

Jude and the body of Moses

Jude 1:9 ⁹ Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.

Zechariah 3:1-5 And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. ² And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: *is* not this a brand plucked out of the fire? ³ Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. ⁴ And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. ⁵ And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by.

Some scholars believe that Jude was not using Zechariah but was referring to a Jewish apocryphal pseudepigraphical work where a fight over the corpse of Moses is described. It is worth remembering that Moses died on Mt Nebo and apparently no one buried him (Deut 32:49-52, though reference to “gathered unto thy people” suggests otherwise). Philo adds to Deuteronomy 34:6 that Moses was buried by celestial beings (*Vita Mosis* 2:3). Targum *Pseudo-Jonathan* on the same passage records that the angels buried Moses four miles away from where he died. In a Falasha legend the three gravediggers are Michael, Gabriel and Zagzagel.¹

Zechariah 3 is thought (by some) to depict the recently deceased body (soul?) of Joshua appearing before the Judgment seat. This cannot be correct because Joshua is given a list of priestly requirements that he is expected to uphold and he can hardly do this if he is dead. Others argue that the vision is directed at Joshua’s grandson the serving High Priest Eliashib who was corrupt by the time of Nehemiah (Neh.13.28). Joshua was probably already dead by that time and the vision-oracle would function as an allegory-parable exposing priestly intermarriage and financial corruption in the time of Nehemiah. However, the story does not condemn Joshua **in fact exactly the opposite is true**. The allegation is thrown out and Satan is rebuked. In fact the remainder of the vision addressed to Joshua becomes **highly messianic** with Joshua foreshadowing Jesus. The story does not function as a warning to the priests of Nehemiah’s era (Joshua’s grandsons) nor does it make sense if addressed to a “dead” Joshua. The only possible explanation is that the allegation lodged against Joshua was that the captivity had made him ritually unfit or unclean for the role of High Priest.

¹ Ginzberg, Vol. 6, p.952 cites Faitlovich, Mota Musa 9-20

This possibly relates to sectarian infighting between different priestly factions (Zadokite, Levite, Aaronite) and may even have focused on irregularities concerning identity (was Joshua legitimately a Zadokite or Levite etc...). Priests were supposedly scrupulous in recording and protecting their lineage but this obviously went awry when the priests married foreign women in Nehemiah's time. That something like this lies behind the vision is established by Yahweh's promise in v.9 --- **"I will engrave the graving thereof [on the stone]"**. This is a euphemism for conception. The Hebrew word for stone is 'eben, a play on the Hebrew word ben, used for sons. A house can be built with stones ('eben) and a dynasty is built with sons (ben). The altar and the temple (house) of God are built without **using any tool of man** (Exod 20.25, Deut.27.5, 1 Kgs 6.7). This is a prophecy concerning **the virgin birth**. God would raise-up a high priest Joshua-Jesus – he would “engrave the graving” thereof and the slander and accusations concerning his legitimacy would be thrown out of court. It was necessary to have a priest (intercessor) who bore the nature of Adam and yet was also the son of God. **Zechariah 3:9-10** “I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree” – compare Nathaniel under the fig tree (John 1.46-51), his messianic declaration and his reference to Nazareth (cf. my servant the Branch in Zech 3.8)²

² Hebrew צִמָּח (tsemach), sprout, growth, branch. In the LXX a proper noun Ἀνατολήν from, anatoḗ meaning a *rising* of light, that is, *dawn* (figuratively); by implication the *east* (also in plural): - dayspring, east, rising. The LXX and Hebrew use completely different terms possibly indicating the use of different Hebrew Vorlage. In Isaiah 11:1 it says, “Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a **branch** from his roots will bear fruit”. The Hebrew there is נֶזֶר (NZR) **“and is probably related to the same root that gives us the place name Nazareth”** (NIDOTTE, ed., VanGemeren, Paternoster, 1997, vol. 3, 5916, p., 148), here the LXX has ἄνθος (anthos), a primary word meaning, a blossom (flower). There does not seem to be consistency of translation either between the Hebrew and Greek versions or even in the English translations. The word branch (NZR) probably forms the basis of Matthew 2.23 (possibly based on oral tradition - “that which was *spoken* by the prophets”). See also Gen 49.26 the blessing on Joseph: “of him that was separate נָזִיר (naziyr) from his brethren”. Remarkably, the other name for Galilee – Genneseret – means land of Nazareth. The Hebrew lema of “Nazareth” also means “preserved” or “guarded”(how marvellously appropriate here to one kept safe from the wrath of Herod!) The reference by Nathaniel to Nazareth immediately before his messianic declaration (although derogatory) supports the play on branch (NZR) for Nazareth. In effect Nathaniel is saying there is no branch/sprout (messianic descendant of Jesse) coming from that (worthless) place. Solomon gifted cities in this area to King Hiram but Hiram considered them worthless and was not pleased (1 Kgs 9.13). It is strange (and inconsistent) that Zech 3.8 uses tsemach instead of nezer and the LXX is of no help here. One wonders if deliberate scribal choices were made to obscure the prophecy. The Nazarenes originated as a sect of first-century Judaism. The first use of the term “sect of the Nazarenes” is used in Acts 24.5. Then, the term simply designated followers of “Yeshua Natzri” but in the first to fourth centuries, the term was used for a sect of followers of Jesus who were closer to Judaism than most Christians.

Jude and extra biblical sources

According to Origen, a Greek Christian writer of the early 3rd C, and an advocate of belief in fallen angels, Jude is quoting a Jewish myth:

“And in the first place, in the book of Genesis the serpent is described as having seduced Eve; regarding whom, in the work entitled *The Assumption of Moses*, a little treatise, of which the Apostle Jude makes mention in his Epistle, the archangel Michael, when disputing with the devil regarding the body of Moses, says that the serpent, being inspired by the devil, was the cause of Adam and Eve’s transgression”. (Origen, *De principiis*, III, 2 ,1)

Origen names this work the *Assumption of Moses* (*Analepsis Mouseos*, *Ανάληψις Μουσεώς*) which may or may not be the same as the *Ascension of Moses* (*Anabasis Mouseos*, *Ανάβασις Μουσεώς*) mentioned by Athanasius (c. 293 – 373). To complicate matters further, Nicephorus (c. 758 – 828) lists among apocryphal texts found in the libraries of Constantinople both a *Testament of Moses* and an *Assumption of Moses*.

The actual text to which Origen refers is lost. But Origen being able to cite something as specific as the serpent being inspired by the devil bears the hallmark of a genuine Jewish myth – since in Jewish mythology the serpent and devil were seen as two separate enemies. This is particularly clear in the *Apocalypse of Moses*, a Greek text which unlike the *Assumption of Moses* does contain the material Origen describes: Michael, when disputing with the devil regarding a body, says that the serpent, being inspired by the devil, was the cause of Adam and Eve’s transgression (*Apocalypse of Moses* is the Greek version of the Latin and Slavonic *Life of Adam and Eve*).

The only problem with Origen’s testimony is that the burial incident in the *Apocalypse of Moses* isn’t about Michael, the devil and the body of Moses, but concerns the **body of Adam**. Is it possible that Origen got confused between two apocryphal Jewish texts: the *Assumption of Moses* (*Analepsis Mouseos*) and the *Apocalypse of Moses* (*Apokalypsis Mouseous*)?

Discussion

Was Jude referring to a Jewish apocryphal pseudepigraphical work or to Zechariah? The context of Jude is a dispute with Enochites, who held a belief in fallen, rebellious and sinful angels. According to I Enoch 9:1-10, it was Michael who accused Shemihazah and Azazel, but according to Jude, Michael “would not dare to bring a slanderous accusation,” even against the devil himself. In other words, the story of Michael making an accusation against the angels in Enoch is false, and if the story of the accusation is false then so is the story of the angels’ sin.³

Therefore, by identifying the angel of Zech. 3 with Michael, Jude provides a counter argument against the Enochites who were *slandering heavenly beings*, (Jude 8) in believing that angels were capable of sin, since the Angel of the Lord does not do in Zech. 3 (slander) what Michael is reported to do in 1Enoch.⁴ This accounts for the addition of Michael by Jude, by why did he change Joshua into the *body of Moses*? A paraphrase of Zech 3 might look like this:

Yet the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about **Joshua**, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.

Instead Jude says this:

Jude 1:9 ⁹ Yet **Michael** the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the **body of Moses**, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.

It seems that Jude wants to point the subject of the dispute away from being about the suitability of Joshua (Jesus) towards the suitability of Judaists (followers of Moses) that had brought Enochic fables into the church. Jude intends the body of Moses to contrast with the **body of Christ**, for the Jews *were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea* (1 Cor. 10:2^{NKJ}). The Old Covenant community was baptized (as a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation)⁵ **into Moses**. Even under Moses they were meant to be a holy nation and Enochic doctrine was not only falsely slandering angels (the administrators of the Law) as rebellious but was somehow used to justify turning the grace of God into lasciviousness (v.4). The example of Sodom and “strange flesh” (v.7) reflects the Sodomites wanting to force themselves on their angel visitors –

³ Not Giving Heed to Jewish Fables (6): Michael, the Devil, and the Body of Moses Steven Cox, Christadelphian Tidings Magazine April 15, 2001 <http://www.tidings.org/wp/?p=2042>

⁴ See, Neyrey, Jerome H, 2 Peter, Jude,(Yale University Press 1995) and Carol L. Meyers, Haggai, Zechariah 1-8 (Anchor Bible Series, Vol. 25B 1987)

⁵ Exodus 19.6

it is about crossing boundaries between the holy and the profane. In slandering the integrity of those very dignitaries Enochic teaching was crossing the same boundary (between the holy and profane) that the Sodomites crossed. The argument has subtly been changed from the fitness of Jesus-Joshua as a priest to the fitness of the Jewish nation becoming a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. The body of Moses would also subliminally remind them that Moses had himself not entered the kingdom and had been buried outside the land because *ye sanctified me not in the midst of the children of Israel* (Deut 32.51). Moses did not sanctify God neither did Enochic Judaists sanctify God or his angels. Even their own prophet Enoch condemns them (v.14-15)⁶ with words that the pseudepigraphical writer obviously based on Deut 33.2 the **same chapter that relates the death of Moses!**

A more likely explanation for this passage is that Jude was familiar with the Apocalypse. In the “war in heaven” Rev 12 paraphrases Zech 3 and conflates it with Michael in Dan 12.1 (and the 3½ year time of trouble). In turn, Jude has both the Apocalypse and Zechariah at his disposal and conflates them to produce a counter argument (another paraphrase) against the Enochites, who were also (supposedly) a Judaist law-keeping-party.

⁶ Enoch 1:9, translated from the Ethiopic (found also in Qumran scroll 4Q204=4QEnoch^c ar, col I 16–18) And behold! He cometh with ten thousands of His Saints To execute judgment upon all, And to destroy all the ungodly: And to convict all flesh Of all the works of their ungodliness which they have ungodly committed, And of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him. See, Clontz, TE; Clontz, J (2008), The Comprehensive New Testament with complete textual variant mapping and references for the Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo, Josephus, Nag Hammadi Library, Pseudepigrapha, Apocrypha, Plato, Egyptian Book of the Dead, Talmud, Old Testament, Patristic Writings, Dhammapada, Tacitus, Epic of Gilgamesh, Cornerstone, p. 711