**“’Jasher, the Book of the Upright One!’ A Theological Landmine”**

 (A Theory Identifying the Origin and Purpose of the Text)

By:

Evangelist Nick Garrett

Not quite Apocrypha,[[1]](#footnote-1) Jasher is Psuedepagripha.[[2]](#footnote-2) Or is it? Does the text mean anything at all to Christians? Its legitimate category is Midrashic Haggadah[[3]](#footnote-3) in Jewish religious traditions. In essence it is a historical narrative.

To understand why Jasher has not been formalized in Christianity, one really has to weigh several uncomfortable perspectives that our denominational and theological precommitments prevent us from doing. Are Jasher’s contents even authentic? If so, is Jasher spiritually or supernaturally significant enough to be worthy of debate for inclusion in the Canon of Scripture?

Jasher is included among what in modern parlance gets referred to in aimless History Channel documentaries as, ‘Lost Books of the Bible.” Are they really lost though? Apparently not. Lost books seem to be books mentioned in scripture but that are no longer available to read.

 Book of the Wars of the Lord (Numbers 21:14)

 Books of the Acts of Solomon (I Kings 11:41)

 Book of Samuel the Seer (I Chronicles 29:29)

 Book of Nathan the Prophet (1 Chronicles 29:29; 2 Chronicles 9:29)

 Book of Gad the Seer (1 Chronicles 29:29)

 Prophecy of Ahijah (2 Chronicles 9:29)

 Visions of Iddo the Seer (2 Chronicles 9:29, 12:15, 13:22)

 Book of Shemiah (2 Chronicles 12:15)

 Book of Jehu (2 Chronicles 20:34)

 Sayings of the Seers (2 Chronicles 33:19)

 Early Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 5:9)

 Possible early version of Ephesians (3:3)

 An Epistle to the Laodocians (Colossians 4:16)

 Prophecies of Enoch (Jude 1:14)[[4]](#footnote-4)

The exciting but often hollow buzz words, ‘Lost books,’ do not mean lost divinely inspired texts though. It is no accident that most of these books are referenced in the history portion of the Old Testament. The current arrangement of the Old Testament is not the order in which the individual books were written, or even canonized. Old Testament texts in the Holy Bible appear in the arrangement given them in the Greek Septuagint from the 200’s BC.[[5]](#footnote-5)

1. Books of the Law
2. History

 (III) Poetry

 (IV) Prophecy

References to history books in inspired texts likely fit the bill for Jasher too. It is referenced in Joshua 10:13 where it documents in detail the sun stopping in the sky and refusing to set during the Battle of Jericho; *“is not this written in the Book of Jasher?”*

The second mention of Jasher appears in II Samuel 1:18 and records a relatively insignificant detail when compared to the sun stopping in the sky by God’s direct command. The reference in Samuel only verifies that King David had given Judah an official order to learn Archery.

The Israelites would certainly want to detail a major supernatural event. If Jasher is just a history book it is telling that a supernatural event is recorded in its pages. That would be unheard of in our time. Yet, the second reference is relatively insignificant; a minor detail about a monarchical edict giving military instructions. This causes one to consider the veracity of Jasher as a concept separate from physical texts. Generally medieval plagiarism would stick to ideas of doctrine and major supernatural events to pass to posterity.

On first thought one wonders why Jasher would be put forth as a verification for what is written in inspired texts in a way that seems to verify them? Can an inspired text like Joshua or Samuel draw from a human history that does not hold divinity itself? Does that mean an ancient history book needs to be considered among a special group of books? It is a difficult question. As history would reveal, the answer is too difficult for mainline denominations to even answer.

As a result of worldwide digitizing of records and texts, new readers have developed interest in these types of writings. Often, they wonder how a book can accompany sacred text throughout history and not itself be considered? Recently I explored such a question. Should Jasher be considered orthodox Christian canon?

The provenance of Jasher’s lineage copies really muddy the waters too. One text was known to have been written in the 1800s A.D. and passed off as Midrashic Haggadah to strictly Christian audiences.[[6]](#footnote-6) Another text of Jasher is known to have originated in Spain during the thirteenth century.

The thirteenth century lineage copy was translated into English around the same time as the others during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. However, given the negative buzz around those copies, which were known to be forgery and plagiarism. The translation of the alleged authentic version was not released. In 1840 Mordecai Manuel Noah, a Jewish newspaper editor purchased it and sat on it longer; unpublished and unreleased. In 1887 Noah sold the rights to his translation of Jasher to the Church of Jesus Christ of Later Day Saints. Yes, the Mormons purchased a questionably legitimate text to house in LDS Salt Lake City libraries alongside texts only decades old of their own creation, and containing their own divinity claims.

Today the LDS copy of Jasher is seemingly the only copy available for commercial purchase. Moreover, it is presented in modern publication without any indication that it is a Mormon book. One must begin reading the introduction, and discover the arguments for Jasher’s veracity are made supported by Doctrines and Covenants, and the Book of Mormon. This fact alone means this book will never be touched by Catholics, or any other western Christian denominations.

It feels sinister that a well-organized institution writing, criticizing, and storing up texts in Salt Lake City Utah, and who are only tangentially Christian, would pass off their own century old writing as inspired by God too. Is there a motive to purchase potentially legitimate texts like Jasher to house with them? Smart for them, potentially deceitful to Christians? Maybe LDS realized that with Protestantism in different fragments around the world, that in the distant future researchers may come to view LDS and their Salt Lake City home base the same way people today view Catholic Vatican Rome, or the Council of Nicaea.[[7]](#footnote-7) As a consequence of simply housing documents they could become the ancient Christianity of the future to those who won’t know better. Their hodgepodge of partially legitimate, questionable, and illegitimate texts may lose that moniker to researchers of the future unaware what to look for, or too confused by the sheer volume of texts to make any sense of them.

Many more reasons effect the ability of mainline denominations to take up and question Jasher. Catholics, for example, have never opened closed-canon scriptures for reconsideration. During the 382 A.D. Council of Rome Jerome was charged with organizing the sacred texts into the Vitus Latina, better known as the Latin Vulgate. The Vulgate remained the Christian bible with only minor language-to-language textual variants over the years. To accommodate books that appeared throughout time to be worthy of consideration, or that generated public interest, Catholics created a category called Deuterocanonical[[8]](#footnote-8) texts to include Apocryphal books. Jasher would likely never be taken up in any serious dialogue about its potential placement in that category either. It would be wildly uncharacteristic of the Holy See and create unnecessary controversy for Rome and Catholics worldwide in this way. Hypothetically, what could be gained by analyzing a Mormon-owned text of Jasher, that would be worth opening the canon of scripture to obtain?

Great challenges are posed for Protestants too when evaluating Jasher, even though it is more readily discussed in protestant circles. Even with relatively new canon lineages, to question Jasher and suggest it may be either apocrypha or inspired, would call into question the Doctrines of Inspiration, Inerrancy, and Infallibility. If those doctrines are susceptible to question, the protestant reformation is over. The net result of the whole reformation has been an alternative authority to that of Catholic Magisterium, and Scripture plus Tradition; with special disdain for papal leadership. Protestants instead identified scripture as their authority. This fact requires doctrines that make their scripture objective fact, hence Inspiration, Inerrancy, and Infallibility. The questions posed by consideration of Jasher - if Holy Scripture is missing a book - calls into dispute the very concepts of divine inspiration, error free transmission, and God-breathed texts.[[9]](#footnote-9)

On the question of accepting an ancient text into the Canon of Scripture there would be no disagreement among any sect of Christianity. Post reformation protestants accepted the Vulgate too after all, at least until Desiderius Erasmus’ prolific work on the text of scripture.[[10]](#footnote-10) His writing gave the reformation a shot in the arm and their own documentary lineage of translation other than the vulgate. Since Johannes Gutenberg’s printing press had revolutionized reading and the availability of books during the same era, there was an explosion in the mass production of Holy Bibles and its translation into other languages. A contemporary of Erasmus, Martin Luther wrote a German translation of the Holy Scriptures from the Hebrew Tanakh.

Later, in 1563 the thirty-nine articles[[11]](#footnote-11) gave Anglicans - and what would later be American Episcopalians – their own rules for the lineage of organized canon of scripture. Then the Westminster Confessions of Faith in 1647 adopted the same foundational canon for the protestant denominations of confessional orientation in the west. These groups include Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and reformed churches. A council in Jerusalem in 1692 even saw the Eastern Church adopt its own canon lineage.

So why is this even being talked about? How did Jasher come up? Quite frankly, cable TV, the internet, and the ever pervasive and ever-present temptation of Gnosticism. The idea that secret knowledge can still be discovered that answers questions about God and our past is low hanging fruit for laypeople and scholars alike. For many, that fruit has always been too tempting to walk away from. At the same time what seems like a totally insignificant question really has the power to destroy a Christian church. Jasher cannot just be included without other potential consequences.

Jasher’s current category of Midrashic Haggadah (Historical narrative) is where it stands. The question remains however, is this the correct category, and if not, what is Jasher? Midrashic Haggadah might not be the correct category.

I theorize and assert that “Jasher! The Book of the Righteous One,” was written sometime between 200 B.C. and 400 A.D., and is a bona fide sectarian Christian work, belonging to an early sect of Christians that practiced until about the sixth century A.D. Today this early sect of Christians is known broadly as Jewish Christans. In its earliest iterations they were called Judaizers.

Jewish Christians, or ‘Judaizers’ in biblical terms, were known to have formed during the early days of the Christian faith and are documented in the Bible itself. The Jerusalem Council in the Book of Acts [[12]](#footnote-12)documented a disagreement between the apostles and this sect of early Christians, who remained Jewish while accepting Jesus Christ as the Messiah. What many fail to consider is that while the net result of the council found an orthodox Christian idea born,[[13]](#footnote-13) the Judaizers went off on their own and thrived. They survived for centuries as Nazarene Jews. Often students of the bible or Church history fail to consider that when a heresy is weighed, rejected, and the prevailing party establishes orthodoxy, the rejected party, though they sometimes remain in fellowship, retain their heretical ideas too, and continue to practice them together. It seems that most assume reconciliation during these councils when history teaches the opposite almost every time.

Some sects of Judaizers have resurfaced today around the world, and with both Christian and Jewish lineages. Variants of their beliefs are espoused in part by groups such as the Black Hebrew Israelites, and the Hebrew Roots Movement. The latter of which end up returning to Torah through Christianity, and adhering to the Mosaic Law, mixed customs, and Old Testament Feast Days.[[14]](#footnote-14)

In conclusion, Jasher is a piece of literature from the early church period that resided with Christians of the time, and whose lineage stems from the first schism at the Jerusalem Council. Today, their text is owned in the flesh by a new claimant of the Christian title, The Church of Jesus Christ of Later Day Saints.

Originating during the nineteenth century, Mormons began a strictly American movement that demonstrated questionable practices, literal heresies, early church misinterpretations that stem from not having read doctrinal arguments from universally agreed upon church councils to their completion,[[15]](#footnote-15) with their own prophet, and alleged sacred texts. While they have aimed to incorporate more gospel rhetoric in recent decades, and long to be viewed in the Christian denominational patchwork as just-one-of-the-boys, what they have is at least Midrashic Haggadah, and at most an early version of Old Testament scriptures used by Christian Judaizers.

1. Biblical or related writings not forming part of the accepted canon of Scripture. Catholicism also classifies these texts as Deuterocanonical, or second canon. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Spurious or pseudonymous writings, especially Jewish writings ascribed to various biblical patriarchs and prophets but composed within approximately 200 years of the birth of Jesus Christ. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Aggadah or Midrashic Haggadah (Hebrew: אַגָּדָה‎ or הַגָּדָה‎; Jewish Babylonian Aramaic אַגָּדְתָא; "tales, fairytale, lore") is the non-legalistic exegesis which appears in the classical rabbinic literature of Judaism, particularly the Talmud and Midrash. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This list appears in the introduction of one lineage copy of ‘Jasher, Book of the Righteous One.’ Copyright 2010 Cedar Fort , Inc. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Greek Old Testament, or Septuagint, is the earliest extant Koine Greek translation of books from the Hebrew Bible. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Jewish historical narratives [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Council of Nicaea took place in 325 A.D. and is universally accepted by all modern Christians as the first ecumenical council attempting to define, organize, and unify denominations into a universal fellowship. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Second Canon. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Peter’s epistle uses the Greek word Theopnuestas, God-Breathed, to describe the transmission of scripture from God’s mind through man’s pen on paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Erasmus was a Dutch scholar prominent during the northern renaissance. He wrote an unprecedented two column bible retranslating the Greek into Latin that Jerome had done about 1,200 years earlier. Alongside that column he provided a new Greek translation of the New Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The 39 Articles of Religion are the essential beliefs of the Anglican church codified. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Acts Chapter 15 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Jews and Gentiles could be evangelized by the church and both could in fact enjoy conversion and regeneration in the Holy Spirit. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The Hebrew Roots Movement [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. It seems the way Mormon theology resolves questions from the early church – if they realized the arguments had been taken up prior to their own – is incomplete. On the trinity for example, it is as if they read the work of the third and fourth century Alexandrian Presbyter Arius and accepted his conclusions on questions of Christ’s co-eternality and co-equality without tempering that with the work of Athanasius of Alexandria. In other words, like the fourth century Christians, Mormon theology meanders through very interesting valid questions but stops far short of adequate orthodox Christian answers. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)