit land in Canaan as well — they will, it seems, “inherit the cities of their enemies:”

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<sup>33</sup> I think the “blessing” of land in Deut 33:13 is misleading; though the root בָּרַךְ is juxtaposed with “*artzo*,” that is, “his land,” it is actually a blessing of Joseph through not the land itself, but what will be given to the land (dew, bounty, etc.). Subsequent verses (14-16) highlight that this is not a direct blessing of the land, though the verse could be understood as an *indirect* blessing of the land (which dew, etc., for Joseph) — which, as I have stated, *is* a biblical idea.

<sup>34</sup> In contrast to Gen 3:17, in which the idea that land can be directly *curled* is evident: “The land will be cursed because of you,” that is, God curses the ground because of Adam’s sin but Adam does inherit the earth (which is cursed) to toil in.

(And) He said “I have sworn by myself,” says the Lord, “Because you performed this command and have not refused me your first-born son whom you love, I will indeed bless you and will indeed multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven and as the sands on the seashore. And your descendants will inherit the cities of their enemies. All the nations of the earth will be blessed through your descendants because you have obeyed my command. I have made known to everyone that you are faithful to me in everything that I have told you. Go in peace.” (18:15-16)

Though *Jubilees* extends the biblical relationship between blessed people (of a land, namely, Israel) and land to the novel idea of God directly blessed land, the authors have chosen to retain the biblical idea of Israel inheriting the land. While the biblical text makes no explicit link between a blessed people inheriting a blessed land, the authors of *Jubilees* have reinforced the substantial blessing of the Israelites over the gentiles by creating not only a chosen land for Israel, but also a *blessed* land (in 8:21). While the land may be indirectly blessed through Israel in 18:15-16 insofar as Israel’s enormous blessing will be connected to the land, it is not clear in these verses (or, therefore, in the biblical account of the *Akedah*) that the land is itself directly blessed by God unless it is read with the previous verse, *Jub* 8:21, in mind.

Clearly, in 18:15-16, God is blessing Abraham — the emphasis in this verse is on the act of blessing more broadly. More importantly, however, God is blessing Abraham *also*, that is, *in addition to the nations of the earth* (via Abraham’s offspring) and, therefore, also Abraham’s offspring themselves (the nations of the earth are blessed through Abraham’s seed because his offspring are themselves blessed). Land is a key component of the blessing of Abraham’s descendants: the descendants of Abraham will inherit the land that is promised to him *and* that

land is blessed. *Jub* 18:15-16 contains two kinds of blessing: the indirect blessing of gentiles, and the direct blessing of Abraham — both of which are biblical blessings. Where *Jubilees* is explicitly innovative is in 8:21, with which the reader will already be familiar; they will know that the land is already directly blessed. It is possible to understand 18:15-16, then, as a verse in which Israel and their land are blessed, but yet again gentiles are excluded from direct blessing. Relatedly, it is also the national scope of the blessing which is unique to Israel — though all other nations might collectively be blessed or a single gentile may be blessed, the nation of Israel is the only single nation to be sanctified and blessed by God.

The blessing of land makes sense in the context of Second Temple Judaism. Against a slew of invaders throughout history, overrun by Greek influence, and struggling with national identity, Jews in Palestine would have been eager to claim their land as their own. Not only were they able to affect their relationship with God, but they also had been given the land on which they lived by divine right. In a context in which the Jews would have been struggling to retain ownership in the face of foreign power, it is logical that the authors of *Jubilees* innovated the idea that the land given to Abraham and his descendants was not only promised to Israel — it is also blessed for a blessed people, and blessed for a *powerful* people.

In light of *Jub* 8:21, I think it is reasonable to suggest that the authors of *Jubilees* seem to understand blessing to be both temporal and spatial. Instead of harmonizing or quoting from biblical material, the authors have innovated the idea that blessing can be both temporally significant (it may be passed from generation to generation, for example) and also spatially contingent (it may be linked to land). I would argue that this novel understanding of blessing's ability to occupy both theoretical and physical realms is relatively foreign to the biblical

worldview. Though I have noted Mitchell's comments on "the people of the land" (see introduction) being blessed in the Bible, this is still a temporal view in that the blessing is passed from generation to generation regardless of what land they are actually in; calling Israel a people "of the land" is more like an honorific than an actual reflection of the blessing's spatial contingency. In other words, while the Bible does reflect an understanding of a promised land, it is not as developed as the ideology presented in *Jubilees*. The authors of *Jubilees* extend the power of blessing so that it is both temporal and spatial — it can exist in a physical location or in a more abstract "place" such as a family. Obviously, the blessing of gentiles has no spatial component for these authors; it is not only that the "temporal" variety of blessings are more powerful for Israelites, but they also have access to spatially-based blessings.

The blessing of land outside Israel is intimately related to the authors' expression of Israel's power. That these authors have articulated a scenario in which Israel will establish dominion over the whole land of Shem is certainly connected to the context in which *Jubilees*' authors were writing. Davenport has noted *Jubilees* clear preoccupation with an end-time which is close at hand; these authors envision a radical change in the ordering of the universe.<sup>35</sup> In a Second Temple context, these authors have articulated a vision of the world in which Israel will be restored to its place above the other nations. It is no accident that so much of *Jubilees*, particularly its discussion of blessing, is aimed at arguing for Israel's superiority over other nations. Eventually, for the authors of *Jubilees*, the world will be dramatically changed — and Israel will inherit not only the land promised to Moses, but the whole of the earth. As such, the

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<sup>35</sup> Davenport, Gene L. *The Eschatology of the Book of Jubilees*. Leiden and Boston: Brill. 1971.

ideology being developed in *Jubilees* is not only related to a moral superiority over other nations, but also connected to Israel's eventual physical dominion over their enemies.

### Part Three — The Blessings of Humankind

In return for blessing, in both the Bible and *Jubilees* it is common for people to bless both God and one another. Below I will discuss two kinds of blessing: the blessing of God by humankind, and the blessing of humans (both as individuals and collectively) by other humans. While these blessings are by no means as powerful as God's blessings of people and land, Israelite blessing does seem to be substantially more powerful than gentile blessing. Similarly, I will demonstrate that in *Jubilees*, the only access to the cycle of blessing gentiles have is to bless God, or Israel, through the name of an Israelite.

#### 1. *Blessing God*

Blessings of God by human beings are typically simple in form. These blessings can be for one of two purposes: the perpetuation of the cycle of blessing (which is an ordinance for the people of Israel) or for the transfer of authority. Blessing does also seem to stem from goodwill and gratitude, though I would classify this as part of the cycle of blessing enjoined upon Israelites and not as a distinct category. In every case — whether the purpose of blessing God is made explicit or not — any blessing of God furthers the cycle of blessing which is so critical to understanding *Jubilees'* assessment of authority. A standard form in *Jubilees* follows the basic pattern of “N blesses God for X,” as in 13:7: “Then he blessed the Lord who had led him from Ur or the Chaldeans and brought him to this mountain.” Here, N is Abraham -- who blesses God for bringing him to the mountain (X).

In 13:7, Abraham is directly blessing God for what God has done. Abraham possesses, as Israel will after him, the power to bless God. Abraham is the archetypal Israelite; though he has a special relationship with God and is a Hebrew, not Israelite, in the technical sense, the authors of *Jubilees* often make a point of aligning Abraham's offspring with Abraham himself — as is often done in the Bible as well. There is no evidence in the verses that follow that Abraham's unrecorded blessing (that is, we do not know the verbal content of the blessing) has an effect on God, though his blessing is part of the important ongoing cycle of blessing and receipt of blessing. As such, though this particular blessing is not juxtaposed with an explicit comment on the result of the blessing, Abraham's blessing does implicitly serve to further the understanding in *Jubilees* that the relationship between God and Israel is bidirectional.

The act of blessing God by an Israelite can also be a result of an indirect, or secondary, blessing by God:

And he [Abraham] blessed his creator who had created him in his generation because he had created him for his pleasure, for he knew and perceived that from there would come a righteous plant for the history of eternity and from him there would be holy descendants so that they should become like the one who made everything (16:26).

Abraham is blessing God, but here blessing is not necessarily a novel act. Rather, the blessing is imitative; Abraham has been created by God, and he blesses him as a result. The secondary blessing is that in becoming “like the one who made everything,” Abraham's offspring (who have been indirectly blessed through Abraham being blessed by God in *Jub* 13), Abraham's descendants will both be blessed (like God, who is being blessed by Abraham here) and imitate God (and therefore continue the cycle of blessing).

*Jubilees* makes clear that imitative blessing is a core feature of Israel's means of relating to God. As is clear from 16:26, the ability to bless and be blessed is, in addition to sabbath observance, part of the *imitatio dei* which, for the authors, is emblematic of Israel's special status among the nations. Imitative blessing is also demonstrated by Noah:

And in the twenty-eighth jubilee Noah began to enjoin upon his sons' sons the ordinances and commandments, and all the judgments that he knew, and he exhorted his sons to observe righteousness, and to cover the shame of their flesh, and to bless their creator, and honor father and mother, and love their neighbor, and guard their souls from fornication and uncleanness and all iniquity (7:20).

Here, Israel can bless God two ways: by blessing him directly (“and to bless their Creator”) and also by obeying the ordinances, commandments, and “judgments that [Noah] knew.” Blessing is, then, not merely a direct transfer by means of speech act — blessing can also be given indirectly in action and observance of divine commandments, though this type of blessing is unique to the relationship between Israel and God (in other words, gentiles cannot bless God imitatively, nor are they bound to be obedient to God). For the authors of *Jubilees*, I would note that Noah is not a righteous gentile — rather, he is clearly understood to be a proto-Israelite. Noah, like the patriarchs, often performs proto-priestly functions before the actual Moasic covenant is given at Sinai. Noah is also often explicitly named as a forefather of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (*Jub* 19:27).

If Noah's righteousness is Israelite righteousness, we have already seen that the Israelites are to become like God (*Jub* 16:26). In 7:20, however, the concept of imitative blessing is made even more explicit. Noah's sons are to observe the sabbath, which God also observes; they are to

bless their creator, as God blesses; and so on. Another component of the blessing in 7:20 is the common idea in *Jubilees* that observance of the commandments by Israel is in itself a blessing to God: I think the most natural reading of 7:20 is: “ordinances and commandments, and... judgments... and righteousness... [such as] to cover the shame of their flesh, and to bless their creator, etc....” In this reading, blessing is a major component of what is enjoined upon Noah’s sons to observe. So, while Noah’s sons must always continue to bless God and thereby renew their capability for blessing throughout the generations, they are also obligated to do so. Sabbath observance is also a crucial piece of this puzzle but, for our present purposes, it suffices to note that blessing of one’s creator is not only an imitation of God, but it is also *owed* to God.

If, then, blessing is both an imitation of God and that which is owed, the logical conclusion is that blessing is also owed to Israel by God. God, too, is bound to bless and just as Israelites are bound to bless God; the relationship between God and Israel is *not* one in which only Israel has an obligation to God, or only God has an obligation to Israel. Rather, in *Jubilees*’ understanding of blessing between God and Israel as a feedback loop, both participants (God and Israel) are obligated to one another. It is not only that God has a tendency to bless Israel above other nations, then: God *must* bless Israel.

In 7:20 we find imitative blessing which reflects not only the relationship between God and Israel, but also constitutes further evidence that the origin of blessing is God alone. As I noted in Section B, “The Origin of Blessing,” if we read *Jubilees* in a linear fashion, the power of blessing is only in human hands relatively late (*Jub* 7:11, in which Noah blesses Shem). *Jub* 7:20 further reinforces that blessing originates with God. In the imitation of God, blessing is a central component. Noah’s sons are to bless *like* God blesses. The righteousness and blessing that

are central to 7:20 are not *sui generis* or, as such, of human origin. Blessing, like other ordinances of God, therefore comes from God alone.

The commandment to bless God is *not* a biblical commandment. Blessing (and, in the Bible, praise) of God is not enjoined upon Noah or the Israelites, though in *Jubilees* the commandment is, as we have seen, unambiguous. *Jubilees'* distinctive position further highlights the importance of Israel's relationship with God over and above the gentiles. Blessing is an indispensable aspect of how the authors of *Jubilees* articulate Israel's relationship with God and, therefore, Israel's election over other nations. In other words, *Jubilees* does not only express a contempt for gentiles through strict laws about intermarriage or caricatures of brutish gentiles like Esau. Rather, the authors present the audience with a nuanced understanding of how Israel relates to the divine not only through the covenant in a broad sense, but via the specific medium of blessing. To assert that God and Israel are enjoined to bless one another is a powerful statement, and the authors of *Jubilees* make this point forcefully.

A more complex formula for the blessing of God by an Israelite is found in Rebecca's blessing of and commandments to her son, Jacob. Rebecca is, for the authors of *Jubilees*, an incredibly significant figure in Israel's history<sup>36</sup> and, as such, she is given a central role in the text. Her blessing of Jacob is a rich example of the Israelite ability to bless both God and other human beings:

(a) Blessed are you, righteous Lord, God of ages;

and may he<sup>37</sup> bless you more than all the human race.

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<sup>36</sup> She is Jacob's mother, and Jacob is focus of the covenant in *Jubilees*; see B. Halpern-Amaru, *The Empowerment of Women in the Book of Jubilees*, 1999. See also W. K. Gilders, "The Concept of Covenant in *Jubilees*," 186-187.

<sup>37</sup> That is, Jacob, her son.

(b) My son, may he provide the right path for you  
and reveal what is right to your descendants. (25:15)

This is a relatively awkward construction<sup>38</sup> insofar as it is a blessing of God (what I have called part “a,” the first two lines) followed immediately by Rebecca speaking to her son in the context of this larger blessing (which begins in 25:11 and continues into 25:23). Rebecca’s blessing of God is immediately preceded by Rebecca laying her hands on Jacob’s head to bless him,<sup>39</sup> though her eventual blessing of Jacob is entirely within the context of the blessing of God. Immediately preceding 25:15 we find Rebecca’s prayer that God *will* bless her son, prefaced by the line: “Bless him, Lord, and place a righteous blessing in my mouth so that I may bless him” (25:13). The formula in 25:13 is relatively basic: God gives blessing to a human, which produces blessing of another human being, which in turn also produces more blessing to be returned to God.<sup>40</sup> This closed system of positive feedback originates with divine blessing. However, this system can also be thought of as possessing reflexivity insofar as it is both bidirectional and, in strictest terms, yields both causes and effects which interact with each other to yield even further causes and effects. For example, the effect of blessing refers back to the origin of blessing and, in so doing, *affects* the original source of blessing (God). Rebecca’s blessing of God and Jacob is perhaps the most obvious example of this system because the blessing of God is directly juxtaposed with the blessing of Jacob. However, before Rebecca can

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. VanderKam 1989:161, Ms. 12 “attempts to alleviate the abruptness of the change in address by prefacing ‘she rose and said? ...’” (cf. also Berger, 454, n. c to v 15).

<sup>39</sup> See B. Halpern-Amaru, *The Empowerment of Women in the Book of Jubilees*, 1999. Halpern-Amaru makes clear that Rebecca’s position in *Jubilees* is quite unusual: Rebecca takes on clearly defined gender roles, but roles which are unequivocally both female *and* powerful. See pp. 47-73, “The Matriarchs as Wives and Copartners.”

<sup>40</sup> Here in particular, I am defining positive feedback as Keesing does: “A produces more of B which in turn produces more of A.” Keesing, R.M. *Cultural anthropology: A contemporary perspective*, 2nd ed. Sydney: Holt, Rinehard, & Winston, Inc. 1981. cf. p. 49.

bless Jacob or God, she must have blessing *placed in her mouth* by God himself because she has not been directly blessed yet.<sup>41</sup> In other words, 25:13 contains further evidence that God is the source of all blessing — even when a character as central and powerful as Rebecca is doing the blessing. If God has not previously blessed the Israelite doing the blessing of another person or thing, God must *give* them the power of blessing. Blessing is not, as I have argued above, a *sui generis* human phenomenon; *imitatio dei* may allow human (or, more specifically, Israelite) participation in the cycle of blessing, but this system must be initiated by God.<sup>42</sup>

To return to 25:15a, Rebecca’s blessing of God is both a direct blessing (“Blessed are you...”) and also a wish for future blessing (“may he [Jacob] bless you...”). Rebecca’s blessing immediately points to what I have already noted is critical to *Jubilees*’ understanding of Israel’s special status: that they are given blessing by God, bless him “more than all the human race,” and in turn are made a part of the continual cycle of blessing and renewal of blessing that is definitive of their relationship with God. Once Rebecca has invoked God’s original blessing (25:13), she can bless God in return (25:15a) and express a wish for the continuation of the cycle of blessing through Jacob (25:15b) much as Noah has commanded his sons (7:20). I think it is important to highlight this blessing in particular, as Jacob is especially central to the authors of *Jubilees* — Isaac’s role is downplayed and Abraham’s life extended so that Abraham can personally bless Jacob.<sup>43</sup> These deviations from the biblical narrative highlight Jacob’s centrality

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<sup>41</sup> I do not think this implies that God blesses himself per se, only that the capability to bless God is contingent on God’s initial blessing of those who will initially bless him: in other words, only Israelites are part of the cycle of blessing, as I have demonstrated above.

<sup>42</sup> This being said, I do not think there is evidence that God alone maintains the cycle of blessing; per the above, God is bound to bless Israel but Israel is also bound to bless God.

<sup>43</sup> Jacob is clearly the covenantal focus of *Jubilees*; see W. K. Gilders, “The Concept of Covenant in *Jubilees*,” 186-187. See also B. Halpern-Amaru, “Metahistorical Covenant,” *Rewriting the Bible: Land and Covenant in Postbiblical Jewish Literature*, Valley Forge, PA: Trinity. 1994, pp. 36-41.

as a patriarch; that the blessing in 25:15 is connected to Jacob only serves to highlight its ideological importance.

Rebecca's blessing of Jacob continues for several more lines, building on what I have previously discussed. The most notable feature of this blessing is Rebecca's paraphrase of God's promise to Abraham found both in *Jubilees* and in the biblical material:

May the one who blesses you be blessed  
and anyone who curses you falsely be cursed (25:22).

Whether we are meant to assume that Rebecca knows the content of God's earlier blessing of Abraham is unclear. However, I think the paraphrase of the material in Gen 12 may be a means of contextualizing Rebecca's blessing to Jacob within the larger framework of the blessing to the patriarchs — a significant ideological move on the part of *Jubilees'* authors. Moreover, by referring to the earlier “one who blesses you be blessed” construction, Rebecca's blessing is elevated in importance by its association with perhaps the most important blessing in both the Bible and *Jubilees* (that is, Gen 12 and its equivalent). It is also worth noting that this extensive blessing is concluded with “she then stopped blessing him” (25:23). This formal conclusion of blessing is unusual in *Jubilees* and further highlights the centrality of Rebecca's blessing of Jacob, especially when coupled with the formal invocation of blessing at the onset. Rebecca must, though, use this blessing formula. Because Rebecca herself has not been directly blessed by God prior to her giving of blessing to Jacob, she must ask God to give her the power of blessing. The patriarchs, conversely, do not invoke God before their blessings because their

power to bless is derived from their previous blessings by God (cf. 22:7-24, “Now I offer humble thanks to you...”).<sup>44</sup>

A different type of blessing is the blessing of God by an Israelite as a result of goodwill or gratitude. Jacob’s blessing of God is a good example of this; though this is an “unrecorded” blessing in the sense that we do not know the specific wording of the blessing, we are given an overview of its content and also what has inspired Jacob to return blessing to God.

He was eating happily there — he and all his sons and his men — for the seven days. He was blessing and praising the Lord who had freed him from all his difficulties and who had granted him his vow (32:7).

While knowledge of characters’ inner states is rare in biblical material, it is more common in *Jubilees* to know, for example, that a character is happy. We are told that Jacob is happily eating with his family and servants. For these seven days, he is continually blessing *and* praising<sup>45</sup> God. This implies that there is a clear distinction in the minds of the authors of *Jubilees* between the passive praise of God and the active blessing of God (which is owed to God as part of the covenant relationship). In *Jubilees*, blessing is always active. Here I think it is worth reinforcing that throughout *Jubilees*, “to bless” reflects an active engagement with the world; characters are affecting the state of God and one another when they engage in the act of blessing. In Rebecca’s blessing of Jacob, blessing means that Rebecca is *changing* and *controlling* the world around her

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<sup>44</sup> This return of blessing stands in contrast to the biblical concern, which is often fertility, cf. the introduction. The concern within *Jubilees* seems to be not only the number of offspring but also the type of offspring -- that is, these children must be righteous, blessed, and sanctified in each subsequent generation. There is an understanding that blessing requires renewal and that this renewal occurs through the use of speeches given by one who is capable of blessing. In every cycle of blessing, though, even when humans are blessing other humans, the referent for blessing is always God and his relationship with the people of Israel. See C. W. Mitchell 1987:165, 6.1.

<sup>45</sup> I note this especially because of my previous comments in the introduction on the distinction between blessing and praise in *Jub* versus the HB. Here the distinction between blessing and praise is very clear, and I defer to VanderKam’s translation.

in a meaningful way. In every example I have cited thus far, “blessing” is an appropriate translation of the original Hebrew root because the engagement of the entity doing the blessing (God, Israelite, etc.) is an active one and the recipient of the blessing (God, etc.) is *affected* and *changed* by receiving the blessing. In 32:7, the language makes clear that Jacob is both blessing (that is, participating in the special system of positive feedback between Israel and God) and praising (which is, expressing gratitude but not actively engaging in the world around him or changing God’s state of being in any way).

Let us return to Jacob’s blessing of God in 32:7. His blessing stems directly from his happiness and, indeed, his state of blessing (“freed... from all... difficulties” and “granted... his vow”). This passage makes a fairly explicit link between being blessed (as Jacob is) and returning blessing to God. *Jubilees* does not record blessing of God without some sense that the person doing the blessing has received the benefit of God’s blessing prior to their blessing of God. Much as in Rebecca’s blessing of Jacob (though she has not been directly blessed by God and must invoke God’s blessing as such), she *is* articulating a connection to God that I find analogous to the sense the patriarch’s connection with God. Because Rebecca has such special status as a matriarch, her exceptional blessing still falls within the general understanding within *Jubilees* that the blessed can then bless. Though *Jubilees* omits the annunciation to Rebecca (Gen 26), the fact that she is able to invoke God to bless Jacob at all indicates her special status. She is, broadly speaking, Israelite and unlike gentiles recorded to have received the benefit of God’s blessing in *Jubilees*, she is able to bless both God and others.

In *Jubilees*, one can only bless God when one is the recipient of blessing. The *Book of Jubilees* does not record any occasion on which a gentile is able to bless God or another human,

though instances of gentiles being blessed by God are indeed recorded (see above). We can infer from the lack of gentile power to bless either God or one another that these blessings are unique to Israel. Israel's power to bless God sets them apart from other nations. While this is not an explicitly polemical ideology, I would argue that this novel expression of Israel's power is intended to set them apart. Whereas gentiles may receive blessing, they cannot affect their relationship with God or renew the blessing that was initiated by God. Israel's power to bless God immediately differentiates them and, moreover, *ranks* them as a nation. They are hierarchically superior to other nations not only because they have been blessed (and sanctified, etc.) by God *but also* because they are able to continually effect and shape their relationship with God through the power of blessing.

## 2. *Blessing One Another*

As we have seen, the blessing of humankind requires renewal. Though humans possess the ability to bless, their blessing seems not to have the lasting power of God's blessing. While God's blessing may be permanently tied to a land or people (in *Jubilees*, that is Israel), when the patriarchs bless one another their blessing must be renewed in each subsequent generation, typically through the giving of a speech (as per Rebecca's blessing above). The ability to bless one another is unique to Israel — gentiles are *not* understood to have this remarkable power, as I will explain in further detail below.

In the retelling of Jacob's blessing as a patriarch, Abraham is still alive -- and his blessing reflects several of the key characteristics of the blessing of a human by another:

Then he summoned Jacob into the presence of his mother Rebecca, kissed him, blessed him, and said: ‘My dear son Jacob whom I myself love, may God bless you from above the firmament. May he give you all the blessings with which he blessed Adam, Enoch, Noah, and Shem. Everything that he said to me and everything that he promised to give me may he attached to you and your descendants until eternity like the days of heaven above the earth.’ (19:26-27)

VanderKam notes that the “he” is clarified, in the Latin, to be Abraham.<sup>46</sup> Abraham’s blessing of Jacob is one of the clearest examples of the renewal of blessing from generation to generation. Abraham explicitly links the blessing of Jacob to “Adam, Enoch, Noah, and Shem” before aligning Jacob’s blessing with his own blessing by God. Abraham’s blessing clearly refers to God as the origin of blessing: “may God bless you” and the subsequent allusion to the blessing of Abraham in *Jub* 12:23 is a clear way of linking the blessing of a human being (Abraham) to its source (God). Much like the blessing of Jacob by Rebecca, Abraham refers to the source of all blessing in his blessing of another. The frequency with which the authors of *Jubilees* orient blessings of humankind to God seems to suggest that to call this section “blessing one another” is somewhat misleading. Rather, the blessing of human beings by other human beings can also be thought of as a *secondary* blessing *by* God — while human beings may bless one another through speech acts, their power to give blessing is always connected to their relationship with God. As such, it is really God who is blessing humankind through the medium of another human being — a good example of this being, of course, Rebecca’s archetypal blessing of Jacob. In the passage above, God has blessed Abraham and therefore Abraham’s seed. However, God has also

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<sup>46</sup> VanderKam 1989:115, n to v 19.26.

blessed Jacob specifically — but blessed Jacob through Abraham, since Abraham has the power to transfer blessing.

Another critical aspect of the power of human beings to bless is their ability to bless themselves. Abraham commands his sons Isaac and Ishmael to:

‘... bless everything that you do, all that you have done on the earth; bless your food and water and bless the products of the land and the herds of your cattle and the flocks of your sheep. You will become a blessing on the earth, and all the nations of the earth will be delighted with you. They will bless your sons in my name so that they may be as blessed as I am.’ (20:9-10)

The Ge’ez text of this blessing has a singular form of the verb, meaning “you” is directed to one person only. VanderKam argues that the “you” should actually be plural, which is attested in the Latin.<sup>47</sup> The Ge’ez singular is “probably wrong” according to both VanderKam and Charles, though VanderKam notes that “a copyist thought that the blessing sounded as though it was only for Isaac and his descendants.”<sup>48</sup> Here the anonymous copyist and I agree. While VanderKam and Charles assume that the Latin makes sense because Abraham has previously been speaking to his sons and grandsons, I would note the verse immediately following:

When he had given gifts to Ishmael, his sons, and Keturah’s sons and sent them away from his son Isaac, he gave everything to his son Isaac (20:11).

The Ethiopic does not specify at what point Abraham sends Ishmael et al. away from Isaac, but it *does* specify that “he gave everything to his son Isaac.” I take this to be a clear indication of Abraham’s preference; moreover, because the plural is attested only Latin, we may equally as

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<sup>47</sup> VanderKam 1989:119, n to v 20.10

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

readily assume that Latin copyists made adjustments to the verbal form in order to fit their sense of Abraham's intended audience. Because the Ethiopic retains the singular, I understand *Jub* 20:10 — as the Ethiopian scribes did — to refer to Isaac alone. Moreover, given *Jubilees'* attitudes towards gentiles and their ability to bless throughout the rest of the book, this blessing would be truly exceptional. As such, I think the most logical reading is that Abraham is addressing Isaac though Ishmael may (or may not) be present.

Abraham's blessing in 20:9-10 is incredibly nuanced. While this takes the form of apodictic commandments to bless objects (animate and otherwise), it is also a reminder that *in the act of blessing one can become blessed*. By blessing all that he does, Isaac can bring himself into a state of blessing and *be* a blessing himself. This blessing, in turn, can be transferred to all the peoples of the earth. Perhaps most importantly, though, the people of the earth will *bless Isaac's sons in Abraham's name*. On first reading, this seems to imply that gentiles (the other nations) can bless Isaac and, therefore, become as blessed as Abraham. The use of "they," however, is misleading -- we might render this verse more clearly as "The nations of the earth will bless your sons in my name that your sons may be as blessed as I am." While it is difficult to confirm the referent of the pronouns used here, I think that in light of *Jubilees'* attitudes toward gentiles, it follows logically that gentiles would not be "as blessed as" Abraham is. Moreover, we have already seen in *Jub* 13 that the nations of the earth can be blessed through Abraham as he is a blessing to them.

Still, though, this clarification leaves the question of how gentiles are able to bless if, throughout the rest of *Jubilees*, this power is not one that they possess. The key is that they themselves cannot do "real" blessing — that is, blessing as it is done by Israelites — which is, as

we have seen, always linked to God. That is, because they are not Israelite, they cannot access the source of the power to bless: God. The gentiles can, however, participate in a kind of blessing which is imitative of Israelite blessing. In other words, the blessings of Israelites are, as we have seen, often a form of *imitatio dei*; the blessings of gentiles are, then, a kind of “imitatio Israel.” Gentiles can, instead of invoking God’s name to bless, bless in *Abraham’s* name. Since this blessing in no way is connected to God, the origin of blessing, or previous blessing of the gentiles by God, we must assume that this blessing is far inferior to other forms of blessing in which Israelites can participate. It is interesting that Abraham says “so that they may be as blessed as I am,” though I take this conclusion to his larger blessing to mean that this “so” is inclusive of everything else that Abraham has commanded his son(s) beginning in 20:2 and concluding in 20:10.

It is clear from these verses that even when some power of blessing is conceded to the gentiles, it is a radically inferior form of blessing, which is in no way connected to the closed system of feedback which Israel and God are constantly negotiating and renegotiating with one another. The power of blessing is, for gentiles, limited to blessing in the most symbolic sense; their blessing is not one that can be understood to affect or interact with divine blessing. Indeed, we again see evidence of the gentiles being cut off from God as they are throughout so much of *Jubilees*. They are inferior to the Israelites not only because they have not been chosen, but also because they are powerless before God and even to bless one another. For the authors of *Jubilees*, the most important component of this arrangement seems to be that the gentiles are wholly cut off from God and from power.

## Conclusion

*The Book of Jubilees* argues that Israel is radically superior to other nations. Not only is Israel morally superior to the gentiles and sanctified like the sabbath, but Israel also retains the power to affect their God. Land, as we have seen, is also important to *Jubilees*' understanding of Israel's superiority. The other themes at work in *Jubilees*: covenant, calendar, and purity, all reinforce the idea that Israel is a blessed and sanctified nation. It is unsurprising that *Jubilees*' understanding of blessing is used to reinforce these other themes. Though gentiles are not explicitly cursed, their blessing — if they have any at all — is far inferior to that which has blessed the Israelites.

The authors of *Jubilees* have, as I have argued, developed a “feedback loop” system of blessing in which the blessings of God and Israel constantly reinforce each other and, moreover, are enjoined upon both God and Israel. By taking the biblical idea of Israel's responsibility to God to its next possible conclusion, the authors of *Jubilees* have also enjoined sabbath observance and blessing of Israel upon God. This system is a positive feedback loop insofar as blessing yields, in turn, further blessing — either of the initial giver of the blessing or of a new recipient.

The importance of blessing in *Jubilees* cannot be overstated. For these authors who faced oppression and adversity in a Second Temple context, to assert real power — divine power — was to counter not only Greek, but also other Jewish, claims to influence and authority. It is evident that *Jubilees* is intended to be not only polemical, but also assertive. By “assertive,” I mean that these authors set out not only to make claims about the calendar and details of

sacrifice. Obviously, these were — and are — important details in Jewish life. However, the authors of *Jubilees* have made a far more radical claim: they have redefined the way in which Israelites related to their God and, of course, the way in which gentiles *cannot* relate to their God. It is not only that Israel has been chosen for their moral superiority, but that gentiles can never aspire to this same chosenness. Though Greek influence may have been pervasive in Palestine at the time, the authors of *Jubilees* demonstrate that this ownership is only an illusion; not only is the land of Israel a blessed land for a blessed people, but land even yet outside of Israel — all of the territory of Shem — will eventually fall to the Israelites and the cities of their enemies will become Israel's domain. *Jubilees'* unique orientation toward end-time scenarios like Israel's dominion over the earth certainly reinforces its status as an apocalyptic book. However, *Jubilees'* ideas about blessing also confirm its dating. *Jubilees* reflects serious concern about the future of the Jewish people in a world overrun with gentiles; the authors must have known the outcome of the Maccabean Revolt and realized that perhaps the ideology of the Bible was not enough to sustain them. Instead, they narrowed both the semantic range of בָּרַךְ (*barakh*) and heightened the exclusivity of access to not only divine blessing, but *all* blessing.

*The Book of Jubilees* redefines Israelite authority by redefining blessing itself. Blessing is no longer an expression of goodwill between two parties as it is so often in the biblical sources; rather, it is a means of separation and exclusion. Gentiles, excluded as they may have been in the texts of the Hebrew Bible, are all the more excluded in *Jubilees*. The concession of some blessing to the special gentile Ishmael is not enough; even he is cut off from the power to bless and from the unlimited access to the origin of blessing, God, that the Israelites enjoy. *Jubilees* is

unequivocal in its assertion that gentiles not only have no place in the covenant, but that they have no means of relating to God.

**Appendix A: Occurrences of בָּרַךְ (*baraka*, “bless”) in *Jubilees***

1:16, 29

2:19, 21, 23, 28, 30-32

6:5

7:11, 20

8:18, 20-21

12:23

13:7

15:16, 20

16:16, 26-28

17:2-3

18:15-16

19:17, 23-27

20:9-10

21:25

22:4, 6, 10-11, 13-14, 19, 25-30

23:1

24:1, 9, 11, 22

25:3, 11-23

26:2, 5- 6, 8, 13, 18-19, 22-32, 35

27:9, 11, 18, 23

29:4, 20

30:18, 23

31:7, 13-20, 22, 25, 28, 31-32

32:1, 7, 17

33:23

35:8, 12, 23

36:15, 17

37:3

39:3

45:3-4, 14

46:6

50:9

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