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Ladder of Jacob

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The **Ladder of Jacob** is a [pseudepigraphic](#) writing (a text whose claimed authorship is unfounded) of the [Old Testament](#). It is usually considered to be part of the [Apocalyptic literature](#). The text has been preserved only in [Slavonic](#), and it is clearly a translation from a now lost [Greek](#) version^[1]. It is not regarded as [scripture](#) by [Jews](#) or any [Christian](#) group.

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Manuscript tradition [\[edit\]](#)

The text of the *Ladder of Jacob* has been preserved only in [Slavonic](#); it occurs in the *Tolkovaja Paleja* (a compendium of various Old Testament texts and comments, that preserved also the [Apocalypse of Abraham](#), written in [Greek](#) in the eighth or ninth century and later translated in Slavonic). Two recensions have been identified^[2]: a longer one, usually denoted *A* which survives in three manuscripts^[3], and a shorter one, usually called *B* which is represented by the majority of the manuscript tradition^[4]. The chief difference between these is that the shorter recension reduces drastically the prayer of Jacob and omits the name of the angel [Sariel](#) (2:2-5:1).

The [Slavonic](#) text has been almost surely translated from [Greek](#). Some plays in words suggest an original [Hebrew](#) text or a Greek text intended for readers with at least some knowledge of Hebrew.

Date and origin [\[edit\]](#)

The date and origin of the *Ladder of Jacob* are uncertain. It is possible to infer at least three stages: an original work written in a [Jewish](#) context after the [Destruction of the Temple](#), the use in early [Byzantine](#) world and the final translation in [Slavonic](#) on about the ninth century. In the [Christian](#) stages the text was interpolated to form an anti-Jewish [polemic](#), by adding some comments here and there, omitting some sentences and adding a [Christian](#) conclusion: chapter seven has Christian origin. The expectation of a delayed warrior Messiah and the similarities with [2 Baruch](#), [Apocalypse of Abraham](#) and other [apocalyptic literature](#) suggest the original text may have been written in the first half of the second century CE.

Content [\[edit\]](#)

The *Ladder of Jacob* is based on the [Biblical](#) dream of [Jacob](#) in ([Genesis 28:11-19](#)^[5]).

- Chapter 1 is an expansion of the narrative of [Genesis](#). [Jacob](#) falls asleep and sees a ladder set up on the earth; the top of it reaches to heaven with [angels](#) ascending and descending on it. Many details are added to the Genesis' narrative: the ladder is made of twelve steps, and on each step there are two human forms, one on each side of the step, visible as far as their breasts. On the top of the ladder there was a *face, as of a man*, carved in the fire and much more terrifying than the twenty-four other busts. The Lord is over this central *face*.
- Chapter 2 includes a prayer by Jacob, surely abbreviated by the Slavonic copyist, asking the Lord the meaning of the vision. The prayer describes God sitting on a fire throne, surrounded by [Cherubim](#) and [Seraphim](#), a vision that is a classic example of [Merkabah](#).
- In chapter 3 the angel [Sariel](#) is sent by the Lord to Jacob to explain the vision, and the text says Jacob was not terrified by the vision of the angel.
- In chapter 4 Sariel changes the name of [Jacob](#) into *Israel* in order to have it *to be similar to his own name*; in Hebrew, there would be one letter's difference between *Israel* and *Sariel*
- Chapter 5 includes the explanation of the ladder given by Sariel: the ladder is the Age, the twelve steps are the periods in which the Age is divided (the same division we find in [2 Baruch](#)). The twenty-four human busts are the kings of the world who oppose Israel, some more, some less. The fourth step may be the author's picture of his own time; in the last times the Lord will raise a descendant of [Esau](#) (probably the [Roman Empire](#)) who initially will protect Israel, and later will serve the idols and

use violence. The people of Jacob will be exiled, made slave and wounded.

- Chapter 6 is about the coming of the [Messiah](#), described as a king who fights and wins against the enemies of Israel; the enemies then repent and the Lord accepts their plea. In the following events the Lord acts directly: there will be earthquakes and destructions followed by the final victory against the [Leviathan](#) and the *Falkon*. The sons of Jacobs will walk in the Lord's justice, and the kingdoms of [Edom](#) and [Moab](#) will be destroyed.
- Chapter 7 is surely a [Christian](#) addition, that predicts the [Incarnation](#) of the Savior.

Theology

[[edit](#)]

The *Ladder of Jacob*, as well as the [Apocalypse of Abraham](#), interprets the experience of [Patriarchs](#) in the context of [merkabah mysticism](#)^[5]. The *Ladder of Jacob* takes a stand on the main debated issues in the apocalyptic literature: the role of the [Messiah](#) is limited to be a warrior, the final victory against the evil and the [last judgment](#) are carried out directly by God himself, it is possible to repent in the last day.

See also

[[edit](#)]

- [Jacob's Ladder](#)

Notes

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- [↑] James L. Kugel *The Ladder of Jacob: Ancient Interpretations of the Biblical Story of Jacob and His Children* Princeton University Press, 2006 [ISBN 0691121222](#), pag 24
- [↑] H.F.D. Sparks *The Apocryphal Old Testament* [ISBN 0198261772](#) (1984)
- [↑] Paleja dated 1477, Sin 210, ff 100v-106v, State Historical Museum Moscow, published in 1893. Paleja dated 1494 Rum. 455 ff76-83 Lenin Library Moscow, published in 1862
- [↑] for example: Paleja of Kolomna dated 1406, Tr.Serg. 38, ff 77-79, Lenin Library Moscow, published in 1863
- [↑] Timo Eskola *Messiah and the Throne: Jewish Merkabah Mysticism and Early Christian Exaltation Discourse* [ISBN 3161476417](#) (2001) pag 107

Sources

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- H.F.D. Sparks *The Apocryphal Old Testament* [ISBN 0198261772](#) (1984) pag 453-464
- H.G.Lunt *Ladder of Jacob, a new translation and introduction* in ed. James H. Charlesworth *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Vol. 2* [ISBN 0385188137](#)(1985) pag 401-412.
- P.Sacchi M.Enrietti *Apocrifi dell'Antico Testamento Vol 3* [ISBN 8839405836](#) (1999) pag 551-570.

Categories: [Old Testament Apocrypha](#) | [Apocalyptic literature](#) | [Jacob](#)

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