

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

CALENDARS IN THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS: MEASURING TIME

JAMES C. VANDERKAM



**Also available as a printed book
see title verso for ISBN details**

CALENDARS IN THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

Since the photographs of the Dead Sea Scrolls were released in 1991, there has been an explosion of interest in them. *Calendars in the Dead Sea Scrolls* explores the evidence about the different uses of time-measurement in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Hebrew Bible and other ancient Jewish texts. James C.VanderKam examines the pertinent texts, their sources and the different uses to which people put calendrical information in the world of Judaism and Christianity. He argues that the scrolls indicate that a dispute about the correct calendar for dating festivals was one of the principal reasons for the separation of the author of the scrolls from normal Jewish society.

James C.VanderKam is professor of Hebrew Scriptures at the University of Notre Dame. He is the author of *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* (Eerdmans 1994).

This new series, *The Literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, provides in six volumes an overall introduction to the principal kinds of literature amongst the Dead Sea scrolls. Since all the unpublished texts came into the public domain in 1991, there has been much scholarly activity in editing the materials. However, little has been published to provide the interested student with a concise guide to the complete extant literary corpus. This new series aims to fill that gap through its popular presentation of the main ideas and concerns of the literature from Qumran and elsewhere in the Judaean wilderness.

The series is intended for all interested in the Dead Sea scrolls, especially undergraduate and graduate students working in Biblical Studies or the study of Jewish history and religion in the late Second Temple period. Written by the foremost experts in their particular fields, the series serves to advance general knowledge of the scrolls and to inform the discussion of the background to the self-definition of early Judaism and nascent Christianity.

CALENDARS IN THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

Measuring time

James C. VanderKam



London and New York

First published 1998
by Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE
This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

© 1998 James C. VanderKam
The right of James C. VanderKam
to be identified as the Author of this Work has been asserted by
him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act
1988

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or
reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic,
mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter
invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any
information storage or retrieval system, without permission
in writing from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data
VanderKam, James C.
Calendars in the Dead Sea scrolls: measuring time/James C. VanderKam.
p. cm.—(The Dead Sea scrolls)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-415-16513-X.—ISBN 0-415-16514-8 (pbk.)
1. Dead Sea scrolls—Criticism, interpretation, etc. 2. Calendar,
Jewish. 3. Chronology, Jewish. I. Title. II. Series: Literature
of the Dead Sea scrolls.
BM487. V25 1998
296, 1'55—dc21

ISBN 0-203-20188-4 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-27156-4 (Adobe e-Reader Format)
ISBN 0-415-16513-X (hbk)
ISBN 0-415-16514-8 (pbk)

CONTENTS

Series editor's preface

vi

Preface

vii

Part I

Introduction to Biblical and post-biblical Calendars

| | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|----|
| 1 | THE HEBREW BIBLE | 2 |
| 2 | SOURCES LATER THAN THE HEBREW BIBLE | 12 |
| 3 | RABBINIC LITERATURE | 26 |

Part II

The calendars in the Qumran texts

| | | |
|---|---|-----|
| 4 | THE FIRST CALENDRIAL HINTS | 32 |
| 5 | A HISTORY OF SCHOLARSHIP ON THE QUMRAN CALENDARS | 39 |
| 6 | THE CALENDRIAL TEXTS | 53 |
| 7 | MEASURING AND SYMBOLIZING LONGER UNITS OF TIME | 68 |
| 8 | CONCLUSIONS | 82 |
| | <i>Notes</i> | 87 |
| | <i>Bibliography</i> | 93 |
| | <i>Index of subjects</i> | 98 |
| | <i>Index of references</i> | 102 |

SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

The Literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls is a six-volume series designed to provide introductions to the principal literary genres found among these very important texts. From the outset the intention behind the series has been to focus on the texts themselves, before trying to assert what their historical or theological significance might be. The series treats principally the finds from the eleven caves at Qumran, but some other contemporary texts found in the Judaean wilderness in the last fifty years are also considered.

In 1991 all the unpublished manuscripts from Caves 4 and 11 at Qumran became available to the scholarly world at large and to the general public. Much has been done to incorporate all the new information into scholarly debates about Jewish religion and history in the late Second Temple period, but little of the overall significance of the whole literary corpus has been put in the public domain. A major aim of this series is to step back from the debates about the history and identification of the community or movement responsible for writing or preserving these manuscripts. In so doing, entirely fresh consideration can be given to the literary corpus as a whole within the context of Jewish literature of the three centuries before the fall of the temple in 70 CE. On such fresh and newly constructed foundations firmer opinions can be offered about the importance of the scrolls for emerging forms of Judaism and for nascent Christianity.

It is important for those interested in Jewish history and religion of this period to have access to the primary resources, the texts, for themselves, so that anybody can make up their own minds about them. However, some of the textual evidence is very fragmentary and difficult to assess, some of it is entirely new evidence in the discussions. Students of all kinds need straightforward guides to the literature to enable them to trace a secure path through the mass of material. It is not the purpose of this series to provide detailed translations and commentaries on individual texts, though in some chapters of some of the volumes in the series this is the case. Though small extracts and quotations are often given, to make the most of what is written in each volume readers will need to have access to one of the standard translations of the Dead Sea scrolls in English. Nor is the purpose of the series to cover every single text. But the general reader will find here a valuable and up-to-date companion to the principal literary genres found in the scrolls.

Such companions as these may be especially useful to those studying similar genres in related fields such as the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, or Jewish halakhah, so, that those too are not studied in isolation from this extensive literary corpus which provides so much insight into the development of genres in the period.

I am grateful to my colleagues in the field of Dead Sea scrolls research who have taken the time to contribute to this worthwhile venture and to the editors at Routledge, especially Richard Stoneman, for the enthusiastic welcome given to this series and its individual volumes.

George J. Brooke

PREFACE

Calendars in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Measuring Time summarizes and analyses the calendrical information in the Qumran texts and attempts to place it within a larger historical framework. A more comprehensive survey of this kind has become possible only in the last few years, with the release of all the photographs of the previously unpublished Dead Sea Scrolls. Work on the monograph has provided opportunity to revise some earlier studies I had written and also to advance into new areas. There is good reason for believing that a calendrical dispute was one factor that led the Qumran community to separate itself physically from the rest of Jewish society. For them the calendar was not simply a convenient tool; rather, the correct reckoning of time was divinely revealed, and conducting one's life according to it had been mandated by God himself in prediluvian times.

I wish to thank Professor George Brooke for inviting me to contribute this volume to the Routledge series *The Literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls* and for his helpful comments and suggestions as the manuscript was taking shape. I also wish to express appreciation to Coco Stevenson, Jody Ball, and Sarah Brown of Routledge for their work in guiding the manuscript to publication and to Michael Anderson for his careful and efficient work in compiling the indexes for the book.

James C. VanderKam
Notre Dame
June 25, 1998

Part I

INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL AND POST- BIBLICAL CALENDARS

Before turning our attention to the calendrical information that comes from the Dead Sea scrolls, it is very useful to have before us some idea about calendars in ancient Israel and early Judaism. This provides a helpful background against which to view the data from the Dead Sea scrolls because the authors of those texts consciously based their time reckonings upon the ancient Scriptures. Surveying the sources outside the scrolls also shows what was known about ancient Jewish calendrical thought before the scrolls were discovered.

1

THE HEBREW BIBLE

The Hebrew Bible, the earliest surviving collection of Israelite—Jewish writings, includes no document that could be called a calendar as we think of calendars today. As a matter of fact, the Bible provides little information about calendars, yet it does offer some givens that have necessarily played a role in all subsequent Jewish calendrical calculation. Several of the key passages should now be adduced and their value for the topic at hand assessed.

IMPORTANT PASSAGES

The creation account in Gen. 1:1–2:4a

Much is said already in the priestly creation story of Genesis 1. The paragraph devoted to the fourth day in the creative week reads:

And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.’ And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

(1:14–19)¹

The paragraph establishes that God is in control of the heavenly luminaries: they themselves are not personified or deified as they were in some neighboring cultures. Also, he assigns duties to both sun and moon (the stars are mentioned later) during each day: they are meant for signs, seasons, days, and years. The term translated “seasons” (*mw’dym*) is one that elsewhere in the Bible means “festivals”. Therefore, one could say that in this paragraph the sun and moon are given calendrical assignments for three of the entities that are significant in Biblical and post-Biblical calendars—days, years and festivals. The religious festivals were carefully dated and thus regularly mentioned in connection with the calendar and, of course, days and years are two of the fundamental elements in any system for measuring time. It is interesting that neither sun nor moon is actually named here: they are merely described as the greater and lesser lights. From these verses we could conclude that in biblical reckoning of time both sun and moon had

to be considered. Both were created by God, and to both he gave calendrical functions. Note that at the end of the paragraph, regarding day four, we meet the refrain “there was evening and there was morning”, a sequence that seems to say something about when the writer thought the day began (see below).

The flood story

A second passage in Genesis has also figured prominently in subsequent calendrical thought. Of all the stories in the first book of the Bible, the flood narrative has the highest density of specific dates, all of which fit within slightly more than a one-year span and all of which designate the months by ordinals (see below on this system for naming months). The text relates that Noah was 600 years of age when the flood waters fell on the earth (Gen. 7:6, 11). The dates mentioned in the Hebrew text are the following (dates are expressed as month/date in the month):

600th year of Noah's life

2/17 the waters come (7:11)

7/17 the ark rests on one of the mountains of Ararat (8:4), 150 days after the deluge started (7:24; 8:3)

10/1 the tops of the mountains appear (8:5)

601st year of Noah's life

1/1 the waters are dried up and Noah removes the covering of the ark (8:13)

2/27 the earth is dry

The careful reader of the story will notice that the months are assumed to contain thirty days because five months (2/17–7/17) are said to total 150 days. These would not be the standard lunar months of the later Jewish calendar because such months had either twenty nine or thirty days in them, and it would have been virtually impossible to have five consecutive months of thirty days each. It has been suggested, although the text does not specifically say, that the year began in the autumn in the flood calendar as that is when the rains come in the Near East. However, we are dealing with unusual rainfall in this case, not a super-sized autumnal rainy season. Since the version of the flood story in which the numbered months are used is the priestly one, and elsewhere in the priestly source the first month is in the spring, it is more likely that the flood calendar also began in the spring. As we will see, the flood story was an important scriptural base for the calendars elaborated in the Book of Jubilees and in at least one of the Dead Sea scrolls.

Scholars have long puzzled over the significance of the report that the flood lasted one year and eleven days (from 2/17 in one year to 2/27 in the next). One hypothesis that has been advanced to explain the numbers is that the flood was believed to have lasted one year but that that single year is expressed in two systems: the basic unit is the lunar year which lasts 354 days, and the eleven additional days are added to arrive at a full solar year of 365 days.²

THE MOON AND THE SUN

The teaching of Genesis 1 that both the sun and the moon play a part in marking times is borne out elsewhere in the Bible where both luminaries are mentioned in calendrical contexts.

The moon

The moon served as a primary means for segmenting time in the ancient world. Observation led very early on to the conclusion that the span of time between one new moon (that is, the first time that part of the lunar surface becomes visible after the period of its invisibility) and the next was twenty nine or thirty days. The course of the lunar month could be charted as the percentage of its surface illuminated by the sun increased until the full moon (when the half of the lunar surface visible to the human eye was lighted) and then decreased to the point of invisibility.

Genesis 1 is not the only biblical passage that recognizes the role of the moon in measuring time. For example, in Ps. 104:19 the poet, as he praises the wondrous works of the Lord in creation, sings: "You have made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting". Here again the term translated "seasons" is the one that can also refer to festivals. If the psalmist understood the term to mean "festivals", he did not specify which holidays were marked by the moon, but it is clear that he did not assign a similar role to the sun. The writer may have had in mind the two great festivals that take place exactly half a year apart—the holidays of unleavened bread and tabernacles (on these, see p. 10). The seven day Festival of Unleavened Bread began on the fifteenth day of the first month, while the Festival of Tabernacles commenced on the fifteenth day of the seventh month: that is, both began when the moon was full. Ps. 81:3 probably refers to the Festival of Unleavened Bread, a holiday closely tied to the Passover (which was celebrated on 1/14) and exodus from Egypt. It reads: "Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our festal day". The fifth verse of this psalm refers to the night of the first Passover, thus suggesting that the full moon of verse 3 is the one on which the Festivals of Passover—Unleavened Bread began.

Several passages in the Bible show that the first day of the month or the new moon was considered a special day. The point emerges clearly from 1 Sam.: 20, one of the stories involving Saul, Jonathan and David. In it we read about the meals—apparently not ordinary ones—that took place on the new moon and the day following. At a time when his relations with Saul had deteriorated badly, David met his friend Jonathan and said to him: "Tomorrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at the meal; but let me go, so that I may hide in the field until the third evening" (v. 5). The term "new moon" is quite understandable, but at this juncture in the story the reader has no clue what the significance of the phrase "until the third evening" might be (see also v. 12). The sequel clarifies the issue. Jonathan and David arranged to meet on the day after the new moon (vv. 18–19). The day of the new moon came and David was absent from the meal (vv. 24–25), but Saul assumed that something had happened to David to disqualify him from what appears to have been a sacred meal (v. 26): "But on the second day, the