The Prayer of Joseph is a unique text which maintains that the patriarch Jacob was the earthly incarnation of the angel Israel. The central tale, in the fragments that have survived, concerns a conflict between the angels Israel and Uriel over their relative rank in heaven. The title is enigmatic as Joseph is not mentioned in the surviving fragments, but the text was most likely an extended testament developed out of Jacob’s blessing of Joseph’s sons in Genesis 48. The narrative of Jacob wrestling with the “man” in Genesis 32:24–31 has contributed the central motifs to the text.

Texts

According to the Stichometry of Nicephorus, the Prayer of Joseph originally contained eleven hundred lines. Only three fragments containing nine Greek sentences have survived in the writings of Origen. Fragment A is quoted in Origen’s Commentary on John by way of supporting his argument that John the Baptist was an angel who became incarnate in order to bear witness to Jesus. Fragment B, a single sentence, is cited in Gregory and Basil’s compilation of Origen, the Philocalia, and is also quoted in Eusebius, The Preparation of the Gospel as well as in the Latin Commentary on Genesis byProcopius of Gaza. Fragment C, also from the Philocalia, quotes Fragment B and paraphrases Fragment A.

In addition to these fragments, the title (Proseuche loseph) occurs in several lists of apocryphal works, and three possible allusions to the Prayer of Joseph in other writings have been suggested by scholars. None of these adds to our knowledge of the text.


Original language

The 164 words that have survived from the Prayer of Joseph in direct quotation are too scant to permit an identification of the original language. In the scholarly literature, the majority of commentators have abstained from hazarding an opinion; for those who have, much has depended on the assignment of the text to either Jewish or Christian authorship. For those who hold that it was originally a Jewish work, an Aramaic original is presumed; for those who hold to a Christian authorship, a Greek. Neither of these identifications is based on linguistic criteria.

The Prayer of Joseph contains three words that have been identified as *hapax legomena*:
one (Fragment A, 7 *archichiliarchos*, chief captain) is a unique occurrence of what appears to be a technical military term that, if historical, might suggest the date and provenance of the text. The other two—*proektisthesan* (Fragment A, 2 precreated) and the phrase “imperishable name” (Fragment A, 9 *onomata asbestos*)—are rare theological terms that occur in later Christian texts.5

The largest number of linguistic and theological parallels are to Egyptian Greek and Coptic Jewish and Christian texts; the significant narrative details in the Prayer of Joseph are most closely paralleled by Aramaic materials.

Date

The dating of Origen’s *Commentary on John* with its notice of the Prayer of Joseph as “an apocrypha presently in use among the Hebrews” as prior to A.D. 231 provides a secure latest possible date. The various parallels to both hellenistic and Aramaic materials would suggest a first-century date.

Provenance

Given the uncertainty with respect to original language and date, any decision regarding provenance is impossible. If the Greco-Egyptian Jewish and Christian parallels are stressed, Alexandria would appear most likely. If the Aramaic parallels are stressed, a Palestinian provenance seems more likely.

Historical importance

There are no historical allusions in the Prayer of Joseph. No particular situation appears to be reflected in the text.

Theological importance

Given the extant remains of the Prayer of Joseph, its theological significance must be located in the remarkable cluster of titles attributed to the angel Israel, its notion of Jacob as the incarnation of the angel Israel, and its striking narrative of a combat between Uriel and Israel. Because of these, many scholars have sought to relate the Prayer of Joseph in some way to Christian tradition: either as a Jewish-Christian or gnostic text (Resch, Batiffol, Schneider, Grant, Winter, Daniélou) or as a Jewish anti-Christian work (Charles, Marshall, James, Russell, Turner) or as a Christian anti-Jewish polemic (Burch).6 But the close

---


parallels in technical terms, make narrative tradition and theology to both hellenistic and Palestinian Jewish traditions make it most probable that Origen was right in identifying the Prayer of Joseph as Jewish (Priebatsch, Stein, Smith). The Prayer is most likely to be situated within those first-century Jewish groups, both in Palestine and in the Diaspora, both before and after the destruction of the Temple, that sought to develop a notion of community, principles of authority, sources of revelation, and modes of access to divinity apart from the Jerusalem Temple, its traditions, priests, and cult. This was accomplished largely through the creation of a pseudographical literature of revelation to the patriarchs (beginning already with the ascription of the Pentateuch to Moses) and by the development of the complex rituals and visionary literature of the early Jewish Merkabah (throne) mystics. Both of these tendencies are related to the Prayer of Joseph.

The theology of the Prayer is best described in terms of the titles it confers on the angel Israel; its mythology of combat and descent will be discussed below as exegetical developments of the Jacob narrative.

In the Prayer of Joseph, the titles that are given apply only to the angel Israel. Although in Greco-Egyptian magical materials, Coptic-gnostic and Manichean texts, there is an angel Jacob, in the Prayer of Joseph, Israel is the name borne by the angel; Jacob, by the man.

Israel, an angel of God

While the immediate locus for this title would appear to be turgonic and midrashic understandings of the conferring of the name Israel on Jacob in Genesis 32:28, a second source would appear to be the collective use of Israel in canonical passages (e.g. Ex 4:22) that suggest a heavenly or pre-existent being. These passages, sometimes referring to Jacob-Israel, sometimes to the nation, were collected in catenae (e.g. 4Ezra 6:58 and the close parallel in 4QDibHam iii), which resemble the assemblage in the Prayer of Joseph. For example, in De confusione linguarum 146, Philo writes of the Logos: “God’s firstborn, the Logos, who holds the eldership among the angels, an archangel as it were. And many names are his for he is called the Beginning, and the Name of God, and His Word, and the Man after His Image and He that Sees, that is to say, Israel.” In the Prayer of Joseph, Israel is called “firstborn,” an “archangel,” and a “man seeing God”; and his role as “the Beginning” and his “eldership” is clearly implied. Even more striking is the Coptic-

Israel, an angel of God

...
gnostic treatise *On the Creation of the World* (CG 2.5), which depicts, standing before the heavenly throne, amid the angels and next to Sabaoth, “a firstborn whose name is Israel, the one who sees God.” All three titles occur as well in the Prayer of Joseph. The setting in this treatise, rather than the occurrence of an angel Israel in Greco-Egyptian and Jewish magical materials, seems to supply the proper context for understanding Israel's role in the Prayer.

In early Jewish mystical literature, the community of Israel chanting the *Keduša* (the *Trisagion*) became personified as a heavenly figure named Israel who leads (as does Michael or Metatron in parallel traditions) the celestial worship before the throne. In its original form it is a two-level action such as that depicted in b.Hullin 91b: “Israel is beloved before the Holy One, blessed be he, even more than the ministering angels. For Israel repeats the song every hour while the ministering angels repeat it only once a day . . . Furthermore, the ministering angels do not begin the song above until Israel has started it below.” Later there developed a vision, in the Hekhalot literature, in which the congregational action was transported entirely to heaven with an “angel who bears the name Israel standing in the center of heaven and leading the heavenly choir.” Such a role is summarized in the Prayer of Joseph by the self-description of Israel as the “first minister before the face of God” who calls “upon my God by the inextinguishable name” (Fragment A, 8f.).

In the discussion of canonical parallels below, it will be noted that the Palestinian targumic tradition is uniform in understanding Jacob’s angelic adversary in Genesis 32 as “the chief of those who praise [God in heaven],” that it was a common midrashic tradition that Jacob let the angel go at dawn so that the angel could return on high to join in the heavenly chanting, that some texts identify Jacob’s adversary as bearing the name Israel, while others interpret the name Israel as meaning “trying to sing instead of the angels.” It is on some such cluster of associations that the central narrative of the Prayer of Joseph rests. It is also related to the theme of angelic rivalry before the heavenly throne, which may be found in both hellenistic and Palestinian Merkabah literature. Thus, in the Apocalypse of Abraham 10:9, Jaoel (or Iaoel) is described as “the one who has been charged, according to his commandment, to restrain the threats of the living creatures of the cherubim against one another,” while in the vision of the throne in chapter 18, Abraham sees that when the *hayyot*, “the living creatures,” “finished singing, they would look at one another and threaten one another. And it came to pass that when the angel who was with me saw that they were threatening each other, he left me and went running to them. And he turned the face of each living creature from the face which was opposite it so that they could not see each other’s threats frightening each other. And he taught them the song of peace which the angel who bears the name Israel standing in the center of heaven and leading the heavenly choir.”

---

13 Israel, as an angelic name, appears only in late Jewish magical materials, e.g. Sefer Raziel 4b, 41b. *Yisriel* appears more frequently in earlier texts, e.g. Sefer ha-Razim (ed. M. Margalioth [Jerusalem, 1966]) pp. 97, 19. *Harbe de Moshe* (ed. M. Gaster, *Studies and Texts* [London, 1928]) vol. 3, pp. 71f. In Gk. materials, Israel appears ed. A. Shinan (Jerusalem, 1977) vol. 3, pp. 161-63. The pattern, in b.Hullin 91b, of the angels not beginning their song above until Israel has started it below. Later there developed a vision, in the Hekhalot literature, in which the congregational action was transported entirely to heaven with an “angel who bears the name Israel standing in the center of heaven and leading the heavenly choir.” Such a role is summarized in the Prayer of Joseph by the self-description of Israel as the “first minister before the face of God” who calls “upon my God by the inextinguishable name” (Fragment A, 8f.).

14 In early Jewish mystical literature, the community of Israel chanting the *Keduša* (the *Trisagion*) became personified as a heavenly figure named Israel who leads (as does Michael or Metatron in parallel traditions) the celestial worship before the throne. In its original form it is a two-level action such as that depicted in b.Hullin 91b: “Israel is beloved before the Holy One, blessed be he, even more than the ministering angels. For Israel repeats the song every hour while the ministering angels repeat it only once a day . . . Furthermore, the ministering angels do not begin the song above until Israel has started it below.” Later there developed a vision, in the Hekhalot literature, in which the congregational action was transported entirely to heaven with an “angel who bears the name Israel standing in the center of heaven and leading the heavenly choir.”

---

[Translation is by R. Rubinkiewicz and H. G. Lunt and is published herein. —J.H.C.]
Eternal One has in himself’ (ApAb 18:8–11). The same sort of conflict is depicted in Tanhuma, Bereshit (ed. S. Buber, Rome, 1885) 1.10, which contains a Midrash on Job 25:2: ‘“Dominion and fear are with him: he makes peace in his high places.”’ ‘“Dominion” is interpreted as Michael; “fear” as Gabriel. The “making peace” is understood to be God’s action in keeping peace among the angels “for even the heavenly ones need peace . . . each one in his turn says ‘I am the first.’” In Pirke Hekhalot (BH M 3.161–63), the angel Israel has the function of keeping order among the heavenly choir much as does Jaoel in the Apocalypse of Abraham. The conflict between Uriel and Israel over their relative rank in the Prayer of Joseph more closely resembles that depicted in Tanhuma.

A ruling spirit
A general term in astrological and angelological materials to which no special significance may be attached.17 In the Prayer of Joseph it serves to emphasize Israel’s preeminent rank.

A man seeing God
Ultimately dependent on Genesis 32:31, the name Israel was understood to be derived from ‘yš ‘r’h ‘hl, “a man seeing God,” which is the form in which it occurs in the Prayer of Joseph (Fragment A, 3). While a Hebrew play on words, the etymology is not found (except for one possible late exception)18 in any extant Hebrew source but is rather to be found only in Jewish and Christian texts from a Greco-Egyptian provenance in a variety of verbal forms.19 Its most massive witness is Philo, in whose writings some form of the etymology appears forty-nine times.20 The term indicates what, since Ezekiel 1:4–28, was the goal of the Merkabah mystic—a vision of God on his heavenly throne.21

The firstborn
Israel’s claim that “I am the firstborn (prōtoton) of every living thing to whom God gives life” (Fragment A, 3) bears a striking resemblance to the description of the son in the archaic hymn preserved in Colossians 1:15, 17: “He is the image of the unseen God and the firstborn (prōtoton) of all creation . . . before anything was created he existed.”22

---

17 It may not be used to relate PrJos to the gnostic, Archontic sect (Resch, Agrapha, pp. 295–97).
18 The only occurrence of the etymology of Israel as a man seeing God in Heb. tradition is a presumably late Midrash on Hos 9:10 in SER 27 (ed. M. Friedmann, Jahresbericht der israelitisch-theologischen Lehranstalt in Wien 7 [1900] 138f).
19 In the Philonic form ho horŏn ton theon in Clement of Alexandria, Paid 1.9 (PG vol. 8, col. 841); Origen, Princ 4.3 (PG vol. 11, col. 395); Eusebius, PrEv 11.6.519b (PG vol. 21, col. 860); Basil Caesar, Comm 15 (PG vol. 30, col. 141); and in closely related forms in Jerome, HebQuaestinLibGen (CCSL 72.40–41); Pseudo-Jerome, Liber Interpretationis Hebraicorum Nominum in Exodum (CCSL 72.75); Macarius, Hom 47.5 (PG vol. 34, col. 800); Clement of Alexandria, Strom 1.5 (PG vol. 8, col. 725). See, likewise, the Jewish(?) prayers in the Apostolic Constitutions 7.36.2 and 8.15.7 in W. Bousset, “Eine jüdische Gebetssamlung im siebenten Buch der apostolischen Konstitutionen,” Nachrichten von der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, philologische-historische Klasse, 1915 (1916), especially p. 444. [Also see the contribution herein titled the Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers.—J.H.C.] The Heb. form is most closely represented by the rarer anēr horōn theon or anthrōpos horōn theon in Hippolytus, Contra Noetum 5 (PG vol. 10, col. 809); Eusebius, PrEv 7.8.525b (PG vol. 21, col. 525); and the Coptic-agnostic treatise “On the Origin of the World” (Böhlig-Labib, pp. 153, 23–25). See further Smith, Goodenough Festschrift, p. 264.
20 Philo most usually employs the phrase Ἰσραήλ [ho] horōn [ton theon]: LegAll 2.34, 3.186, 212; Sacr 134; Post 62, 92; Conf 56, 72, 146, 148; Migr 113, 125, 201; Heres 78; Conge 51; Fuga 208; Somn 1.173: 2.44; 173; Abr 57; Leg 4; QuaesGen 3.49: 4.233. Cf. LegAll 3.15; 172; Plant 58, 60; QuaesGen 2.22. To horatikon genos as a synonym for Israel occurs in QuodDeus 144; Conf 91; Migr 18, 54; Mut 109, 189, 258; Somn 2.279; cf. Somn 2.44. The form ho oron in Conf 159 and QuaesEx 2.47 and ho oratikos in Plant 46f. and QuaesEx 2.58 may be compared. For other verbs of seeing applied to Israel in Philo, cf. Sacr 120; Heres 279; Somn 1.114. For horatikos with some bodily organ with reference to Israel, compare Ebr 111; Migr 14; Mut 209; Conf 92; Mut 203.
21 See P. Borgen, Bread from Heaven, pp. 115–18, 175–79, who relates the Philonic etymology to Merkabah traditions.
and has its origin in Exodus 4:22, in which God declares "Israel is my first-born (πρῶτοτοκος, LXX) son." While in Exodus the title clearly refers to the nation (cf. 4Ezra 6:58; Sir 36:12; Jub 2:20; PssSol 18:4), some texts interpreted the passage to refer to the patriarch (cf. Jub 19:29; R. Nathan in ExR 19:7). This title is paralleled by the tradition that the patriarchs were formed before creation (a tradition alluded to in PrJos A, 2: "Abraham and Isaac were [pre-]created before any work") and likewise Israel (either the patriarch or the nation). 23

Archangel of the power of the Lord

This is one of the early occurrences of the term "archangel." Joined to the phrase "of the power of the Lord," it appears to be a reflection of the traditional vocabulary associated with Michael as the "Great Prince" (viz. Dan 12:1).

Chief captain among the sons of God

The title "chief captain" (archichilliarchos) is unique to the Prayer of Joseph but appears to parallel Michael, who is the chief captain of the heavenly host (archistrategos) in hellenistic Jewish literature (Dan 8:11 in LXX and Theod; 2En 22.6f.; 33:10f.; AsMos 10:2; JosAsen 14 and throughout TAB).

The first minister before the face of God

The term ministering angels (μαλακτε υπ'αγγελοι λειτουργοι) is commonplace. The figure of Israel in the Prayer of Joseph is a close parallel to the Merkabah description in the Testament of Levi 3:4: "For in the uppermost heaven of all dwells the Great Glory, in the Holy of Holies, superior to all holiness. There with him are the archangels, who serve and offer propitiatory sacrifices to the Lord . . ."

The designation "first" ought to be read as a term of rank consonant with "ruling spirit," "archangel," "chief captain," and, especially, "[Uriel] the eighth after me [Israel]." This last term has caused much discussion as it seems to imply that Uriel is no longer one of the seven archangels. 25 The problem is relieved by assuming a scheme of seven archangels with an eighth highest angel (who is Israel); Uriel would be the lowest of the seven. Thus Israel, in the Prayer of Joseph, plays an analogous role to the Ogdoad in gnostic traditions (e.g. AdvHaer 31:4), to the son who has the face of God and who rules over the seven angelic protoktistoi in Clement of Alexandria (Excerpta ex Theodoto 10–12), and to the Dynamis of the eighth highest heaven in Jewish Merkabah materials (e.g. the "Great Glory" in TLevi 3:4 quoted above; 3En 10:3; b.Hag 13a). 26

Each title in the Prayer of Joseph can be related to parallel Jewish materials; each appears to have its prime locus in early Merkabah traditions as the mythology of the Prayer of Joseph appears to have its prime locus in exegetical traditions developed out of Genesis 32.

The Prayer of Joseph may be termed "a myth of the mystery of Israel." Whether the earthly Jacob-Israel is to be understood as a thoroughly docetic figure, the incarnation of a heavenly power, or a heavenly messenger is not clear. However, it is frequently a characteristic of each of these patterns that the myth may be ritually appropriated by its believers. The narrative of Israel's descent is presumably matched by a ritual for Jacob's (and the sons of Jacob's) ascent. The soteriological experience would accord with the well-known pattern of the ascent of the mystic to the Merkabah, an ascent threatened by angelic adversaries, which results in a vision of the form of God on the celestial throne and the "angelicizing" of the adept as he joins in the heavenly chorus of praise. One may presume that the way of ascent in the Prayer of Joseph was "Jacob's Ladder." The Prayer of Joseph may be grouped with the pseudepigraphical literature and Philo, in contradistinction to the

Hebrew and Aramaic Merkabah texts, in placing emphasis on the patriarch as a model for salvation.  

With particular reference to the Prayer of Joseph, the sort of promise it held out to its believers may be paralleled by E. R. Goodenough's description of the great reredos in the Dura Europos synagogue. The fresco is dominated by a great vine, which is, in part, a ladder. To one side, at the foot of the vine, is the reclining figure of the patriarch Jacob; in the branches sits the figure of Orpheus, the heavenly singer; at the summit is the celestial throne and the Powers. In Goodenough's words: "blessed at the bottom by the Patriarch wearing the white robe of a man of God on earth, Israel can go up to stand permanently beside the Throne with the Powers."  

An even closer parallel is found in a Jewish magical papyrus entitled "The Prayer of Jacob" (Proseuchê Iakôb). The petitioner prays, "Fill me with wisdom, empower me, Master . . . because I am an angel on earth, because I have become immortal, because I have received the gift from you."  

The Prayer of Joseph is to be situated within some such circle of first-century Judaism, which sought a model for salvation in the ascent of the patriarchs to the full reality of their heavenly, angelic nature. This Prayer is the narrative of the mythology of such a heavenly figure; a text such as the Prayer of Jacob is the expression of the experience of this salvation on the part of the individual believer.  

The complete pattern is most apparent in the various texts that witness to the complex Enoch tradition, particularly 2 Enoch. Here Enoch was originally a man (ch. 1) who ascended to heaven and became an angel (22:9, cf. 3En 10:3f. and 48C), returned to earth as a man (33:11), and finally returned again to heaven to resume his angelic station (67:18).

Relation to canonical books

In considering the relation of the Prayer of Joseph to the present canonical text, it is necessary, as is the case with any of the pseudepigrapha, to compare it not only with modern editions of the Hebrew scriptures but also with early versions, translations, and interpretations. It is also essential to perceive how redactional activity within the canon is continued by the pseudepigraphical works. In the case of the Prayer of Joseph, the links already established in Genesis as well as in Hosea 12:4–6 between three blocks of material: (a) Genesis 32f.; (b) Genesis 35f.; Genesis 28; and (c) Genesis 48 exhaust the passages relevant to an understanding of the Prayer of Joseph. A similar set of links (omitting Gen 32f.) occurs in the version of Genesis 35 in Jubilees 32.

Genesis 32f.

The immediate point of departure for an examination of the relationship of the Prayer of Joseph to canonical tradition is the account of the combat between Jacob and a (heavenly) assailant and the patriarch's gaining of the name Israel in Genesis 32:24–31.

The larger narrative context of Genesis 32f. is relevant. The bulk of these chapters is devoted to an account of Jacob's tense meeting with his elder twin brother, Esau (Gen 32:4–23; 33:1–17), their first meeting since Jacob tricked his father Isaac into bestowing Esau's blessing on him (Gen 27). In the interim, Jacob had sought refuge from Esau's fury with his uncle Laban in Haran (Gen 27:43–32:1). Genesis 32f. is situated as Jacob and his entourage, in flight from Laban, are journeying up from Paddan-Aram to Canaan in response to a divine command to "return to the land of your birth" (Gen 31:13). The tension with Laban and Esau and the fight by the Jabbok are part of an overall pattern. Whenever Jacob approaches a human being, a close relation, with whom there is conflict, preparations for combat are made (Gen 31:22–42; 32:4–23), but battle is avoided and reconciliation occurs (Gen 31:43–32:1; 33:1–17); whenever Jacob encounters angelic beings, combat appears to follow (Gen 32:2f.; 32:24–31).

a) The combat in the Prayer of Joseph occurs in an identical setting as Genesis 32f. Jacob is "coming up from Syrian Mesopotamia" (Fragment A, 4), the standard Septuagint translation of Paddan-Aram (see LXX Gen 31:18 and 33:18, which frame the meeting with Esau).

---

27 See further Smith, Goodenough Festschrift, pp. 287–91.
b) The conflict, as described in the Prayer of Joseph, is between two rival, all but equal, archangelic powers as to their relative rank before the throne of God. This closely parallels the conflict between Jacob and Esau. They are twin brothers constantly competing for relative seniority. The competition began in their mother’s womb (Gen 25:22–26), continued through Jacob’s acquisition of Esau’s birthright (Gen 25:29–34), and culminated in Jacob’s theft of Esau’s blessing (Gen 27:1–40) with Esau’s threat to kill Jacob (Gen 27:41f.). These events explain the derivations of Jacob’s name: Ya’aqōb, either because at birth he held his brother’s heel (’aqēbh, Gen 25:26) or because he is one who supplants: “Is it because his name is Jacob that he has now supplanted (wayya’tqēbhēnī) me twice? First he took my birthright, and look, now he has taken my blessing!” (Gen 27:36). This latter derivation is followed throughout the canon, in Hosea 12:3 and, most effectively, in the proverbial pun in Jeremiah 9:4: “every brother is a very Jacob (’aqēbh yā’qōb).” Philo regularly assigns the title “‘The Supplanter’” (ho pternistes, e.g. LegAll 1.61; 2.89) to Jacob before receiving the name Israel. The derivation is alluded to by Origen in the introduction to his paraphrase of the Prayer of Joseph (Fragment C, 1): “Jacob . . . he who supplanted his brother.” 31

Esau’s jealousy of his brother may well have supplied the notion of “envy” which is given as the motivation for the attack on Israel by Uriel in the Prayer of Joseph (Fragment A, 5), but in the Prayer, despite the implicit accusation that each angel has usurped the other’s title and rank, Israel is the elder (Fragment A, 3). 32

c) In the Genesis account, the patriarch’s journey begins with a mysterious encounter between Jacob and a band of angels: “‘While Jacob was going on his way angels of God met him, and on seeing them he said, ‘This is God’s camp.’ and he named the place Mahanaim’” (Gen 32:1–2). The construction pg ′ with br  ′, here translated as “met,” usually implies a hostile encounter. Likewise Jacob’s exclamation that the place was a mahl nē, 34 lōhim, a war camp of God (more strongly militaristic in the LXX) and the etymology of the place name Mahanaim (two camps) hints at an armed conflict between Jacob and the angels. 33

d) From what has survived, one might well have thought that the apocryphon would have been entitled “Prayer of Jacob” rather than of Joseph. The only prayer by Jacob in the canonical text occurs in Genesis 32:10–13 where the patriarch prays: “I implore you, save me from my brother’s clutches, for I am afraid of him; he may come and attack us . . . .” 34

---

30 Based on the oracle in Gen 25:23, haggadic literature extended the conflict to the descendants of Jacob and Esau and their respective guardian angels. Going beyond the mere confrontation of Gen 32–33, some traditions have Jacob slay Esau “as he came forth from Mesopotamia.” For early witnesses, see TJud 9 and the more extended narrative in Jub 37:1–38:14; and compare such late Midrashim as Midrash wa-Yissau’ in Yalkut 1.132 (BHVM, vol. 2, pp. 1–5) and Chronicles of Jerahmeel, pp. 80–87 (ed. M. Gaster; London, 1899). These may be dependent on the lost Wars of the Patriarchs” (Jub 34:1–9; TJud 3–7), of which two fragments, derived from Jacob’s encounter with Esau (Gen 32:15) and the wrestling match (Gen 32:23f.), may have been recovered at Qumran (1Q23 1:13). But see the new designation of these fragments as IQHenGiants following J. T. Milik, “Turfan et Qumran,” Kuhn Festschrift, pp. 120f. In part these traditions are based on Esau’s threat (Gen 27:41f.) and Jacob’s fear (Gen 32:7–12) combined with the battle scene of the sons of Jacob avenging the rape of Dinah (Gen 34:25–29) and the brief reference to the wars of Jacob (connected by a pun with Shechem, Gen 48:22, cf. GenR 80:10 and 97:6); in part on traditions that identify Esau as the nation opposed to Israel: first, Edom, already in the Genesis narrative (Gen 36:1, 8, 9, 43; extended in Mal 1:2–5, cf. Rom 9:10–13), later to the Herodian dynasty, Rome, and the Christian Church. See G. D. Cohen, “Esau as a Symbol in Early Medieval Thought,” in A. Altmann, ed., Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies (University de Paris, Travaux et Mémoires de l’Institut d’Ethnologie 38, Paris, 1940) p. 241, where the angel Gabriel reveals to Jacob while he was dwelling in “Syria” all of the names of God: “By this prayer, Jacob was saved from the hand of his brother Esau. Likewise save me . . . .” Cf. PRE (ed. G. Friedlander, New York, 1965) p. 37.

31 Compare Jub 19:29 where Jacob is declared to be the firstborn son.

32 Some scholars have suggested that Gen 32:1f. is the Elohist version of the wrestling match in the Jahwist narrative (Gen 32:24–31). The Palestinian Targumim consistently relate the two incidents through a variety of exegetical devices.

33 There are only two texts entitled “The Prayer of Jacob”: PGM, vol. 2, pp. 148f. (discussed above and presented below by J. H. Charlesworth), and an Eth. magical text, Lassánâ Ya’aqbh, in D. Lifchitz, Textes éthiopiens magico-religieux (Université de Paris, Travaux et Mémoires de l’Institut d’Ethnologie 38, Paris, 1940) p. 241, where the angel Gabriel reveals to Jacob while he was dwelling in “Syria” all of the names of God: “By this prayer, Jacob was saved from the hand of his brother Esau. Likewise save me . . . .” Cf. PRE (ed. G. Friedlander, New York, 1965) p. 37.

34 There are only two texts entitled “The Prayer of Jacob”: PGM, vol. 2, pp. 148f. (discussed above and presented below by J. H. Charlesworth), and an Eth. magical text, Lassánâ Ya’aqbh, in D. Lifchitz, Textes éthiopiens magico-religieux (Université de Paris, Travaux et Mémoires de l’Institut d’Ethnologie 38, Paris, 1940) p. 241, where the angel Gabriel reveals to Jacob while he was dwelling in “Syria” all of the names of God: “By this prayer, Jacob was saved from the hand of his brother Esau. Likewise save me . . . .” Cf. PRE (ed. G. Friedlander, New York, 1965) p. 37.
e) The central text that supplies the narrative details in Prayer of Joseph ("He . . . fought with me and wrestled with me saying that his name," Fragment A, 5) is Genesis 32:24–31; but these verses appear to intrude abruptly on the larger story of Jacob and Esau. Each detail of the nocturnal wrestling match is of relevance with the exception of the damage to Jacob’s thigh (Gen 32:25b, 31b–32).

Genesis gives no clue as to the identity of Jacob’s opponent. He is simply described as a “man” or “one” (Gen 32:25); and, later, he refuses to answer Jacob’s question as to his name (Gen 32:29). The conferring of the name Israel on Jacob, with the etymology of “because you have been strong (šārītā) against God (‘lōhīm)’” (Gen 32:28) represents, already, an interpretation of the adversary. A further layer of interpretation within the canon is given in Hosea, which plays on both possible meanings of ‘lōhīm as God or divine beings, and correlates the conflict against Esau with the struggle at the Jabbok and the bestowal of the name Israel on Jacob in Genesis 32 with that in chapter 35: “In the very womb he supplanted his brother, in maturity he wrestled against God. He wrestled with the angel and beat him, he wept and pleaded with him. He met him at Bethel and there God spoke to him” (Hos 12:3f.).

Post-canonical “Old Testament” tradition either continues the ambiguity of the Genesis account or, building on the sort of interpretation represented by Hosea 12, goes on to specify the angel’s name. Thus Targum Onkelos Genesis 32:24f. reads “a man” as does the Septuagint. The Palestinian Targum reads “an angel in the likeness of a man,” to which may be compared the homiletical Midrashim, “in the likeness of a shepherd” or “of an outlaw” (GenR 77:2). Josephus understands the opponent to have been a “phantasm” (Ant 1.333). The earlier homiletic Midrashim specify either Michael or Gabriel as the angelic adversary (perhaps already implied in TargYer 32:25); later mystical Midrashim identify him as Metatron. The old Midrash Yeledmedenu, preserved only in fragments in later collections, contains the tradition that Jacob fought with several angels (Yalqut Shim‘oni Ps 39 [Horeb, 1925–26; 2.758]). This appears to conflate Jacob’s encounter with the angels in Genesis 32:1f. with the combat in 32:24–31. R.Hama b.R. Hanina is reported to have held that the adversary was the guardian angel of Esau (GenR 77:3 and 78:3), thus correlating the wrestling with the forthcoming encounter between the two brothers. Two anonymous traditions, one explicit (PRE 37), the other implicit (GenR 77:3), give the name of the wrestling angel as Israel. In this tradition, Jacob, the man, does battle with his heavenly counterpart, the angel Israel.

The most important of these post-canonical “Old Testament” interpretations—one that supplies both some clues as to why it is that Uriel is uniquely identified in the Prayer of Joseph as Jacob-Israel’s opponent and a number of striking parallels to other elements in such interpretations.


36 The details of weeping and pleading introduce new elements whether they are understood to refer to Jacob (most commentators—but unlikely) or the angel (so b.Hull 92a; Gunkel, Pedersen; Engnell); see the summary of critical positions in P. R. Ackroyd, “Hosea and Jacob,” VT 13 (1963) 250f. For the combination of Gen 32f. with Gen 35 in Hos, see GenR 78:3 and 82:4 and the attempt to place Hos 12 in a haggadic context by M. Gartner, “Mesorah and the Levites,” VT 10 (1960) 272–84.

37 This is based on Gen 33:10 (obscured in the JB translation, hence my own translations follow) where Jacob says to Esau: “Seeing your face is like seeing the face of God,” which is correlated with Jacob’s naming of Peniel: “I have seen God face to face” (Gen 32:31); but these verses appear to intrude abruptly on the larger story of Jacob and Esau. The central text that supplies the narrative details in Prayer of Joseph (“He . . . fought with me and wrestled with me saying that his name,” Fragment A, 5) is Genesis 32:24–31; but these verses appear to intrude abruptly on the larger story of Jacob and Esau. Each detail of the nocturnal wrestling match is of relevance with the exception of the damage to Jacob’s thigh (Gen 32:25b, 31b–32).

38 The interpretation in GenR 77:3 appears based on the notion of national guardian angels and takes Jacob-Israel as the nation. The tradition in PRE 37 is more complex: “And [the angel] called [Jacob’s] name Israel like his [the angel’s] own name, for his [the angel’s] own name was called Israel.” In the LadJac (as translated by James, LAOT p. 98) the angel Saraki says to Jacob after the vision at Bethel: “What is your name?” and Jacob answered: “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob but your name shall be like my name, Israel.” In Christian tradition, Christ—as the Logos who is called Israel—wrestles with Jacob and bestows his name on the patriarch. Justin, DialTrypho 125.5 (PG vol. 6, col. 768), is the earliest witness to this.

39 The only explicit identification of the angel as Uriel (outside of the PrJos) is a Christian homily attributed to John of Jerusalem (MS Reims 427 fol. 62): et pugnavit cum angelo Oriel and is probably dependent on Origen’s quotation of the PrJos. See G. Morin, “Le Catalogue de manuscrits de l’abbaye de Gorze au XIe siècle. Appendix: Homélies inédites attribuées à Jean de Jerusalem,” RBen 22 (1905) 14.
the Prayer—is the early Palestinian targumic tradition on Genesis 32:25-31 represented by Codex Neofiti:40

25 And Jacob was left alone and the angel Sariel wrestled with him in the appearance of a man and he held him until the column of dawn arose . . .

27 And he [the angel] said: "Let me go because the rise of the column of dawn has arrived and because the time of the angels on high to praise has arrived and I am chief of those who praise." And he [Jacob] said: "I will not let you go until you bless me." And he said to him: "What is your name?" And he said: "Jacob." And he said: "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, because you have acted as a prince with angels from before the Lord . . ."

31 And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel "because I have seen angels from before the Lord face to face and my life has been spared."41

Palestinian targumic tradition is remarkably uniform in identifying Jacob's opponent as the ryš lmsbh, the "chief of those who praise" (Neofiti; Fragment Targum, Genizah Fragment A; TargYer reads "one of the praising angels"; LAB 18:6 identifies the opponent as "the angel that was over the praises"), and in stressing that this was the reason that the angel had to return on high at dawn, to lead the heavenly praise-songs.42

The targumic tradition is an early Palestinian witness to an understanding of the combat in Genesis 32 within a Merkabah context. To this may be added the cluster of details discussed above: the traditions of angelic rivalry before the throne; the angel Israel who serves as the heavenly choirmaster and has the function of keeping order among the chorusing angels; the tradition that the heavenly choir does not begin its song above until Israel (the nation) has begun to chant below; and the derivation of the name Israel as "trying to sing instead of the angels." All of these give expression to the same sort of role that Israel plays in the Prayer of Joseph, depict the same sort of rivalry as is present in the Prayer, and give special force to the self-identification of Israel as "the first minister before the face of God" (Fragment A, 8).

A unique element in Neofiti, of possible relevance to the Prayer of Joseph, is the identification of the opposing angel as Sariel. The usual catalog of the four chief angels is: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel. However, the list is subject to some variation. In the majority of instances, when the list is altered, it is Uriel that is displaced. When that occurs, the name of the angel that takes his place appears to be in some way associated with Genesis 32:24-31!43 Three examples are of particular importance. In 1QM 9:12-15, the list of chief angels is given as Michael, [Gabriel], Sariel, and Raphael. The same list occurs in 4Q Hen 9:1 replacing Uriel in the Greek manuscripts.44 While Sariel is known elsewhere in early sources,45 his identification as one of the four archangels appears unique to Qumran just as the identification of him as Jacob's opponent is unique to Neofiti. In 1 Enoch 10:1 (Gk. and Syncellus), God sends Uriel to warn Noah about the impending flood. In the Gizeh fragment, the angelic name Istrahel (Israel) is substituted.46 In five instances in 1 Enoch (40:9; 54:6; 71:8, 9, 13), confined to the "Similitudes," Phanuel replaces Uriel in a catalog


42 The origin of this tradition appears to have been the thrice-repeated chronological note in Gen 32:24, 26, 31 of "daybreak," the traditional beginning of liturgical activity (e.g. GenR 78:2 on Gen 32:26). The same sort of tradition is behind PRE 37. Note the alternative tradition that the angels sing by night, the nation Israel by day (e.g. b.Hag 12b). [Also see TAdam, and S. E. Robinson's contribution upon it in this collection. —J.H.C.]


44 J. T. Milik, "Problèmes de la littérature Hénochique à la lumière des fragments araméens de Qumrân," HTR 64 (1974) 346. 1En 9:1 combines both, listing Sariel (Suryal/Suryān) and Uriel (Uryal/Uryān).

45 1En 20:6; Sefer ha-Razim (ed. Margalioth) pp. 104f.

46 For Istrahel, see above n. 13. The Eth. reads Arseleyor.
of the four archangels. It is most likely that the name Phanuel is to be derived from the place name Peniel / Penuel (the face of God) in Genesis 32:30, and therefore may be related to the title “a man seeing God” (Fragment A, 3). The conclusion by G. Vermes appears justified: “In the circles represented by the Similitudes of Enoch, Qumran and the Neofiti variety of the Palestinian Targum, the angelic adversary of Jacob was recognized as one of the four celestial princes and called alternatively as Sariel or Phanuel.”

To strengthen the relationship of this tradition to the Prayer of Joseph, it must be noted that Sariel-Phanuel-Istrahel regularly substitutes for Uriel and that, while Sariel is a relatively unknown angelic figure, his name seems to be quite frequently conflated with Uriel (e.g. 1En 9:1, Eth.) to produce the angelic name Suriel, a figure of largely negative attributes. For example, in the remote parallel to Genesis 32 and the Prayer of Joseph, the enigmatic scene in Exodus 4:22-26 is later clarified so that Moses—after being told by the Lord that “Israel is my first-born son”—is met “on the way” by an “angel” (so the LXX, most of the targumic and midrashic treatments, e.g. b.Ned 31b-32a) who seeks to kill him. When this angel is identified, it is most frequently Uriel or Suriel. These bits of evidence are obscure and fragmentary, but there is a striking “family of resemblance” among these details, largely centered in Aramaic materials, which hint at a connection between the Uriel of the Prayer of Joseph and the figure Sariel-Phanuel-Suriel in Palestinian tradition.

A third element of possible relevance to the Prayer of Joseph in Neofiti is its etymology of the name Israel. Neofiti understands Israel to be built from the root Šrr (to rule, to act as a prince), a derivation found in other Targumim (TargOnk, rb, the Palestinian tradition, trbrb) and the Greek of Aquila and Symmachus (archein). This denominative verb, from šār, “prince” (which figures prominently as an element in angelic titles), yields the interpretation of Genesis 32:28: “You have conducted yourself as a prince with angels” and must be related to the angelic understanding of Israel in the Prayer.

f) One of the more puzzling motifs in the Prayer of Joseph is Origen’s paraphrastic report that Jacob was ignorant of his heavenly nature until reminded of it by Uriel (Fragment C and implied?) in Fragment A, 4). This may be dependent on the sequence of events in Genesis 32f. In Genesis 32:28, Jacob is recognized as a princely (i.e. angelic) being by his (angelic) adversary and given the (angelic) name Israel. In Genesis 33:10 Jacob recognizes Esau (Uriel?) as a heavenly being: “I came into your presence as into the presence of God,” strengthened in the Palestinian targumic circumlocution: “I have seen your countenance as one sees the countenance of the angels from before the Lord.”

Genesis 35:9f., Genesis 28:10-18

As indicated by Hosea 12:4 (“He wrestled with the angel and beat him, he wept and pleaded with him. He met him at Bethel and there God spoke to him”), and suggested already by the redactional note in Genesis 35:9 (“Once more God appeared”), the conferring of the name Israel on Jacob was harmonized with the doublet conferring the name at Bethel in chapter 35 and this with the angelic vision at Bethel in chapter 28 (Gen 35:1: “Go to Bethel... Make an altar there for the God who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau”).

While the geographical setting in Genesis 35:9 is the same as in Genesis 31:18 and 33:18 and Prayer of Joseph Fragment A, 4: “on his return from Paddan-Aram,” no etymology

---


50 Vermes, M. Smith Festschrift, pp. 164f. A similar interpretation is found in Jerome, HebQuaestinLibGen (PL, vol. 23, col. 1038), and may well derive from his knowledge of the Targumim (see Smith, Goodenough Festschrift, p. 264).
of the name Israel is given or implied; it is simply bestowed: “from now on you shall be named not Jacob but Israel” (Gen 35:10). But again, a theophany appears to be the cause of the designation. The Palestinian Targumim are unanimous in rendering Peniel (Gen 32:30) as “I have seen angels of the Lord face to face” rather than the usual singular circumlocution, “angel of the Lord.” This most probably refers to the angels in the “ladder” vision of Genesis 28:12, with chapter 35 supplying the warrant for connecting chapters 32 and 28. Further, the “ladder” vision supplies the picture of ascending and descending angels so central to the Prayer of Joseph and this motif is used, in both the Palestinian Targumim and early Midrashim, as the chief proof-text for a heavenly Jacob-Israel. These interpretations, combined with the canonical portrait in Genesis 28 of Jacob as an ignorable, sleeping man (Gen 28:16), may well have contributed to the puzzling report in the Prayer (Fragment C) that Jacob was ignorant of his heavenly nature “while doing service in the body.”

Genesis 48

If the title of the work and the quotation that Jacob “read in the tablets of heaven all that shall befall you and your sons” (Fragment B, cf. C) most probably relate the text to the testament-genre, then the most likely influence on the form of the Prayer of Joseph within the canon would be Genesis 48, according to which the dying Jacob adopts and blesses Joseph’s sons. While the narrative setting is in Egypt, Jacob begins his address to Joseph and his sons with the phrase “When I was on my way from Paddan” (Gen 48:7). The only place in Genesis in which this phrase occurs in direct speech by the patriarch as it does in the Prayer of Joseph (Fragment A, 4), and the first mention of Jacob’s journey since the narrative of his name being changed to Israel at Bethel is in Genesis 35:9. The content of Jacob’s first address (Gen 48:7) is all but a direct quotation of Genesis 35:16–20. Thus it would appear that the redactional activity within the Genesis narrative itself already linked together the three blocks of canonical material most crucial to the Prayer of Joseph: Genesis 32–33; 35; and 48.

The blessing of Joseph’s sons by the weak-sighted patriarch with its theme of the placing of the younger brother ahead of the elder reintroduces the motif of fraternal rivalry and repeats elements of the scene of blind Isaac blessing Jacob and Esau (Gen 27). This echoes the angelic rivalry in the Prayer of Joseph and the dispute between Uriel and Israel over priority of birth (Fragment A, 3) and rank (Fragment A, 7f.). The blessing contains, as well, an enigmatic reference to Jacob’s guardian angel: “may the angel who has been my saviour from all harm, bless these boys” (Gen 48:16), which does not appear to refer to any of the canonical traditions of Jacob and an angel (Gen 28:11; 31:11; 32:2).

Thus texts about Jacob, linked together by both internal redaction within the canon and early targumic and midrashic interpretation, appear to account for the bulk of the narrative material in the Prayer of Joseph.

Relation to apocryphal books

The title “prayer” (proseuchē/oratio) affixed to this document is relatively rare as a designation for apocryphal works. Those that have survived with such a title are either

51 See above, n. 37.
52 Vermes, M. Smith Festschrift, p. 164.
53 The most frequent explanation as to why the angels were “going up and coming down” rather than the expected descending and ascending is that they saw the sleeping patriarch below and then ascended to see his image engraved on the throne on high (So TargYer and Neofiti, Gen 27:12; b.Hull 91b; GenR 68:12; 78:3). See the extended debate between R. Hiyya and R. Yannai in GenR 68:13–69:3 in Smith, Goodenough Festschrift, pp. 285f. [Also cf. Jn 1:51 and LadJac, which is presented in the present collection by H. Lunt. —J.H.C.]
54 James, LAOT, p. 26, has pointed to verbal parallels between Gen 48 in the LXX and PrJos. There are two, of relative insignificance: Mesopotamias tēs Syrias (Gen 48:7 = PrJos Fragment A, 4) and the phrase “my God” (Gen 48:3 in some MSS = PrJos Fragment A, 9). The thematic similarities are more persuasive.
55 A somewhat similar catena underlies Jub 32:16–34, which paraphrases Gen 35 and contains (vss. 21–26) the closest parallel to the testamentary passage in PrJos Fragments B, C (see below). Jub 32:21 combines Gen 35 with Gen 28:11; Jub 32:23 alludes to Gen 47:30; 46:4, 30; 48f. Note that the version of Gen 32f. in Jub omits the wrestling match and retains only the reconciliation with Esau (Jub 29:13).
lengthy prayers without narrative (e.g. PrMan; PrAzar; 4QPrNab) or narrative works with extended prayers as a central feature of their plot (e.g. JosAsen 12–13). The insertion of prayers and hymns is a frequent device in expansions of biblical texts from Chronicles to Pseudo-Philo (perhaps most clearly, AddEsth 4:17-4:26; 5:1-5:2). Thus it is possible to assume with M. R. James that the lost sections of the Prayer of Joseph "must have contained a prayer or prayers of considerable bulk uttered by Joseph . . . . On what occasion it was offered, whether in pit or prison or on his death bed, there is no certainty." However, neither canonical nor post-canonical "Old Testament" tradition has attributed much in the way of prayers to Joseph (JosAsen 8:10ff. would be the chief, though insignificant, exception).

What has survived of the Prayer of Joseph is either direct speech by Jacob (not Joseph): "I, Jacob, who is speaking to you" (Fragment A, 1) or indirect speech by the angel Israel reporting what he and Uriel had said (Fragment A, 4–9). The audience is, presumably, Joseph and his sons: "For I have read in the tablets of heaven all that shall befall you and your sons" (Fragment B. cf. C). The setting would most appropriately be the blessing by Jacob of Joseph's sons expanded from Genesis 48. This suggests that the Prayer of Joseph is most likely what Kolenkow has termed a "blessing-revelation testament." She argues that the archaic genre of the last words of patriarchs, which foretell the future (e.g. Gen 27:27–29; 48ff.; Deut 33; cf. Tob 13–14), has been expanded, in the hellenistic period, to include narratives that relate visions or journeys to heaven and serve to validate the forecasts. As in texts such as Philo's De vita Mosis and the Assumption of Moses 1:14, this authority would seem to have been further extended by having the patriarch not merely journey to heaven but be himself a heavenly figure. The Prayer of Joseph would seem to belong to this type.

Although the majority of such testamentary texts title the work after the name of the revealing patriarch (e.g. AsMos; TAb), there is a subgenre, represented by works such as the Testament of Isaac and the Testament of Jacob, in which an angel (Michael) assumes the form of the previous patriarch, appears, and speaks to the patriarch named in the title, most usually at the point of the latter's death. Thus, in the latter, Michael appears to Jacob in the form of Isaac; in the Prayer of Joseph, perhaps, Israel appears to Joseph in the form of Jacob.

The possibility of relating the Prayer of Joseph to a testament tradition receives strong support from Jubilees 32:17–26, which contains the closest verbal parallels to the testamentary passage in Fragments B and C of the Prayer, and which has been discussed above as connecting the same chain of biblical passages that seem to underlie the Prayer. [For a translation of Jubilees 32:17–26, the reader is encouraged to see the contribution herein on Jubilees by O. S. Wintermute. —J.H.C.]

Cultural importance

In its present form, the Prayer of Joseph remains a tantalizing fragment that has left no discernible impact on subsequent literature.

56 See C. Burchard, Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth. pp. 50–54, 76–90. [Also see Burchard's contribution in JosAsen in the present collection. —J.H.C.]
57 James, LAOT, p. 26.
59 W. E. Barnes, "Appendix: The Testaments of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" in James, The Testament of Abraham (Cambridge, 1892) pp. 140, 152; S. Gaslee, "Appendix: Translations from the Coptic Version of the Testaments of Isaac and Jacob," in G. H. Box, The Testament of Abraham (London, 1927) pp. 58, 77. [Also see W. F. Stinespring's contributions in this collection on TIsaac and TJacob. —J.H.C.] Some scholars (Priebatsch, Josephsgeschichte, pp. 16–34) have posited a relationship between PrJos and JosAsen with the latter's striking portrait of a divine Joseph. Attention has been focused on the detail of Michael assuming the form of Joseph (JosAsen 14:8) to speak with Aseneth. But the motif here is used to quite a different end than that in TIsaac and TJac. It would appear either to be related to Egyptian kingship traditions where the Sun God assumes the form of the reigning king, copulates with his wife in order to produce the new, divine heir (see H. Brunner, Die Geburt des Gottkönigs [Wiesbaden, 1964]) or to Greco-Roman erotic romance motifs, such as the seduction of Alkmene by Zeus, who assumes the form of Amphitryon (e.g. Apollodorus, Bibliotheca 2.4.8; Plautus, Amphitryon).
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Charlesworth, *PMR*, pp. 140–42.

Priebatsch, H. *Die Josephsgeschichte in der Weltliteratur*. Breslau, 1937; see especially pp. 8–44.
PRAYER OF JOSEPH

FRAGMENT A

1 "I, Jacob, who is speaking to you, am also Israel, an angel of God and a ruling spirit. *Abraham and Isaac were created before any work. *But, I, Jacob, who men call Jacob but whose name is Israel am he who God called Israel which means, a man seeing God, because I am the firstborn of every living thing to whom God gives life."

4 And when I was coming up from Syrian Mesopotamia, Uriel, the angel of God, came forth and said that 'I [Jacob-Israel] had descended to earth and I had tabernacled among men and that I had been called by the name of Jacob.' *He envied me and fought with me and wrestled with me saying that his name and the name that is before every angel was to be above mine. *I told him his name and what rank he held among the sons of God. *Are you not Uriel, the eighth after me? and I, Israel, the archangel of the power of the Lord and the chief captain among the sons of God? *Am I not Israel, the first minister before the face of God? *And I called upon my God by the inextinguishable name.

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.

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.
FRAGMENT B

1 "For I have read in the tablets of heaven 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.  

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.