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Ancient Chronography on Abraham's Departure from Haran: Qumran, Josephus, Rabbinic Literature, and Jerome

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Abstract

This paper examines how the chronological contradiction in Abraham's departure from Haran (Gen 11:26, 32; 12:4) has been explained in the history of biblical interpretation, especially in Rewritten Scripture from Qumran (4Q252 and *Jubilees*), Josephus, and rabbinic literature (*Genesis Rabbah*), including the lost Jewish tradition preserved by Jerome. According to Ben Zion Wacholder, who dealt with a different case of chronology in Genesis, the rabbinic and the Qumranic views are too different to be reconcilable, whereas the Graeco-Jewish writers and Qumran literature present similar views. This study, however, demonstrates that rabbinic interpretation on Abraham's departure share some important ideas both with Qumran literature and Josephus.

Keywords

chronography – *Genesis Rabbah* – Jerome – 4Q252 – *Jubilees* – Josephus

1 Introduction

It is known that chronological contradiction exists in the story of Abraham's departure from Haran in Genesis (In terms of the chronology, there is no significant textual difference

between MT, LXX, Vulgate, Peshitta, and Targums):¹ According to Gen 11:26, Abraham was born when Terah, his father, was 70 years old. Terah and Abraham lived in Ur of the Chaldeans, but on one occasion they departed from Ur to Haran. Since Terah died in Haran at the age of 205 (Gen 11:32), Abraham was supposed to be 135 years old at that time (205 – 70 = 135). Gen 12:4, however, reports that Abraham was actually 75 years old at his departure from Haran to the land of Canaan (See Table 1 in Appendix).

How has this contradiction been elucidated in the history of biblical interpretation? This paper firstly introduces two interpretations on this topic elaborated in late antiquity: *Genesis Rabbah* (a collection of narrative aggadot mainly on the Book of Genesis) and the contrasting lost Jewish interpretation preserved by Jerome. After reviewing these sophisticated midrashic interpretations in later traditions, this paper secondly traces back to some texts of Rewritten Scripture in the Second Temple period—4QCommentary on Genesis A (4Q252), the *Book of Jubilees*, and Josephus's *Judean Antiquities*—all of which treat the problem of the chronological contradiction in the story of Abraham's departure. Thus, this paper intends to approach the texts in anachronistic way, since the newer sophisticated interpretation oftentimes shed some light on the vague and unclear parts of the older interpretation.²

One example of previous research which deals with the chronography in Genesis includes the 1964 article by Ben Zion Wacholder.³ He points out that the philologists in ancient Alexandria first attempted to solve some chronological contradictions in Greek literature, such as Homer's *Iliad*. Influenced by the Greek philologists (whether directly or indirectly), Jewish writers also tried to explain the similar problems found in the Bible, for example, a period of time during which Abraham stayed in Egypt (Gen 12:11-20). According to Wacholder, the comparison among the three schools—rabbinic literature, Qumran literature,⁴ and the Graeco-Jewish writers—demonstrates that the rabbinic and the Qumranic views are too different to be reconcilable, whereas the Graeco-Jewish writers and Qumran literature present similar positions. Since Wacholder leads to this conclusion only from the study about the chronology of Abraham's stay in Egypt, this paper also examines whether his conclusion is applicable to the chronology on Abraham's departure from Haran.

¹ In this paper, the name Abraham will be consistently used even in the period when Abraham was called Abram. As for the definition of the terms "chronography" and "chronology," I follow Milikowsky, "*Seder 'Olam*," 116, explaining that chronography means "the arranging and writing of historical events in the correct order of time," whereas chronology is "the science of computing time or periods of time and the assignation of events to their correct order."

² For some important points to notice when comparing rabbinic literature and Rewritten Scripture especially found in Qumran, see Fraade, "Looking for Narrative Midrash," 190-92.

³ Wacholder, "How Long Did Abram Stay?" For more general study about the Graeco-Jewish biblical chronography, see Wacholder, "Biblical Chronology"; Teshima, *The Order of Things*.

⁴ Wacholder actually uses the term "sectarian texts" to describe *Jubilees* and *Genesis Apocryphon* as the works found in Qumran, and calls the group that composed these texts "sectarians." This paper, however, simply calls the texts "Qumran literature."

2 Solutions in Rabbinic Literature

Genesis Rabbah

The interpretation of *Genesis Rabbah* on the chronological discrepancy in Abraham's departure is later accepted by Rashi as a standard interpretation on this topic.⁵ The formation of *Genesis Rabbah* as an edition took place in the talmudic period or later, but some traditions contained in this collection are considered to date back to more ancient times. *Genesis Rabbah* (39.7) solves the chronological problem in the story of Abraham, by maintaining the original timeline of Abraham but moving the "death" of Terah forward (See Table 2):

Now what precedes this passage? *And Terah died in Haran* (Gen 11:32), which is followed by *Now the Lord said unto Abram: Get thee (Lekh Lekha)*. R. Isaac said: From the point of view of chronology a period of 65 years is still required. But first you may learn that the wicked, even during their lifetime, are called dead. For Abraham was afraid, saying: "Shall I go out and bring dishonor upon the Divine Name, as people will say, 'He left his father in his old age and departed'?" Therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, reassured him: "I exempt thee (*Lekha*) from the duty of honoring thy parents, though I exempt no one else from this duty. Moreover, I will record his death before thy departure." Hence *And Terah died in Haran* is stated first, and then, *Now the Lord said unto Abraham*, etc.⁶

Rabbi Isaac claims that 65 years is needed for proper chronological order. Where does this number 65 come from? This explanation derives from another interpretation (*Genesis Rabbah* 39.8) in which Abraham departed from Haran twice—the first departure was at his age of 70 and the second was at his age of 75—by replacing *Lekh Lekha* ("Go forth to yourself!") in Gen 12:1 with double *Lekh* ("Go forth, go forth!").⁷ According to this interpretation, if Abraham's first departure from Haran took place after the death of his father aged 205, he would be 70 years old. However, according to the sequence of events in Genesis, Abraham needs to be 135 years old when Terah passed away. Accordingly, Rabbi Isaac calculates the

⁵ Among the medieval Jewish biblical exegetes, Nahmanides has a critical view on *Genesis Rabbah*'s and Rashi's interpretation on the chronology of Abraham's departure from Haran, but, at the same time, this very fact proves the authority of *Genesis Rabbah* and Rashi. In his commentary on Gen 11:32, Nahmanides states: "Thus the words of Rashi which are found in Bereshith Rabbah. But I wonder about their words for this is the customary way for Scripture to relate the life of a father, his begetting a son, and his death, and afterwards to begin the narration of the son in all generations." See Chavel, *Perush ha-ramban*, 1:74. English translation is cited from Chavel, *Ramban (Nachmanides) Commentary*, 162. Some other midrash collections, such as *Midrash Tanhuma* and *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai*, also offer slightly different interpretations. See Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 5:219, n. 54.

⁶ *Gen. Rab.* 39.7 (Mirkin, *Ber'eshit rabbah*, 94). English translation is cited from Freedman and Simon, trans. *Midrash Rabbah*, 1:315-16.

⁷ See also *Midrash Seder Olam* 1 (Milikowsky, *Seder Olam*, 210).

balance of 65 years between two possibilities of Abraham's age ($135 - 70 = 65$).

If, in contrast, Abraham departed from Haran while Terah was alive, it means that Abraham immorally left his father behind. In order to explain this inappropriate behavior of Abraham, Rabbi Isaac adds further interpretation, explaining that the wicked are called dead even during their lifetime. In other words, since Terah the idolater was definitely wicked, he was as good as dead at the time of Abraham's departure from Haran, even though he was still alive. From this point of view, not only Abraham's honor is maintained, but the chronological discrepancy is also resolved. Since there is no need to follow the timeline of such a bad guy, Genesis tells the "death" of Terah first in 11:32, and then it describes Abraham's departure from Haran in 12:4.⁸

Jerome's Jewish Tradition

Jerome composed the textual and philological commentary on Genesis, entitled *Hebrew Questions on Genesis*, around 391 CE, namely, the time when he moved from Rome to Bethlehem and there undertook the Latin translation of the Old Testament based on the Hebrew text.⁹ This commentary contains not only Christian interpretations by the Greek Church Fathers, but also Jewish interpretations that Jerome learned from his Jewish teachers.¹⁰ In this commentary, Jerome solves the chronological contradiction in Abraham's departure from Haran, by fixing the timeline of Terah (not of Abraham, as *Genesis Rabbah* did), and by pushing the "birth" of Abraham back (See Table 3). Interestingly enough, Jerome clarifies that this interpretation does not come from himself, but, in fact, is a "tradition of the Hebrews" (*Hebraeorum traditio*), whereas we cannot find the same interpretation in the extant corpus of Jewish literature. Accordingly, if Jerome's statement is correct, it follows that this interpretation is lost in Jewish tradition, but only preserved in Jerome's commentary.¹¹

Jerome introduces the interpretation as follows:

And Abram was 75 years old when he went out from Haran. A question arises which cannot be answered. For if Terah, Abram's father, when he was still in the territory of

⁸ As *Genesis Rabbah* does, Acts (7:4) and Philo (*Migr.* 177) also try to solve the chronological contradiction and the ethical problem, by setting the departure of Abraham after the death of Terah against the narrative order in Genesis. However, on the contrary to *Genesis Rabbah*, they do not hesitate to perform this transposition of the events without any further explanations. In other words, their solution is incomplete. See Acts 7:4: "Then he [sc. Abraham] departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living."

⁹ On the detail of Jerome's *Hebrew Questions on Genesis*, see Kamesar, *Jerome*.

¹⁰ For the relationship between Jerome and his Jewish informants, see Kedar, "The Latin Translations," 315; Newman, *Jerome* [Hebrew]; Graves, *Jerome's Hebrew Philology*, 88-92; Williams, "Lessons"; Kato, "Jerome's Understanding," 290-91. Some scholars contest the extent of Jerome's contacts with the Jews in some cases. See Bardy, "Saint Jérôme"; Nautin, "Hieronymus"; Stemberger, "Hieronymus und die Juden."

¹¹ Rahmer, *Die hebräischen Traditionen*, 24-27; Hayward, *Jerome's Hebrew Questions*, 146-49. Cf. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition*, 67-95. For another case of Jewish tradition that was lost in Jewish literature but preserved in Jerome, see Kamesar, *Jerome*, 112, n. 53.

the Chaldeans at 70 years of age fathered Abram, and afterwards died in Haran in the 205th year of his life: how is it that now, after Terah's death, Abram went out from Haran, and is declared to have been 75 years old, when 135 years are shown to have passed from Abram's birth up to his father's death? Therefore that tradition of the Hebrews, which we have related above, is true; that Terah with his sons went out from the fire of the Chaldeans, and that Abram, when surrounded by the Babylonian fire because he refused to worship it, was set free by God's help; and from that time onwards the days of his life and the measure of his age are reckoned for him, namely from that time when he acknowledged the Lord and despised the idols of the Chaldeans.¹²

Here Jerome points out the chronological contradiction in Abraham's departure from Haran, and then introduces a famous side story that is also contained in *Genesis Rabbah* (38.13): Terah was an idolater as well as a manufacturer of idols, and sometimes left Abraham to sell them. Having given up worshipping idols, Abraham frequently had discussions with his customers on the senselessness of idolatry, and at other times destroyed idols.¹³ Terah got mad at Abraham, seized him, and sent him to the Assyrian king Nimrod. Since Abraham argued with this fire-worshipping king about the folly of worshipping such things, he was cast into the fire. Haran, Abraham's brother, saw this event, but hesitated to decide on which side to be. When Abraham was saved from the fiery furnace, Haran declared himself to be of Abraham's belief. Then Haran was cast into the fire by Nimrod, and died in the presence of his father Terah.¹⁴

Jerome, while sharing with *Genesis Rabbah* this side story of Abraham's return from the fire, did not go along with the same interpretation, but introduces different "tradition of the Hebrews," which is now lost. Jerome's Jewish tradition almost regards Abraham's return from the fire as his rebirth, and considers that from this time onwards "the days of his life and the measure of his age are reckoned" again. Furthermore, we can find that Abraham was 60 years old when he returned from the fire, if we count backward based on the supposition that he departed from Haran at the age of 75 after Terah's death aged 205.

As shown above, *Genesis Rabbah* fixes the timeline of Abraham but moves the "death" of Terah forward, as if Terah died before the departure of Abraham, whereas Jerome's

¹² Jerome, *Qu. hebr. Gen.* 12.4 (CChr.SL 72:15). English translation is cited, with slight modification, from Hayward, *Jerome's Hebrew Questions*, 43-44.

¹³ On the image of Abraham as an iconoclast, see, for example, Katsumata, "Abraham the Iconoclast."

¹⁴ In this side story, we can find two midrashic interpretations: First, the phrase "in the presence of," which has a local nuance, is based on a different reading of the Hebrew phrase *'al pene* in Gen 11:28, which usually gives a temporal nuance of "before." Second, fiery image is alluded by reading "Ur of the Chaldeans" as "fire of the Chaldeans." Since this story with these two interpretations is adopted by Rashi and some other medieval Jewish exegetes, it might be fair to say that this is a standard way of interpreting this passage in later Jewish tradition. In his *Qu. hebr. Gen.* 11.28, Jerome also narrates the same story (*fabula*), noticing that the Hebrews handed it down to him.

Jewish tradition fixes the timeline of Terah but pushes the “birth” of Abraham back, as if Abraham was reborn in the fiery furnace.¹⁵ In other words, both these traditions have the shared tasks to resolve—the chronological discrepancy and the ethical problem in the story of Abraham—but adopt antithetical methods. In addition, each interpretation has its own understanding of the chronology: *Genesis Rabbah* indicates that Abraham departed from Haran twice; on the other hand, Jerome’s Jewish tradition emphasizes the importance of the age of 60 in Abraham’s life, and connects this age with the event of the fire. Furthermore, it is worthy to mention that there are at least two reasons why only Jerome’s Jewish tradition was lost in the extant Jewish corpus: firstly because this interpretation corrupts the later chronology of the story of Abraham, and secondly, probably because the motif of the rebirth of Abraham reminds the readers of the rebirth of Jesus.

In light of the interpretations in *Genesis Rabbah* and Jerome’s Jewish tradition, we will trace back to their predecessors, namely, Rewritten Scriptures in the Second Temple period, and will examine how they understand the chronology.¹⁶ In addition, we will note if there is a similar tradition as the lost Jewish tradition preserved by Jerome.

3 Solutions in Second Temple Literature

4Q252

Among the Qumran compositions, we deal with 4QCommentary on Genesis A (hereafter, 4Q252) as a representative interpretation of the chronological contradiction of Abraham’s departure.¹⁷ 4Q252 is considered as one of the examples of the so-called parabiblical texts,

¹⁵ In his *Civ. Dei* 16.15, Augustine preserves two traditions that are similar to *Genesis Rabbah* and Jerome’s Jewish tradition, respectively. The tradition resembling *Genesis Rabbah*, however, is not exactly the same, for it lacks the structure of “two departures” and “a wicked man is dead” motif, while simply explaining the reason why the death of Terah is announced first in Gen 11:32 and Abraham’s departure comes later in Gen 12:4 is just because “the Scripture went back to what had been passed over in order to complete what had been begun about Terah.” Augustine, on the other hand, seems to depend on Jerome’s commentary in explaining the other tradition, but without specifying his source. He states: “But this question is also solved in another way, that the 75 years of Abraham when he departed out of Haran are reckoned from the year in which he was delivered from the fire of the Chaldeans, not from that of his birth, as if he was rather to be held as having been born then.” With slight modification, English translation is cited from Dods, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*.

¹⁶ C.T.R. Hayward, who provides the translation and commentary of Jerome’s *Hebrew Questions on Genesis*, does not compare Jerome’s exegesis with Jewish literature in the Second Temple period except for Philo and Josephus (*Jerome’s Hebrew Questions*, 15-23). Other than these two Graeco-Jewish writers, he only deals with Greek Church Fathers (Origen, Eusebius of Emesa, Diodore of Tarsus etc.) and later Jewish literature (the *Liber Nominum*, the Tannaitic Midrashim, the *Midrash Rabbah*, the two Talmuds, the later midrasahim, and the Aramaic Targums). However, as Geza Vermes points out (“Bible Interpretation,” 191*), there is a “need for inserting Qumran’s contribution into the corpus of scriptural exegesis in post-biblical Judaism after investigating its points of contact with parallel phenomena in the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, the New Testament, Josephus, Targum and midrash.”

¹⁷ Wacholder studied the *Genesis Apocryphon* as an example of the Qumran chronography; however, unfortunately it lacks the beginning of the Abraham story in Gen 11-12, although it must have contained it originally. See Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture*, 116.

which, according to Emanuel Tov, “contains various compositions which have in common that they are closely related to texts or themes of the Hebrew Bible,” while presenting “a reworking, rewriting, or paraphrase of biblical books.”¹⁸ George J. Brooke considers that 4Q252 is “a highly distinctive commentary,” as in this manuscript one finds the implicit exegesis of Rewritten Scripture and the explicit exegesis of the “citation plus comment” intermingled.¹⁹ The fact that these two different styles of exegesis coexist in one manuscript leads us to conclude that the work comes from a transitional period, probably around the second half of the first century BCE or a little earlier in some cases. The interpretation on Abraham’s departure from Haran is found in Col. II (frags. 1, 3) in the Rewritten Scripture section (See Table 4).²⁰

- 8 ... Terah was one hundred and fo[r]ty years old when he *went forth*
 9 *from Ur of the Chaldees and entered Haran* (11:31b). And Ab[ram was se]venty years
 old. And for five years
 10 Abram stayed in Haran. And after he left [] the land of Canaan, sixty[]
 11 *the heifer and the ram and the go[at* (15:9a) [] Abram for []
 12 *the fire when it pass[ed* (15:17b) [] he took []
 13 at Ab[ram]’s departure []Canaan []

This interpretation has structural similarity to *Genesis Rabbah* in the following two points: First, in both interpretations, Abraham experienced two departures at the age of 70 and 75. In *Genesis Rabbah*, Abraham departed at the age of 70 and 75 both from Haran. In 4Q252, on the other hand, Abraham first left Ur for Haran at the age of 70, and, after spending five years there, he departed from Haran at the age of 75, heading for Canaan. In other words, although the starting point of the first departure is different, both texts share the basic structure of interpretation.

The second point to notice is the number 60 in line 10, when Abraham is reported to go towards the land of Canaan. Although the verse is partially corrupted, it seems to be explained here that Terah passed away “60 years” after Abraham departed from Haran.²¹

¹⁸ Tov, “Foreword,” ix. In his different article (“Textual Criticism,” 197, n. 62; repr. in *Textual Criticism*, 219-20, n. 60), Tov also states that 4Q252 is “an unusual text from the point of view of its structure,” because “in the first columns, 4Q252 presents a rewritten text very closely adhering to the biblical text with a fuller orthography, without altering it, but adding exegetical remarks, mainly relating to chronology. Then it moves slowly away from that pattern to a more free relation to the Scripture text, and at that point it also uses the term *peshet*.”

¹⁹ Brooke, “Early Jewish Commentary,” 401; See also Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture*, 131.

²⁰ 4Q252 II (frags. 1, 3) 8-13 (Brooke *et al.*, DJD 22, 198). For brief survey on this part, see Brooke, “The Thematic Content,” 44-46; Bernstein, “From Re-Written Bible,” in *Reading and Re-Reading*, 106-9; Falk, *The Parabiblical Texts*, 132-34.

²¹ I follow the reading of George J. Brooke, DJD 22, 198, who restored the line as “60” (ששׁי[ם]). Following Moshe J. Bernstein (“From Re-Written Bible,” in *Reading and Re-Reading*, 106), Brooke interprets this number as “the length of time Terah lived in Haran after Abraham had left” (“The Thematic Content,” 45). Some scholars consider that the line can also be restored as “65 years.” Robert H. Eisenman and Michael Wise (*The*

Indeed, Genesis reports that Terah died at the age of 205, while 4Q252 explains that Abraham departed from Haran when Terah was 145 years old. Accordingly, there is a balance of 60 years between these two events. 4Q252 does not have “a wicked man is dead” motif, but it shares with *Genesis Rabbah* the structure of two departures, even though the place of departure is different. In other words, it seems reasonable to suppose that the basic idea of the interpretation in *Genesis Rabbah* already existed at the time of 4Q252, and later “a wicked man is dead” motif was added in order to completely solve the chronological contradiction and, more than that, the serious problem about morality between the father and the son.²²

The Book of Jubilees

The *Book of Jubilees* was composed in the middle of the second century BCE (between 170-150) in Palestine.²³ *Jubilees* “uses the 364-day solar calendar to construct an elaborate chronological system based on the number seven: years, weeks of years (seven years), and jubilees of years (forty-nine years).”²⁴ Following this division, biblical events are precisely mapped into the history. The calendrical system of *Jubilees* is generally accurate and coherent to the biblical chronology, even though the author sometimes displays his creativity.

Abraham in *Jubilees*, like in *Genesis Rabbah*, has a critical attitude towards Terah’s idolatry.²⁵ He encourages his father to worship not an idol made by human hands, but “the God of heaven who makes the rain and dew fall on the earth and makes everything on the earth” (12:4). However, Terah in *Jubilees*, unlike in *Genesis Rabbah*, in fact recognizes the vanity of idolatry. In other words, the reason why he worships the idols is not because of his own faith, but of fear that he might be persecuted by the Chaldeans for impiety (12:7).

Abraham, accordingly, tries to play hardball (See Table 5):

(12) In the sixtieth year of Abram’s life (which was the fourth week, in its fourth year [1936]), Abram got up at night and burned the temple of the idols. He burned

Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered, 80) state that Terah lived 65 years after Abram’s departure, but this is simply not true. Timothy H. Lim (“Notes on 4Q252,” 124) interprets 65 years as “the total number of years he [= Terah] spent in Haran (ששין וחמש שנים תרח ישב בחרן),” claiming that “this is preferable to the above reconstruction of the 60 years remaining in Terah’s life.” This opinion, however, is not widely accepted, for this reconstruction is too long for the space left on the manuscript.

²² The Samaritan Pentateuch also partially shares the interpretation preserved in *Genesis Rabbah*: In Gen 11:32, the Samaritan Pentateuch reports that Terah died at the age of 145 (not 205, as written in other texts), just like he was technically considered to be a dead person in *Genesis Rabbah* due to his vice (For the Hebrew text of the Samaritan Pentateuch, see Tal and Florentin, *The Pentateuch*, 87). In other words, the Samaritan Pentateuch tries to solve the chronological and ethical problem, not by putting additional interpretation, such as the “wicked man is dead” motif, but by rendering the original setting of the narrative. For the interpretation of the Samaritan Pentateuch on Terah’s death, see Emerton, “When Did Terah Die?” For an analysis of the Samaritan Pentateuch as Rewritten Bible, see Tov, “Rewritten Bible Compositions.”

²³ For general information about *Jubilees*, see VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees* (2001).

²⁴ Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture*, 68. See also VanderKam, “Studies in the Chronology,” 522-28.

²⁵ On Abraham in *Jubilees*, see Van Ruiten, *Abraham*, even though it does not fully treat the chronological discrepancy in his departure from Haran.

everything in the temple but no one knew (about it). (13) They got up at night and wanted to save their gods from the fire. (14) Haran dashed in to save them, but the fire raged over him. He was burned in the fire and died in Ur of the Chaldeans before his father Terah. They buried him in Ur of the Chaldeans. (15) Then Terah left Ur of the Chaldeans—he and his sons—to go to the land of Lebanon and the land of Canaan. He settled in Haran, and Abram lived with his father in Haran for two weeks of years. (16) In the sixth week, during its fifth year [1951], Abram sat at night—at the beginning of the seventh month—to observe the stars from evening to dawn in order to see what would be the character of the year with respect to the rains ... (28) In the seventh year of the sixth week [1953], he spoke with his father and told him that he was leaving Haran to go to the land of Canaan to see it and return to him.²⁶

Abraham burned idols in the 1936th year from the beginning of creation and it was 60 years after Abraham's birth in 1876 (11:15).²⁷ Incidentally, the balance of age between Terah and Abraham in *Jubilees* exactly agrees with Genesis (= 70 years), since *Jubilees* reports that Terah was born in 1806 (11:10). When Abraham burned the temple of the idols at the age of 60, Haran, Abraham's brother, was killed in Ur of the Chaldeans "before his father Terah," as written in *Genesis Rabbah*. Then Terah and Abraham moved to Haran, and lived together for 14 years (12:15). Abraham departed from Haran to observe the stars at the age of 75 in 1951, but two years later went back to Haran because the voice of the Lord commanded him to go to the land of Canaan (12:16-27). Abraham immediately left Haran again for the land of Canaan at the age of 77 (12:28). Terah blessed Abraham's departure, and asked Abraham to take him later to a good place to live (12:30), although he disappears from the narrative afterwards.

It is extremely important that Abraham was 60 years old when he burned the temple of idols. Except for *Jubilees*, only Jerome's Jewish tradition attaches importance to the age of 60 in Abraham's life, while relating the age with conflagration. Age 60 cannot have any special meaning in the life of Abraham, unless an exegete counts Abraham's age backward to reconcile the chronological discrepancy between Terah's death and Abraham's departure. However, contrary to Jerome's Jewish tradition, *Jubilees* does not exploit these elements to solve the chronological contradiction in the story of Abraham, because, according to Sebastian Brock, the author of *Jubilees* ignored the rationale behind the number 60 and the event of fire.²⁸ *Jubilees* also shares the motif of two departures from Haran with *Genesis*

²⁶ *Jub.* 12:12-28 (VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees* (1989), 70-74).

²⁷ On the chronological data in *Jubilees*, see VanderKam, "Studies in the Chronology," 528-32.

²⁸ Brock, "Abraham and the Raven," 144. Brock compares Jerome's Jewish tradition with the later Syriac traditions and *Jubilees*, and claims that the later Syriac traditions do not depend upon our *Jubilees* but its ancient source. However, William Adler ("Abraham," 112) takes objection to Brock's statement according to the following two reasons: First, it is extremely unlikely that the Syriac account and Jerome's Jewish tradition refer jointly to the same thing. The Syriac traditions do not show as much concern for the chronological contradiction. Second, the chronology presupposed in Jerome's Jewish tradition differs from the Syriac. Jerome reports that

Rabbah and 4Q252, but again it does not settle the issue.²⁹

Josephus

Josephus³⁰ describes Abraham as a typical national hero, by emphasizing his philosophical and astrological knowledge, so that he can appeal to non-Jewish readers.³¹ Just like the narrative in Genesis, Josephus mentions that Abraham was born when his father was 70 years old (*Ant.* 1.148-49), and then explains the relationship between the death of Terah and the departure of Abraham as follows:

(152) Because Terah came to hate Chaldea owing to his grief for Haran, they all emigrated to Haran in Mesopotamia, where Terah also died and was buried after living 205 years ... (154) Abraham, lacking a legitimate son, adopted Lot, the son of Haran his brother and the brother of his wife Sarah; and at the age of 75 he left Chaldea when God bade him to move to Canaan ...³²

Josephus's narrative places the death of Terah before the departure of Abraham, adding his original alteration: In Genesis, Abraham departed from Haran, whereas in Josephus, he left Chaldea. Since Josephus's explanation is slightly vague here, it is possible to build up the following two possibilities of interpretation in terms of Abraham's journey (See Tables 6 and 7): First, based on the fact that "they all" immigrated to Haran (*Ant.* 1.152), Terah's family *including Abraham* departed from Chaldea to Haran, whereas only Abraham went back to Chaldea and departed from there again to Canaan. Second, while Terah's family *without Abraham* departed from Chaldea to Haran, Abraham alone stayed in Chaldea all the time, and departed from there to Canaan at the age of 75.

The first possibility alludes to the structure of two departures in *Genesis Rabbah* and *Jubilees*, whereas the place of departure is different. In *Genesis Rabbah* and *Jubilees*, Abraham departs from Haran, not from Chaldea. Josephus also attempts to avoid the ethical problem in Abraham leaving his father behind, by on purpose introducing the death of Terah

Abraham spent 75 year in Haran, whereas the Syriac traditions give 14 years. In sum, according to Adler, what is shared by Jerome, Syriac traditions, and *Jubilees* is only one thing: Abraham was 60 years old when he clearly denied idolatry. Adler's assertion is reasonable, but I still think it is notable that all of three traditions give serious consideration to the age of 60 in Abraham's life.

²⁹ In his discussions on the motif of two departures, Brock takes *Genesis Rabbah* into consideration, but not 4Q252.

³⁰ As examples of the Graeco-Jewish writers, Wacholder picked up Demetrius, Artapanus, and Pseudo-Eupolemus, all of whose works are partially preserved in Book 9 of Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica* ("How Long Did Abram Stay?" 44). However, this paper mainly deals with Josephus (and secondarily Philo) just because unfortunately the extant works of the above-mentioned minor Hellenistic Jewish authors do not contain the interpretation of the chronological contradiction in the story of Abraham's departure from Haran.

³¹ Feldman, "Abraham the Greek Philosopher."

³² Josephus, *Ant.* 1.152-54. With slight modification, the English translation is cited from Feldman, *Judean Antiquities, Books 1-4*, 152.

at the earlier stage of Abraham's journey, just as *Genesis Rabbah* does. However, this problem still remains unsolved in this interpretation of Josephus.

The second possibility, on the other hand, solves this ethical problem, because in this case Abraham does not leave Terah behind, but, on the contrary, Terah leaves Abraham. Furthermore, since this interpretation omits Abraham's journey to Haran and his return to Chaldea, Abraham is described to have departed directly from Chaldea to the land of Canaan. This kind of omission is sometimes pointed out as one of the characteristics of Josephus's rewriting techniques.³³

In addition, Abraham's direct departure from Chaldea to Canaan simplifies the transition of Abraham's recognition on divinity: Since Chaldea represents a land of astrology/astronomy in the Hellenistic context, the Greek image of the Chaldeans is an astronomer who deifies planets.³⁴ When Abraham lived in Chaldea, he might in his youth have been involved in cosmic piety derived from Stoicism. However, having been commanded by the transcendent God to go to Canaan, Abraham abandoned this idea, and truly became convinced that in truth there is only one God.³⁵ In other words, if we take the second possibility of interpretation, it seems reasonable to suppose that Josephus simply demonstrates the transition of Abraham's understanding on divinity from the cosmic piety of Chaldea to the monotheism of Canaan, by omitting the Haran part in Abraham's journey. Philo also shares the notion of Abraham's journey as a transition of his perspective on the divinity, but does not omit the process of going to Haran, finding allegorical meaning in the moving both from Chaldea as a land of astronomy to Haran as a land of sense-perception, and from Haran to Canaan (Shechem) as a land of education which will lead Abraham to the virtues.³⁶ In other words, the motif of Abraham's departure directly from Chaldea to Canaan originates from the second possible interpretation in Josephus.

In sum, the both possibilities are legitimate, because the first possibility has some similarities with the existing interpretations, including *Genesis Rabbah* and *Jubilees*, and because the second one is clearly in tune with Josephus's understanding of Abraham.

4 Conclusion

According to Ben Zion Wacholder's comparative study of Hellenistic, Qumran, and rabbinic chronography, the rabbinic and the Qumranic views are too different to be reconcilable, whereas the Graeco-Jewish writers and Qumran literature present similar positions. However, our analysis, in particular, about the chronological contradiction in Abraham's departure from

³³ Begg, "Genesis in Josephus," 312-16.

³⁴ For the image of Abraham as an astronomer in the history of biblical interpretation, see Kugel, *The Bible as It Was*, 138-40.

³⁵ See Josephus, *Ant.* 1.155. For the image of Abraham as a monotheist, see Kugel, *The Bible as It Was*, 135-36.

³⁶ Philo, *Migr.* 177-91, 216-21; *Abr.* 68-84. Taylor and Hay, "Astrology."

Haran, portrays a different result.

4Q252 shares the basic idea of interpretation with *Genesis Rabbah*. Both share the structure of two departures, even though the place of departure is different. *Jubilees* emphasizes the importance of the age of 60 in Abraham's life, and connects this age with the event of the fire. Since these two features in *Jubilees* are alluded to only in Jerome's Jewish tradition which is no longer extant in the later Jewish corpus, *Jubilees* and Jerome might depend on the same source of interpretation, even though *Jubilees* fails to understand the intention of his source. Josephus offers the two possible solutions of the chronological contradiction, one of which alludes to the structure of two departures in *Genesis Rabbah* and *Jubilees*. Accordingly, against Wacholder's conclusions, the present case demonstrates that the Graeco-Jewish and the Qumranic interpretations do not always exclude the rabbinic interpretation, but rather that Qumran literature, Josephus, and rabbinic literature share some important elements in interpreting, for example, the chronological contradiction in the story of Abraham's departure from Haran.³⁷

Appendix

Table 1: Chronological Contradiction in Genesis

	Ur	Ur to Haran	Death
Terah	70		205
		+135	
	Birth	Ur to Haran	Dep.
Abraham	0		135 75?
		+135	

Table 2: Chronology in *Genesis Rabbah*

	Ur	Ur to Haran	"Death"		Death
Terah	70	140	145		205
		+70	+5	+60	
	Birth	Ur to Haran	1st Dep.	2nd Dep.	
Abraham	0		70	75	135
		+70	+5	+60	

³⁷ This is an expanded and revised version of the paper read at the workshop held after the 16th CISMOR Seminar by Prof. Emanuel Tov, "The Biblical Dead Sea Scrolls as Representing Variety in Judaism and Early Christianity," Kyoto, Japan, October 6, 2018. I would like to thank Prof. Tov for his valuable comments and encouragement. My gratitude also goes to Prof. Ada Taggar-Cohen, who organized the seminar.

Table 3: Chronology in Jerome's Jewish Tradition

	Ur	Fire	Ur to Haran	Death
Terah	70	130		205
		+60	+75	
	Birth	"Rebirth"	Ur to Haran	Dep. Ha.
Abraham	(0)	(60)		(135)
		0		75
		+60	+75	

Table 4: Chronology in 4Q252

	Ur	Ur to Haran	Death
Terah	70	140	205
		+70	+5
			+60
	Birth	Ur to Haran	Dep.
Abraham	0	70	75
		+70	+5
			+60

Table 5: Chronology in *Jubilees*

	1876	1936	1951	1953	2011?
	Ur	Fire			Death
Terah	70	130	145	147	205?
		+60	+15	+2	+58?
	Birth	Fire	1st Dep.	2nd Dep.	
Abraham	0	60	75	77	135?
		+60	+15	+2	+58?

Table 6: Chronology in the First Possibility of Josephus's Interpretation

	Ur	Ur to Haran	Death
Terah	70	?	205
		+75	+60
	Birth	Dep. to Ha.	Dep. to Canaan
Abraham	0	?	75
		+75	+60

Table 7: Chronology in the Second Possibility of Josephus's Interpretation

	Ur	Ur to Haran	Death
Terah	70	145	205
		+75	+60
	Birth	Dep. Ur to Canaan	
Abraham	0	75	135
		+75	+60

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