

**The Clear Truth
about
The Book of Jasher**

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The Clear Truth about The Book of Jasher

The Book of Jasher is one of the so-called "Lost Books" of the Bible and is twice cited in the Tanak:

"Is not this written in the Book of Jasher?"
(Yahushua 10:13)

"Behold it is written in the Book of Jasher."
(2Sam. 1:18)

The term "Book of Jasher" is a bit misleading. This was not a book written by someone named "Jasher". In fact the word "Jasher" (Hebrew: Yashar) means "Upright" so that the Hebrew Sefer HaYashar is "The Upright Book". The definite article "Ha" tips us off that this is not a person's name but a modifier for the word "book". There are two references to Jasher in the Tanak: "And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still. (Yahushua 10:13) (Also he bade them teach the children of Y'hudah the use of the bow: behold, it is written in the book of Jasher.) (2 Samuel 1:18) From these two references in the Tanak there are several things we can learn about this mysterious book. From the usage in Yahushua 10:13 we can determine:

1. That Jasher contained the account of the prolonged day mentioned in Yahushua 10.
2. That Jasher was in circulation by the time the book of Yahushua was written. Since Yahushua was written prior to the death of Rahab, Jasher must have been written by that time as well.
3. The Book of Jasher had enough credibility that Yahushua would cite it as support for his assertion of the prolonged day. The usage in 2Sam. 1:18 tells us:

4. The Book of Jasher supported an admonition to teach the son's of Y'hudah "the bow". The identity of this lost book has been a matter of much speculation over the centuries.

The ancient translations and paraphrases offer little help to us in identifying the Book of Jasher. The Greek LXX omits the entire phrase from Yahushua 10:13 and translates the the phrase to mean "The Book of the Upright" in 2 Sam. 1:18. The Latin Vulgate has in both places "Liber Justorum" "The Book of the Upright Ones". In the Targums the phrase is Paraphrased as "The Book of the Law". The Aramaic Peshitta Tanak has "The Book of Praises" in Yahushua 10:13 and "The Book of the Song" in 2 Sam. 1:18. This may have resulted from a misreading of ׀ׁׂ (Upright) as ׀ׁׂ (Song). And some have speculated that the book in question was actually a book of songs which included reference to Yahushua 10:13 in the lyrics of a song. This theory also takes "the bow" in 2 Sam. 1:18 to be the name of a song.

Jasher and the Talmud

The Talmud discusses the identity of Jasher but also fails to offer us much real direction. In b.Avodah Zarah 25a several theories for the identity of the Book of Jasher are proposed. Rabbi Chiyya ben Abba taught in the name of Rabbi Yochanan that it is "the book of Avraham, Yitz'chak and Ya'akov" who are called "righteous". He seems to refer to Genesis since he sites Gen. 49:8 as the reference to Y'hudah being taught "the bow". Rabbi Eleazar identified Jasher as Deuteronomy based on Deut. 4:18. He cites Deut. 33:7 as the reference to Y'hudah and archery. Rabbi Samuel ben Nachmani identified Jasher as the book of Judges based on Judges 17:6.

He found the reference to Y'hudah and archery in Judges 3:2 & 1:1-2. None of these explanations offered by the Talmudic rabbis seek to explain how any of these biblical books could have been referenced by Yahushua 10:13 (especially Judges which was written *after* Yahushua). Could these Rabbis have used a text of Yahushua which agreed with the LXX in omitting reference to the Book of Jasher? At any rate if we accept the reference to Jasher in Yahushua 10:13 then we must reject these identifications of Jasher made in the Talmud. While the Rabbis of the Talmud seem to have lost knowledge of the

identity of the Book of Jasher, its identity was known to earlier generations.

Josephus on Jasher

In his own recounting of the event of the prolonged day of Yahushua 10 the first century Jewish Roman historian Josephus identifies the Book of Jasher mentioned by Yahushua as one of "the books laid up in the Temple" (Ant. 5:1:17). Thus the Book of Jasher was known to Josephus and was known to be among the books laid up in the Temple in the first century.

The Three Books of Jasher

There are at least three books today with the title "Book of Jasher"/"Sefer HaYashar". One of these is a Hebrew book which was never intended to be identified with the Sefer HaYashar or the Bible. (Remember Sefer HaYashar means "The Upright Book").

Another "Book of Jasher" is a very bad English forgery published first in 1751 and again in 1829. This version claims to be written by a man named "Jasher". This forgery opens with the phrase "Whilst it was the beginning, darkness overspread the face of nature." Reprints of this forgery still circulate today.

The "Book of Jasher" presented in this volume was published in Hebrew in Venice in 1625, translated into English by Mosheh Samuel and published by Mordechai Noah in New York in 1840. It was Mosheh Samuel who first divided the work into chapter and verse (being 91 chapters.)

A second edition of this translation was published in Salt Lake City by J. H. Parry & Company in 1887. Both editions have been reprinted and republished several times. In 1954 Bible Corporation of America in Philadelphia reprinted the 1840 edition. They also translated it from English into Italian, Spanish, French and German for publication in those languages as well.

There has been some debate as to whether this Book of Jasher is the book mentioned in the Bible or just a Midrash which some have

speculated originated in the 13th century. Certainly the book claims to be the same Book of Jasher mentioned in the Bible.

Ancient Origin of the Book of Jasher

One major stumbling block in Book of Jasher research has been the lack of real evidence that the Book of Jasher (the one that we have) is truly ancient. There has been no hard evidence to prove that this Book of Jasher existed prior to 1625.

In the Masoretic Text and Septuagint of Gen. 5:18 has "And Jared lived one hundred and sixty two years". But the Book of Jasher 2:37 has "And Jared lived sixty two years". Amazingly this agrees with the Samaritan Pentateuch of Gen. 5:18.

How could the Book of Jasher and the Samaritan Pentateuch share the same scribal error? How could this reading have made its way into the Book of Jasher? If the Book of Jasher were a late compilation made in the Middle Ages, it would certainly have simply copied from the Masoretic Text. Surely a Jewish writer in Europe in the Middle Ages would not have copied data from the Samaritan Pentateuch. This is clear evidence for the ancient origin of the Book of Jasher.

There is also a similar scribal error in Jasher 5:13 where Methuselah begets Lamech at eighty seven. In the Masoretic Text this number is given as one hundred and eighty seven. In the Septuagint it is given as one hundred and sixty seven, and in the Samaritan Pentateuch as sixty seven.

Here the reading agrees with the Samaritan Pentateuch in omitting "one hundred" but agrees with the Masoretic Text in reading "eighty seven". The Book of Jasher is clearly part of the ancient textual tradition here, and not simply borrowing from the Masoretic Text.

One Midrash may also be a key to the truth or falsehood of the Book of Jasher.

The Midrash appears in:

THE TALMUD; SELECTIONS FROM THE CONTENTS OF THAT ANCIENT BOOK, ITS COMMENTARIES, TEACHINGS, POETRY, AND LEGENDS by H. Polano

Not all of the material in this book is actually from the Talmud, some of it appears to come from the Midrashim.

It includes a midrash about Jacob's words to the patriarchs from his deathbed. In this Midrash (Polano does not name the source) Jacob's words to Judah are:

"Thou, my son, art stronger than all thy brethren,
and from thy loins will kings arise. Teach thy children
how they may protect themselves from enemies and evil-doers"

This is similar but not identical to Jasher 56:8-9 which has:

8 And Jacob said unto Judah, I know my son that thou art a mighty man for thy brethren; reign over them, and thy sons shall reign over their sons forever.

9 Only teach thy sons the bow and all the weapons of war, in order that they may fight the battles of their brother who will rule over his enemies.

Which answers to 2Sam. 1:18 and the teaching of the sons of Judah "the bow". Only in the Midrash the "bow" is not specified.

Something interesting along this line, Rashi writes in his commentary on 2Sam. 1:18:

18. And he said to teach the sons of Judah the bow. Behold it is written in the book of the just [Sefer HaYashar].

And he said to teach the sons of Judah the bow: And David said, Since the heroes of Israel have fallen, the sons of Judah must teach them (to wage) war and to draw the bow. :

Behold, it is written in the book of the just: In the Book of Gen., which is the book of the just: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Now, where is it implied?"Your hand be on the nape of your enemies." (Gen. 49:8) What type of warfare is it wherein one directs his hand against his forehead which is opposite his

nape? We must say that this is the bow.

Lost Portion of 3rd Maccabees Found in Hebrew Preface to Book of Jasher

The Hebrew Preface attached to the original Hebrew Text of the Book of Jasher has an interesting and lengthy comment:

“It is also found written in the book of the Asmoneans which has come down to us, that in the days of Ptolemy king of Egypt, he ordered his servants to go and gather all the books of laws, and all the books of Chronicles which they could find in the world, so that he might become wise through them, and by examining them become acquainted with the subjects and events of the world, and to compile from them a book in all matters of jurisdiction regarding the affairs of life, thereby to exercise pure justice. So they went and collected for him nine hundred and sixty five books and brought to him, when he commanded them to go again and seek to complete the number of a thousand books, and they did so. After this, some of the persecutors of Israel stood up before him and said, O king, why wilt thou trouble thyself in this manner? Send to the Jews in Jerusalem that they shall bring unto thee the book of their law which was written from them from the mouth of the Lord by their Prophets, from which thou mayest become wise, and regulate all judgments and laws according to they desire; so the king hearkened to their words, and sent to the Jews upon this matter, who sent to him this book, for they could not give unto him the book of the Lord, for they said, we cannot give the law of the Lord to a stranger. Now when this book came to the hands of Ptolemy he read it and it pleased him greatly, and he searched therein in his wisdom, and he examined it and found therein what he had desired, and he neglected all the other books which they had collected for him, and he blessed him who had advised him to this thing.”

“After some time the persecutors of Israel became aware of this, that the Israelites had not sent the book of the law to the king, and they came and said unto him, O king, the Israelites

have treated thee with contempt, for they did not send to thee the book of the law which we had mentioned to thee, but they sent to thee another book which they had in their hands, therefore send to them that they may forward unto thee the book of their law, for from that book thou wilt obtain they desire much more than from the book which they have sent to thee; so when the king heard their words he became exceedingly wroth against the Israelites, and his anger burned within him until he sent again to them for them to forward to him the book of the law. Fearing that they might still continue to scorn him, he acted prudently with them and sent to seventy of their elders and placed them in seventy house, that each should write the book of the law, so that no alteration might be found in them, and the divine spirit rested upon them, and they wrote for him seventy books and they were all of one version, without addition or diminution. At this the king rejoiced greatly and he honored the elders, together with all the Jews, and he sent offerings and gifts to Jerusalem as it is written there. At his death, the Israelites acted cunningly with his son and took from his treasures the book of the law, but left this book there and took it not away, in order that every future king might know the wonders of the Lord, blessed be his name, and that he had chosen Israel from all nations, and that there is no God beside him.”

The Asmoneans (Hasmoneans) were the Maccabees. The books of the Maccabees/Hasmoneans generally do not deal with the Ptolemys. The Maccabees were rebelling against the Selucid Empire. However the book of 3rd Maccabees is mis-named, it actually has nothing to do with the Maccabees, but a totally different oppression of the Jews that took place under the Ptolomeys of Egypt.

3rd Maccabees however, only deals with the reign of Ptolemy IV, however the account summarized in the Hebrew Preface to Jasher parallels that of the well known “Letter of Aristeas” at the time of Ptolemy II. If this material were in any book of the Hasmoneans, it would have to be 3rd Maccabees, but it is not found there. Instead 3rd Maccabees begins with the time of Ptolemy IV.

However scholars have long recognized that 3rd Maccabees as we have it was once longer, and that our current text begins at some point after the original document did. The New Oxford Annotated Bible footnotes 3rd Maccabees 1:1 with “The abruptness with which the book opens and the use of the Greek conjunctive particle *de* indicate that the introduction to 3Macc. has not survived.” Moreover 3rd Maccabees 2:25 refers to “previously mentioned” events which were not, in our current text, previously mentioned.

So we do in fact have a book of the Hasmoneans that deals with the Ptolemys and Jews in Egypt, and which has an earlier portion which has not survived.

So we have several important discoveries here:

1. The recovery of a summary of a portion of the lost “Introduction” to 3rd Maccabees.
2. Evidence in support of the Book of Jasher.
3. Further evidence that 3rd Maccabees was originally longer, and that only a later portion of it has survived.
4. Evidence to support the authentic and ancient nature of the Hebrew Preface to the Book of Jasher. (The author of the preface was aware of information in the original “long” 3rd Maccabees, which has since been lost.

The Real Book of Jasher?

The 1625 edition of Jasher has a Preface, which says in part (translated from the Hebrew):

...when the holy city Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus, all the military heads went in to rob and plunder, and among the officers of Titus was one whose name was Sidrus, who went in to search, and found in Jerusalem a house of great extent...

According to the preface this Sidrus found a false wall in this house with a hidden room. In this room he found an old man hiding with provisions and many books including the Book of Jasher The old man found favor with Sidrus who took the old man and his books with him. The preface says "they went from city to city and from country to

country until they reached Sevilia [a city in Spain]." At that time "Seville" was called "Hispalis" and was the capital of the Roman province of Hispalensis. The manuscript was donated to the Jewish college at Cordova, Spain. According to the 1625 edition of Jasher the first printed edition of the Book of Jasher was published in Naples Italy in 1552. However no copies of the 1552 edition are known to have survived. The earliest surviving Hebrew edition known is the 1625 edition.

The Book of Jasher is a narrative beginning with the creation of man and ends with the entry of Israel into Kanaan. The Book of Jasher passage related to Yahushua 10:13 reads as follows:

"And when they were smiting, the day was declining toward evening, and Yahushua said in the eyes of all the people, Sun, stand thou still upon Givon, and thou moon in the valley of Ajalon, until the nation shall have revenged itself upon its enemies. And the Lord hearkened to the voice of Yahushua, and the sun stood still in the midst of the heavens, and it stood still six and thirty moments, and the moon also stood still and hastened not to go down a whole day."
(Jasher 88:63-64)

The Book of Jasher passage which relates to 2 Sam. 1:18 involves Ya'akov's last words to his son Y'hudah:

"Only teach your sons the bow and all weapons of war, in order that they may fight the battles of their brother who will rule over his enemies."
(Jasher 56:9)

This reads very similar to the midrash which gives these last words as:

"You, my son, are stronger than all your brothers, and from your loins will kings arise. Teach your children how they may protect themselves from enemies and evil-doers"

It would seem that the author of Jasher did not create this account to fit with 2 Sam. 1:18 since the same account occurs in the midrash (which itself may have been drawn from Jasher). Certainly many serious

scholars have concluded that this Book of Jasher is authentic.

The well known Hebraist and Rabbinic Scholar (and translator of the 1840 Book of Jasher) Mosheh Samuel wrote of Jasher:

"...the book is, with the exception of some doubtful parts, a venerable monument of antiquity; and that, notwithstanding some few additions have been made to it in comparatively modern times, it still retains sufficient to prove it a copy of the book referred to in Yahushua, and 2 Samuel, ch. 1."
- Mosheh Samuel - Hebraist and Rabbinic Scholar

The late Dr. Cyrus Gordon (who was the world's leading Semitist until his death) wrote:

"There can be little doubt that the book of Jasher was a national epic... The time is ripe for a fresh investigation of such genuine sources of Scripture, particularly against the background of the Dead Sea Scrolls."
- Dr. Cyrus Gordon; *A History of the Hebrews*

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