

14. Do the Dead Sea Scrolls Prove the Length of the Jubilee Cycle?

Glenn Moore uses the Dead Sea Scrolls as what he feels is substantial evidence validating his position that the Jubilee cycle consists of forty-nine years. In his “Answers to Objections,” he presents his readers with the following question/answer:

QUESTION: You say that the Jewish "practice" in the post-temple period was that sabbatical years were to be figured consecutively, and that the Jubilee cycles themselves would therefore consist of 49 and not 50 years. And yet the only significant reference you have that supports this is the book of Jubilees, while there are other historical accounts which seem to support 50 year cycles. This seems like weak evidence. [according to the *loyal opposition*]. Can you do better than this?

ANSWER: Yes, we can do much better than this. In fact, we can even find documentation from the first and second century BCE which shows the Jewish people understood that: 1) "weeks" in apocalyptic literature are intended to mean Sabbatical weeks (weeks of years), 2) seven of those weeks represent a complete jubilee cycle, and 3) Daniel's 70 weeks in particular were intended to mean 10 Jubilee cycles.

The Dead Sea Scrolls also shed great light on the significance of a Jubilee cycle and how it was to be counted.¹

Glenn goes on to cite passages from such documents as *The Ages of Creation documents (4Q180-181)*, *The Melchizedek Scroll*, *I Enoch*, *The Pseudo-Moses Apocalypse*² and *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*:

Now, as anyone can plainly see after reading this, the idea that a Jubilee cycle represents seven weeks of years (49 literal years, not 50 years), and the idea that a continuous seven year period represents Sabbatical cycles is not strictly a new idea at all. These concepts were well understood by the Jewish people some 200 years prior to the birth of Messiah.

Is Glenn’s observation above correct? Were the “calendar concepts” embraced by the Qumran community “well understood by the Jewish people some 200 years prior to the birth of the Messiah”? In our opinion, if they were understood by Judaism, they certainly were not *accepted* by Judaism. We have already demonstrated that Philo, a Jew whom Glenn has acknowledged as having been “a great leader among the Jews and had great influence with the people,” recognized the Jubilee cycle as consisting of a period of fifty years. However, other sources also agree that Judaism did not recognize the calendar promoted by the Qumran community. Gabriele Boccaccini in his book *Enoch and Qumran Origins* shares the following observation:

¹ This “Question/Answer” was copied from Glenn’s website page entitled “Is the Jubilee Cycle 49 or 50 Years?” The page actually consists of a series of “Answers to Objections” and may be read in its entirety by accessing the following URL: http://www.itsaboutthattime.net/49_vrs_50_cycles.htm.

² According to Hanan Eshel in “4Q390, the 490-Year Prophecy, and the Calendrical History of the Second Temple Period,” the scroll once identified as “Pseudo-Moses Apocalypse” is now known as “Apocryphon of Jeremiah.” Eshel contributed his findings to Gabriele Boccaccini in his book *Enoch and Qumran Origins* (Published by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005). By the way, the book jacket offers this summary of the contributors' findings: “The contributors demonstrate that the roots of the Qumran community are to be found in the tradition of the Enoch group rather than that of the Jerusalem priesthood.” In other words, the Qumran community held to their own specific calendar beliefs that were separate from those held by normative Judaism.

The predominantly Christian interest in the Pseudepigrapha, which fostered the early stages of the Enoch research, made it vulnerable to theological assumptions and to the spread of anti-Jewish and even anti-Semitic attitudes that so heavily characterized European (and American) culture between the wars. Documents like 1 Enoch, which in Jewish eyes had always remained the bizarre product of marginal sects detached from normative Judaism, appeared now more and more irrelevant also to the many Christian scholars whose primary task was to de-Judaize Christianity.³

Boccaccini's book actually represents the collaborative efforts of 47 specialists from eleven countries. For those who prefer to "cut to the chase" instead of pouring through over 400 pages of commentary, the book's jacket offers the following summary:

The contributors demonstrate that the roots of the Qumran community are to be found in the tradition of the Enoch group rather than that of the Jerusalem priesthood.

In other words, the Qumran community held to their own specific calendar beliefs that were separate from those held by normative Judaism.

Other scholars reflect that same understanding that the Dead Sea Scrolls were authored by members of the same sect. In his book *Judaism Before Jesus*, Anthony J. Tomasino offers his conclusion that *The Book of Jubilees*, *The Book of Enoch*, and *The Melchizedek Scroll* were all authored by members of the same Jewish "community":

It's probably safe to assume that members of this Community (or its descendants) were responsible for writing or copying many of the Scrolls; they may have acquired others that were incorporated into their library. The Community members were probably involved in hiding the collection in the caves around Qumran, as well.⁴

Scholars agree that *The Book of Jubilees*, *The Book of Enoch*, and *The Melchizedek Scroll* are products of the Qumran community. Thus, it doesn't take a great deal of reasoning ability to discern why these Jewish works agree that the Jubilee cycle consists of 49 years: They were all authored by members of the same group, all of whom would have been biased in their belief that the Jubilee cycle is forty-nine years in length. Glenn Moore's citing multiple writings found among the Dead Sea Scrolls as "evidence" to validate the historical observance of 49-year Jubilee cycles would be akin to using writings such as *The Book of Mormon*, *Pearl of Great Price* and *Doctrine and Covenants* to demonstrate that "nominal Christianity" believes an angel named Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith and directed him to unearth (and later translate into English) gold plates that present the ancient historical record of the American continents. All three of the aforementioned books are products of Mormon authors, including founder and "prophet" Joseph Smith, so it would come as no surprise that each of those three writings corroborates the writings of the other two. In the same way, if members of the same Jewish sect authored *The Book of Jubilees*, *The Melchizedek Scroll* and *The Book of Noah*, should it come as any surprise that each writing supports the 49-year Jubilee cycle?

I am reminded of a conversation I had with a fellow believer several years ago. He had authored a study pertaining to why he doesn't believe the celebration of Christmas is sanctioned by Scripture. He

³ *Enoch and Qumran Origins* by Gabriele Boccaccini, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005, p. 2.

⁴ *Judaism Before Jesus: The Ideas and Events That Shaped the New Testament World*, By Anthony J. Tomasino, Published by InterVarsity Press, 2003 ISBN 0830827307, 9780830827305, p. 33

had written it shortly after having been convicted of this belief, and during his research he accumulated a great deal of articles and even books that addressed the topic of Christmas. One of the primary sources from which he quoted was a book written by Herbert W. Armstrong. Armstrong was the founder of The Worldwide Church of God and was very much opposed to the observance of Christmas. Later, when someone pointed out to my friend that it is journalistically irresponsible to use a biased source as evidence supporting his position, he realized his error and removed the quotes from Armstrong. In the same way, Glenn has chosen to present individual works authored by members of the same “organization,” using each one as an added layer of evidence validating the historical support for his position.

Of course, Glenn is free to cite whichever sources he chooses, but I believe it is prudent to point out that fact that when he touts *The Book of Jubilees*, *The Book of Enoch*, and *The Melchizedek Scroll* as *individual* pieces of evidence, he is citing from works produced by the same sect of believers. I need only point out that historians agree that by the time of the return from Babylonian exile, Jubilees were no longer observed and Jews began observing continuously-repeating Sabbatical years. By the time the Qumran community was formed, over 300 years had passed since the return from Babylonian exile and not observing the Jubilee year had become so established by that time that it is not surprising that some had formed the opinion that the Jubilee year occurs every forty-nine years.

Putting the above information all together, it should be easy to discern that even if *The Book of Jubilees*, *The Book of Enoch*, and *The Melchizedek Scroll* were each authored by a different member of a different Jewish sect, the fact would still remain that there was not agreement among the Jews as to the length of the Jubilee cycle. However, since they were *all* collectively authored by members of the same group, the only reason anyone would want to focus on each individual work and treat each one as a separate layer of evidence supporting his position is to embellish an otherwise weak foundation. Thus, in spite of the enormous amount of time that Glenn devoted towards his commentary on the Dead Sea Scrolls, he proved nothing other than the fact that one sect of Jewish believers agreed with his position pertaining to the length of the Jubilee cycle.