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## PRAYER OF JOSEPH

## FRAGMENT A

- 1 "I, Jacob, who is speaking to you, am also Israel,<sup>a</sup> an angel of God<sup>b</sup> and a ruling  
2,3 spirit.<sup>c</sup> • Abraham and Isaac were created before any work.<sup>d</sup> • But, I, Jacob, who  
men call Jacob but whose name is Israel<sup>e</sup> am he who God called Israel which  
means, a man seeing God,<sup>f</sup> because I am the firstborn of every living thing to  
whom God gives life.<sup>g</sup>
- 4 And when I was coming up from Syrian Mesopotamia,<sup>h</sup> Uriel, the angel of  
God,<sup>i</sup> came forth and said that 'I [Jacob-Israel] had descended to earth and I had  
5 tabernacled among men<sup>j</sup> and that I had been called by the name of Jacob.' • He  
envied me and fought with me and wrestled with me<sup>k</sup> saying that his name and  
6 the name that is before every angel was to be above mine.<sup>l</sup> • I told him his name  
7 and what rank he held among the sons of God.<sup>m</sup> • "Are you not Uriel, the eighth  
after me? and I, Israel, the archangel of the power of the Lord and the chief  
8 captain among the sons of God?" • Am I not Israel, the first minister before the  
9 face of God?" • And I called upon my God by the inextinguishable name.<sup>n</sup>

Ja 8:58  
Gen 32:27f.:  
35:10;  
Jub 32:17  
Ex 4:22; Col  
1:15, 17; 4Ezra  
6:58; Sir 36:12  
Jub 2:20; Pss:  
18:4  
Gen 31:17;  
33:18; 35:9;  
48:7  
Gen 28:10-27;  
Eph 4:9f.; Sir  
24:8-10; Bar  
3:36f.; Ja 1:14  
6:38; Rev 21:3  
Gen 32:24-28;  
Hos 12:3f.  
Eph 1:21; Phil  
2:9; Heb 1:4  
TSol 2:4; Josh  
5:14; Dan 8:11  
2En 22:6-7;  
33:10f.  
JosAram 14:7;  
TAB A 7, 19;  
ApocEzra 4:2  
TLevi 3:4  
Mt 18:10

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A a. The change of names in the Gen account (e.g. Gen 17:5, 15) usually indicates some change in status. At times, it may be used for symbolic purposes (Hos 1:8; 2:24). Discovering some deeper meaning to name changes fascinated ancient exegetes, for example, Philo's treatise *On Change of Names (Mut)*.

b. Israel appears as an angel in magical and mystical literature, at times combined with the heavenly nation, Israel.

c. A term found in astrological literature, here used to emphasize Israel's exalted rank.

d. The term "created before" (lit. "pre-created") occurs only here and in late Christian texts. The notion that wisdom, Torah, or the nation Israel were pre-existent is quite widespread in Jewish materials. Less common is the claim that the patriarchs or Moses were pre-existent.

e. Jacob is his earthly name; Israel, the heavenly name. The idea is that the celestial name is known only to other angelic beings.

f. This etymology of the name Israel is found solely in Jewish and Christian materials from Egypt, especially in Philo.

g. Most probably a literalistic understanding of Ex 4:22: "Israel is my first-born son."

h. The standard LXX translation for Paddan-Aram.

i. Uriel is usually one of the four archangels. See 1En 9:10; 10:1, 4, 9, 11; 20:2; GkApEzra 6:2; TSol 2:4; ApMos 40.

j. "To tabernacle" is traditional language of incarnation in Jewish and Christian texts. In Jewish materials, it is used preeminently of Wisdom. [In Christian writings, it is most famous in Jn 1:14. —J.H.C.]

k. This is an allusion to the story of Jacob wrestling with a (heavenly) man in Gen 32:24-31, which supplies a motivation, envy, for the attack missing in the canonical account.

l. His name (Uriel) is the name that is before every angel (God). Another possible translation: "his name (Uriel) should have precedence over my name (Israel) and of the angel that is before all."

m. Here we have a veiled reference to a supernatural contest in which power is displayed by knowing one's secret name (e.g. Mk 1:24); such a contest is quite different than the physical one just described.

n. By any of the traditional schemes of four or seven archangels, the description of Uriel as the "eighth" would eliminate him from the heavenly hierarchy. If the hellenistic scheme of an eighth highest heaven and angel (the Ogdoad) is being employed, then Uriel would be the lowest member of the hierarchy. The titles "archangel" and "chief captain" (this latter term is unique to the PrJos) are close parallels to the titles usually accorded Michael, the chief of the heavenly band. See the full discussion above.

o. The calling on the name probably refers to either the Trisagion or a secret name of *yhwh*.

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## FRAGMENT B

"For I have read in the tablets of heaven<sup>a</sup> all that shall befall you and your sons."

Jub 32:31  
Gen 48f.

## FRAGMENT C

[Origen writes] Jacob was greater than man, he who supplanted his brother and who declared in the same book from which we quoted "I read in the tablets of heaven" that he was a chief captain of the power of the Lord and had, from of old, the name of Israel; something which he recognizes while doing service in the body, being reminded of it by the archangel Uriel.<sup>a</sup>

B  
A. 7  
A. 3  
A. 4

B a. The term "tablets of heaven" is quite common in the pseudepigrapha, especially in Jub where it occurs some twenty times. In some passages it appears to refer to a heavenly law code; elsewhere, as in the PrJos, to a book of destiny.

C a. While clearly a paraphrase of Fragment A, Origen here introduces what appears to be a gnostic

motif (most closely paralleled by texts such as the "Hymn of the Pearl") in which the heavenly figure has forgotten his divine origin until reminded of it by another heavenly figure. To what degree this represents Origen's own interpretation and to what degree this may hint at parts of the PrJos no longer preserved cannot be determined.

## PRAYER OF JACOB

(First to Fourth Century A.D.)

## A NEW TRANSLATION AND INTRODUCTION

BY J. H. CHARLESWORTH

The Prayer of Jacob contains eight internal divisions, consisting of four invocations, three petitions, and one injunction. The first invocation (vss. 1f.) begins by summoning the Father of the Patriarchs who is defined as the Creator; the second (vss. 3-5) moves in a partly chiasmic form to the first from a) Father of the Patriarchs; b) Father of all things; c) Father of the powers of the cosmos; d) Creator of all; through the invocation to d) Father of powers altogether; c) Father of the whole cosmos; b) Father of all creation; a) He who showed favor to Abraham. The third invocation (vss. 6-9) summons God as the King who sits "upon (the) mountain of h[oly] [S]inaios," the sea, the serpent gods, and the sun. The last invocation (vss. 10f.) clarifies a concept found in each preceding invocation, "power": God is the one who gives "power" to others. The first petition (vs. 12) merely asks God to hear the prayer. The second petition (vss. 13f.) is the most Jewish section of the prayer; the one addressed is the "Lord God of the Hebrews," and the petitioner is one "[fro]m the rac[e] of Israel"; the author asks God to make him straight. The third petition (vss. 15-19) mentions the secret name of God and emphasizes his cosmic nature; the request now is specific and laudable, it is for wisdom (as with Solomon, cf. 1Kgs 3) by one who seems to be "an earthly angel." The injunction (vs. 20) concludes the prayer. Unfortunately the Prayer of Jacob is virtually unknown to scholars (while the PrJos is included in *IDB*, vol. 2, p. 979, and discussed in Denis, *Introduction* [especially pp. 125-27], the PrJac is not even noted in these major reference works).

## Texts

The Prayer of Jacob is extant in a fourth-century papyrus now supposedly preserved in the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek in Berlin. The present translation is based on the edition by K. Preisendanz.<sup>1</sup>

## Original language, date, and provenance

There is no reason to doubt that Greek is the original language. The time of composition must antedate the fourth century, the date of the papyrus. Parallels with second-century documents (see below) indicate that the prayer may be as early as the second century A.D.; if the Prayer of Joseph dates from the first century (as J. Z. Smith states in his contribution above) then the Prayer of Jacob may also be that early. Since the papyrus was acquired in Cairo, venerates Sinai, and shares ideas with many other Egyptian documents and papyri, it is reasonable to assume an Egyptian provenance.

<sup>1</sup> K. L. Preisendanz, ed., *Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*, (Leipzig, Berlin, 1931) vol. 2, pp. 148f. Other apocryphal prayers attributed to Jacob are found in PRE 37 (ed. Friedlander, p. 281) and in the Eth. text titled "La Langue de Jacob" (see D. Lifschitz, *Textes éthiopiens magico-religieux* [Université de Paris, Travaux et mémoires de l'Institut d'Ethnologie 38; Paris, 1940] pp. 239-43). I wish to express appreciations to H. D. Betz and P. Pokorný, who helped me improve this contribution.