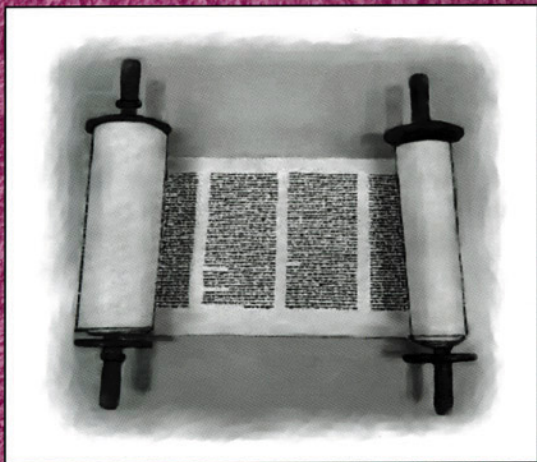


Also known as The Book Of Jasher

The Authentic Annals Of The Early Hebrews



Wayne Simpson

The Authentic Annals of the Early Hebrews

**Also Known as
The *Book of Jasher*
and
*Sefer HaYahsah***

**A New Edition with Notes and Analysis
by Wayne Simpson**

ISBN: 0-9719388-3-0
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 98-90828

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Introduction

Readers of the Bible have often been intrigued by the mention of other books that are mentioned in the scriptures and which seem to be the source from which certain information was drawn. One of the most prominent of those is the *Book of Jasher* mentioned in Joshua 10.13 and II Samuel 1.17. Many writers have engaged in flights of fancy about what may have been contained in it. Even some of the most trusted sources say simply that it has been lost and the nature of it is pure speculation. So it is not surprising that a book entitled the *Book of Jasher* would be met with skepticism.

If this book is, in fact, that *Book of Jasher* mentioned in the Bible, it is arguably one of the oldest history books in existence, having survived well over three thousand years of history. Even if that connection were to be disproved, it still seems to be a very ancient authority, at least 2300 years old. In any case it is certainly a very valuable work of antiquity giving us some superb insights into a period of time in which there is no other written history, other than the Bible. The details of its text shed light on European, Egyptian, and early Assyrian history in addition to the history of the Hebrews. Its history goes back far beyond Homer, Thucydides, and Herodotus. Its text is marvelously clear and the English translation we have is superb, even though the work was done in 1840.

I have chosen to title this edition *The Authentic Annals Of The Early Hebrews* rather than its older title because of the common mindset of many when you say the "Book of ...". A negative image is often formed in one's mind when faced with something with which he is unfamiliar. His first reaction may be suspicion, because of the plethora of ancient apocryphal books in existence. While suspicion may be warranted, a closed mind is not. No one, to my knowledge, has suggested that Jasher should be considered a part of the canon, and I certainly do not. Nor is it a book that lends itself to be used to justify some new age philosophy. So my hope is to avoid that initial negative reaction and to state briefly what it is about at the same time. While skepticism may still exist in the minds of some, I hope those people will not simply pan it without giving it a reading. The English title I have chosen is the real meaning of the Hebrew term Jasher. Jasher is not a proper name. It is, instead, an accurate description of the contents of the book. Jasher means upright, signifying an upright or accurate account, which I have chosen to render *The Authentic Annals*

Jasher has never been truly lost though its circulation has been so limited that only a few seemed to know of its existence in any given period. One of the best sources of information concerning Jasher is the preface of a Spanish-English limited edition entitled *Libro De Las Generaciones and The Book Of Yashar*, edited by Moshe Lazar published in 1989 by Labyrinthos. He tells us that all modern editions of this book come from the Venice 1625 Hebrew edition. It has been reprinted subsequently in Cracow, Prague, Frankfurt, Constantinople, Amsterdam, and Calcutta. It has been translated into Ladino, Latin, Spanish and English. Copies of several such editions are listed in the holdings of the British Library (1893-1960 catalog. Vol. II) including Judeo-German version and a Hebrew version edited and vocalized for the young, published in Warsaw in 1923. Many of these printings seem to have been in very limited quantities. This is probably the reason that it is still relatively unknown. One of the most recent printings has been in 1993 by the KTAV publishers.

There has been much conjecture as to the origin of this volume. Many theories exist, placing it variously in the period of the 9th to 12th centuries, or in the Amoraim period, or in the time preceding the publication of the Septuagint. I take the position that it is indeed the book mentioned in the Bible. I present my reasons in the first appendix to this text. You can make up your own mind on the issue.

This volume holds up well to investigation as to whether it is indeed genuine. That is a valid concern, given the fact that so many forgeries and apocryphal books exist from ancient times. I have dealt with this subject in Appendix A. After studying the book for several years, I have not the slightest hesitation in recommending it as the genuine Book of Jasher that was quoted in Joshua 10.13 and II Sam 1.17. I am sure, however that there will be some who will challenge my assertion. In the long term the reader will have to make up his own mind. In the short term, however, any reader interested in biblical or ancient history can anticipate a fascinating first reading of the book.

The printer's preface describes the original condition of the Hebrew text as the square, unpointed Babylonian script. This, of course, would mean that our current version had to have been written after the Babylonian exile. If it existed before it would have been written in Paleo-Hebrew script. Unfortunately we have no such copies to prove that such a version ever existed. If it did exist then it was undoubtedly transcribed into the square script at the same time as that of the Hebrew Bible and other such Hebrew works, by Ezra and/or the great assembly. At that time the whole culture of the Hebrew people was in danger of being lost because of the changes in their written language that were forced upon them. The loss of the venue of Jewish homeland was reality for the majority of Jews. It made perfectly good sense to bind up the authoritative scriptural writings into a fixed canon at that time. Likewise, it made good sense to transcribe as many non canonical Hebrew works as possible to preserve the culture for future generations. In the absence of hard proof that Jasher existed in Paleo-Hebrew, we can only examine its contents to surmise when it was originally written.

Perhaps I could indulge in a little speculation as to the identity of the original author. It is not unreasonable to think that someone in the family of Abraham would have considered it important to begin a journal of the important events that occurred to them. This is especially true since God had indicated that they were destined for greatness. We can see that a minimal level of detail is provided in the life of Abraham but the greatest level of detail seems to begin with the story of Jacob. Jasher is especially rich in details in the story of Joseph. This suggests that the original author could have been one of Jacob's sons. Of these, I believe Joseph to have been the most likely candidate, due to his position as Vizier of Egypt. Such a position probably encompassed a role as chief archivist for Egypt. It is also consistent with his mission to preserve the family of Jacob/Israel. He was undoubtedly very familiar with the experiences of his father, and he would likewise have known the history of Abraham, his great-grandfather. Notice the paucity of information about happenings in the life of Jacob while Joseph was in prison or during the famine. This is what we would expect if Joseph were writing the book. Of course, at his death someone else in the family would have had to take over the responsibility of recording the chronicles of early Israel. There is indeed evidence of different writing styles throughout the book, suggesting that it was composed by a series of authors, much like the Hebrew Bible. This is exactly what you would expect for the official chronicles of a family on its way to becoming a nation. An alternative view might be that Levi was the original author. There is a Jewish tradition that Jacob appointed Levi as the chief chronicler of Israel. Such an appointment probably took place at Jacob's death and it does not necessarily preclude that Joseph started the record. Of course Moses was a Levite as well, and his role in writing or conveying (depending on your point of view) the books of Torah is well attested.

The best evidence is the overall character of Jasher. It is very matter-of-fact in regard to the events it records. There is no particularly spiritual, interpretive quality like we find in the Bible. There is an implied faith in the existence and the role of the God of Israel but there is little moralizing and little effort to draw lessons from the material. One gets a clear sense that this book was written simply as a journal of the events that the early Hebrews faced on their way to becoming a nation. There are, of course, very dynamic lessons that modern readers can draw upon. Such lessons are generally very consistent with what we find in the Bible. One can easily imagine that if Moses wrote the first books of the Bible he would have drawn from whatever historical documents he had at his disposal. If Jasher

existed in his time, as I believe it did, it is very likely he drew from it, paraphrasing and perhaps copying from it outright at times. On the other hand, if one accepts the Orthodox Jewish point of view that the entire Torah was given by God at Mount Sinai, including those parts of Israel's history that had not yet occurred, *The Book of Jasher* may well constitute a historical chronicle that verifies those prophetic or predictive parts of Torah. In either scenario, this would explain why the character of Jasher is so similar to the Bible.

Whatever your conclusion concerning the origin and authenticity of this volume, it can be a valuable resource to anyone who studies ancient and/or biblical history. I propose that it should be used and treated in the same way as Josephus, the Apocrypha, or the Talmud in drawing on ancient sources for insight on historical or Biblical issues. All those sources are subject to scholarly criticism and debate, but none of them should be ignored. Neither should Jasher be ignored as it has been for so long. I do not know of any Christian scholars who actively cite Jasher. A few Jewish authorities quote it occasionally, but they seem to prefer to quote their sages, even when the same information appears in both sources. Ginzberg, in his *Legends of the Jews*, quotes liberally from it. *The Book of Jasher* has been almost totally ignored in modern biblical scholarship as if no one knows of its existence. I feel that it is one of the best kept secrets of Bible understanding in our time, though I can only speculate as to why this is so. Perhaps it simply has not been in wide enough circulation for most scholars to know about it. Or perhaps those scholars who have learned of it did not know what to make of it. Perhaps they were afraid to trust it, or they simply did not agree with its alternative scheme of history. It is this obliviousness that I hope to change by publishing this new edition of this venerable work.

Jasher has at least three outstanding qualities:

1. **DETAIL.** Readers will quickly see that familiar stories from the Bible occur in Jasher in much greater detail. Those details can enhance our understanding of the Bible greatly. One example of this is the story of the selling of Joseph into slavery. Many Bible commentators have stumbled over the fact that the Bible seems to indicate that the Midianites and the Ishmaelites mentioned there were the same people. Of course Ishmaelites are definitely not Midianites. Jasher's account gives a lengthy account of this episode and it shows clearly that Joseph passed from the hands of the Midianites into the hands of the Ishmaelites. Further, he was placed into the charge of a group of Medianites who finally sold him to Potiphar. Still further, the original selling price of twenty pieces of silver was inflated to four hundred pieces.

2. **CHRONOLOGICAL INTEGRITY.** There is a very detailed and thorough chronological thread that runs through Jasher. Its formula is identical to that used in the early part of Genesis up to the time of Abraham. In Jasher that practice continues throughout the whole book. There are a few breaks that can easily be picked up later in the text to re-establish the proper date. There are a few textual errors that show dates different than the Masoretic text. Some of them correspond to dates in the Septuagint. Usually the correct figure can be determined by comparing it with a later entry. This allows us to date events that cannot be determined from the text of the Bible alone.

3. **CORRELATION WITH EVENTS IN EUROPE AND EGYPT.** For example, we are told that the Rape of the Sabines occurred in the time of Abraham, a time that is sharply at variance with traditional Roman historians. By making use of the additional names and other details in Jasher, we can establish answers to questions that have troubled Bible commentators for centuries such as who were the Pharaohs of Joseph and the Exodus. See the Appendix section for these discussions. These qualities make this book very valuable to anyone who desires greater insight into the early parts of the Bible.

What kind of knowledge can one expect from this book? Several examples serve to answer that question. Expect to learn how Pharaoh was able to trick the Hebrews into slavery; learn about a group

of Israelites who escaped the labors of Egypt only to be destroyed because the time of their captivity had not expired; read how Moses was prepared in a special way to lead the nation of Israel; and you will be astonished at what Jasher has to say about Job. You will never understand the book of Job in quite the same way after reading Jasher. There are some very poignant passages in Jasher as well. The episode of Jacob's dealings with his brothers before they found out his identity comes to mind. You will see how he struggled with his feelings for revenge, and yet how he yearned to be reconciled with them. You will read of the fear and apprehension of Sarah as she prepared for the departure of her only son, Isaac, with his father on their journey to Mt. Moriah. You will read how the young Sabine women, who had been stolen for wives by the men of Chittim, strode fearlessly onto the battlefield, with their babes in arms, between the armies of their husbands and their fathers. They stopped the war cold, forcing the two tribes to make a peace that was to be the beginnings of the great kingdom of pre-imperial Rome.

There is much to commend this book to the reader. I have prepared this new edition in the hope that it can be brought to the attention of many people who I know will benefit from it. The plan that I have followed is a simple one. I have added a brief summary at the head of each chapter or subsection. I have also worked out the chronology of the book and placed a date at the heading of each section where a chronological indicator occurs. Where a difference exists with the Biblical text I have shown it to be so. The dating system I have used is the Anno Mundi system used by many commentators, which runs forward from the time of the creation of man. For example, Adam would have been 160 years old in AM 160. It is my feeling that too much uncertainty exists in regard to conventional dating systems for a BC or BCE date to have any accuracy at all. The AM system avoids lengthy discussions necessary to determine time on that scale. I have used occasional footnotes where appropriate as well as incorporating some of the footnotes from the earlier English editions but I have made little effort to distinguish mine from earlier notes. And finally I have included several Appendices to explain more detailed matters that could not easily be included as footnotes.

Some of the information I have presented in the appendix section is an innovative interpretation of historical data that is sure to fly in the face of conventional Egyptology. I have simply drawn key information from the accounts of Jasher and applied it to what has been known of Egyptian history from the writings of Manetho, and from the various king lists, to produce what I believe to be a more realistic model of the Old Kingdom. Doubtless, there will be those who take exception to this interpretation. I would hope that any such criticism will be based on a logical and thorough analysis of the data that is available, rather than an appeal to the old model of Egyptian history that has been acknowledged by so many to be faulty. If any part of these historical scenarios I have presented are ultimately disproven, I believe the exercise will sharpen the overall knowledge of Egyptian history and its relationship with Hebrew history, and I will have accomplished my goal.

Whether or not the reader agrees with these analyses I have every confidence that no one will feel he has wasted his time reading this book. It is my hope that I can acquaint many with this valuable source of information related to historical studies of the Bible, who would otherwise be unaware of its existence.

Wayne Simpson, August 1995