



FEED MY SHEEP

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Is There a Genuine Book of Jasher?

Many Christians have thrilled to the marvelous stories found in the Book of Jasher. Others have read the Book of Jasher and were somewhat less enthusiastic, finding it to be somewhat dull. Upon further investigation, this writer discovered that those pronouncing it “dull” were reading from a different version than the one this writer had read. There are, in fact, two very different versions of the Book of Jasher currently in existence.

The “dull” version is titled: *The Book of Jasher: with Testimonies and Notes, Critical and Historical, Explanatory of the Text, to which is Prefixed, Various Readings, and a Preliminary Dissertation, Proving the Authenticity of the Work.* Additional title information states: “Translated into English from the Hebrew, by Flaccus Albinus Alcuinus, of Britain, Abbot of Canterbury, who went a Pilgrimage into the Holy Land, where he discovered this volume, in the city of Gazna.” It was published in Bristol, England in 1829.

The other version of the Book of Jasher (the only one which this writer was familiar with for several decades until about a year ago) was published in New York in 1840 by Messrs. M. M. Noah & A. S. Gould. (For clarity’s sake, for the remainder of this monograph we shall refer to the two versions of Jasher by their respective publication dates.) By directing the reader to the Book of Jasher in two separate places (discussed later), the

Bible (a) tells us there is or at least was a Book of Jasher and (b) indirectly lends some aura of credibility to it. The critical question for us to have answered is: Is either of the two extant versions the actual Book of Jasher referred to in the Scriptures?

The two references to it are found in Joshua 10:13 and 2 Samuel 1:18:

Joshua 10: 13 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 in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day.

2 Samuel 1:18 (Also he bade them teach the children of Judah *the use of the bow*: behold, it is written in the book of Jasher.)

The testing method

How can we know if either extant version is genuine? Frankly, this writer knows of no method by which to determine with absolute certainty whether either is genuine. It would seem that the best we can do is to disqualify, if possible, one or both versions. Then, if one of the versions cannot be disqualified with the means at hand, that still does not *prove* it is the genuine Book of Jasher referred to in these two verses; it merely means it is *possible* for it to be the genuine Jasher.

We have two methods whereby we can test the versions for authenticity: (1) Does it conflict with the canon of Scripture? If so, we can say with certainty the conflicting version of Jasher is a fraud and a fake. (2) What is the history of the version of Jasher under consideration? This is fraught with much uncertainty, since we are left with merely the several prefatory and introductory writings in the two versions, along with the very sparse material offered by standard reference works.

While both books of Jasher cover roughly the same time period in their narratives (from Adam to about the end of the Book of Joshua), the 1840 Jasher is a much fuller account. It comprises 91 chapters spread over 267 pages in this writer's older copy. Our newer copy has the 91 chapters in 254 pages. This is the printing by Artisan Publishers which we presently carry on our literature list.¹ The 1829 Jasher, by contrast, is of somewhat smaller page size and has only 37 chapters spread over 63 pages. Obviously then, the references given for chapter and verse in one version of Jasher will not apply to the other Jasher.

The 1829 Jasher

We shall examine the two versions of Jasher by treating each individually and in order of publication. Concerning Jasher-1829 (the alleged "Alcuin" version), we find it replete with outright contradictions to the Bible. We found the following and offer them as examples:

(1) Instead of spending 40 days on Mt. Sinai receiving instruction from Yahweh-God, as the Bible states; according to Jasher-1829 (chapter 17), Moses and Joshua and Nadab and Abihu and 70 elders spent 40 days on the mount receiving instruction from Jethro, Moses' father-in-law. Furthermore, this Jasher claims that Jethro was the son of Esau, Israel's enemy for the ages. The Bible, on the other hand, states that Jethro was the priest of Midian. Midian was one of the six sons of Abraham through Keturah, whom he took to wife after the death of Sarah.

(2) According to Jasher-1829, it is Jethro who instructs Moses how to build the tabernacle and Jethro who tells Moses to build an ark. Jethro also tells Moses to choose a priesthood family. Moses chooses Aaron and his sons, and it is Jethro who tells Moses to clothe them with holy garments. (Jasher 17:8-13). The Bible says God instructed Moses in all these things.

(3) When the 40 days are over, Moses conspires with Joshua and the others and suggests that when they go down off Mt. Sinai to the people, that they had better tell them that they had been meeting with the Lord, when in reality it was only Jethro. There is no mention anywhere of meeting with Yahweh on Mt. Sinai. (1829-Jasher 17:21-22)

(4) The Bible says that Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, were killed by fire from Yahweh for offering "strange fire" on the altar and this was long after the golden calf rebellion. Jasher-1829 says the pair were slain by the sword of the Levites at the command of Moses as part of the 3,000 killed for their part in the golden calf rebellion (although the golden calf is not mentioned in Jasher). (1829-Jasher 18:5, 6)

(5) In the matter of the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, the Bible tells us that the Lord caused the earth to open up and swallow up them and about 250 fellow rebels in a fiery abyss. This 1829-Jasher, in contrast, asserts that Moses instructed the Levites to execute the rebels "with fire." (Jasher 21: 12.)

(6) Bible scholars debate on whether or not Rahab of Jericho was a prostitute or not. This Jasher raises her status even beyond that of ordinary subject of the king. It states she was a "princess" who was born of an Israelite father and a Midianite mother. This account has the enraged king of Jericho merely calling her a whore in a fit of anger for her having tried to persuade him to surrender to Joshua. (1829-Jasher 27:8, 10, 20.)

Reflecting further, one wonders how Rahab

could be a princess, since her alleged Israelite father could not have been a king (Saul was Israel's first king) and no mention is made of her mother being a queen of Midian. And if she were princess of Midian, what was she doing living in Jericho?

(7) The crossing of the Jordan in 1829-Jasher, chapter 28, affords several more examples of blatant contradictions to the Scripture. Jasher avers that the children of Israel were 50 cubits behind the ark, instead of 2,000 as Scripture records. Also, Scripture states that the priests had to stand in the middle of Jordan bearing the ark as the people crossed over. Jasher says it took six days to cross over...a rather ridiculous statement in view of the width of the Jordan as compared to the presumably much wider Red Sea which they crossed over in one night. And pity those poor Levite priests who had to hold up the (very heavy) ark of the covenant for six full days.

(8) Moreover, the Bible asserts plainly that the waters of Jordan receded and the people went over on dry ground. Jasher says they went across Jordan on wood which floated on the face of the waters! (Jasher 28:10) You figure that one out. ...Oh, I get it. This is where the Israelites invented surfboards! Verse 5 of this chapter claims that 16-year-old males were armed. However, all throughout Scripture, only those males 20 years old and upward were numbered in the armies of Israel.

(9) Concerning the siege and storming of Jericho, the Bible says the city was "straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in." This implies that most if not all the inhabitants remained within the walls and were subsequently slaughtered by Joshua and company. Jasher 28:18 states that "the people of Jericho fled from the city; every one to the mountains."

(10) Finally, according to this 1829-Jasher (chapter 32), it was long after – years after the entry in Canaanland – after the conquest, after the

division of the land among the Israelite families, after the establishment of the 48 Levitical cities; it was allegedly after all this that old Joshua gets around to having all the males circumcised. The Scripture, however, clearly states that all the males of Israel were circumcized almost immediately after the crossing of Jordan (Joshua 5) and before the attack on Jericho.

Verdict on the 1829 Book of Jasher

We could on with other examples, but this is certainly sufficient to label the 1829-Jasher as a fraud and a fake. That was an easy one, and we have found no one (save the forger) who claims it is authentic. For example, *The Popular and Critical Bible Encyclopedia* offers this history and denunciation of it.

"In the year 1751 there was published in London, by a type-founder of Bristol named Jacob Ilive, a book entitled 'The Book of Jasher, with Testimonies and Notes Explanatory of the Text: to which is prefixed various readings: translated into English from the Hebrews by Alcuin of Britain, who went a pilgrimage [*sic*] into the Holy Land.'

"This book was noticed in the *Monthly Review* for December, 1751, which describes it as a palpable piece of contrivance, intended to impose upon the credulous and ignorant, to sap the credit of the books of Moses, and the blacken the character of Moses himself. The reviewer adds that 'the book of Jasher appears to have been constructed in part from the apocryphal writings of the Rabbins; in part from a cento^[2] of various scraps stolen from the Pentateuch; and in the remainder from the crazy imaginings of the author' (Ilive).

"Prefixed to this work is a narrative professing to be from the pen of Alcuin himself, giving a detailed account of his discovery of the Hebrew book of Jasher, in the city of Gazna in Persia, during a pilgrimage which he made from Bristol to the holy land, and of his translation of the same into English. This clumsy forgery into modern

English, which appeared with the chapters of the 13th century, and the numerical versicular divisions of the 16th, having been exposed at the time of its appearance, and sunk into well-merited oblivion, was again revised in 1827, when it was reprinted at Bristol and published in London as a new discovery of the book of Jasher. [Note: Here he refers to the same edition which we now call the "1829-Jasher." –JWB]

"A prospectus of a second edition of this reprint was issued in 1833 by the editor, who herein styles himself the Rev. C. R. Bond. Both Ilive's and Bond's edition contain the following pretended testimony to the value of the work from the celebrated Wyckliffe: 'I have read the book of Jasher twice over, and I much approve of it, as a piece of great antiquity and curiosity, but I cannot assent that it should be made a part of the canon of scripture.'"³

Flaccus Albinus Alcuinus (Alcuin) (730?-804 A.D.) was a notable scholar who was born in England, but spent most of his adult life on the Continent. He became a prominent adviser to the Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne whom he had known since 781. None of Alcuin's biographical information known to us ever so much as hints at any trip to Persia or of any acquaintance with the Book of Jasher. Recalling last month's FMS, does this not remind us of the anonymous intertestamental period authors who put the names of Adam and Eve, Enoch, the Twelve Patriarchs, etc. in the titles of their pieces of fiction?

Another reference work relates the following about 1829-Jasher:

"In 1750 Thomas Ilive of London issued an English translation of the work, claiming that it was the book of Jasher mentioned in the Bible. The same claim was raised in 1828 by the London *Courier* and a Jew of Liverpool named Samuel, as a result of which Leopold Zunz issued a statement as to the true nature of the book."⁴

The 1911 *Encyclopedia Britannica* is no less lenient in its treatment of this fake: "A work called *The Book of... Jasher, translated... by Alcuin* (1751; second edition., Bristol, 1829), has nothing to do with this or with any Hebrew original, but is a mere fabrication by the printer, Jacob Ilive, who put it forward as the book "mentioned in holy scripture."⁵

And *Smith's Bible Dictionary* (Holman edition, no date) in its entry concerning the Book of Jasher simply says: "There is an English forgery of 1751 (Bristol, 1829)."

With all of the above evidence from the book itself and from the history of its origin, we can only hope to hasten its second retreat into "well-merited oblivion." Next month we will examine the 1840 *Book of Jasher* with equal scrutiny.

ENDNOTES

1. Ask for B-127, *The Book of Jasher*, \$10 + \$2 s & h.
2. A "cento" is a literary work made up from pieces of other works.
3. *The Popular and Critical Bible Encyclopedia*, volume 2, p. 905, Chicago, 1910
4. *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, volume 6, pp. 41-42, New York, 1942. Even here, notice the seeming contradiction in the historical detail. The previously quoted excerpt gave the name of the perpetrator of the fraud as "Jacob Ilive," whereas this source gives a "Thomas Ilive." It is possible, of course, that both are correct if his name were Jacob Thomas Ilive.
5. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, volume 15, p. 277, 1911 Scholars' Edition

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