

R. H. Charles and Modern Biblical Studies

JAMES C. VANDERKAM

jvanderk@nd.edu

University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN 46556

The presentation centers on R. H. Charles, the pioneer scholar of Jewish apocalypses and pseudepigrapha in the English-speaking world. After a short biography of Charles, I offer a survey of his career and publications, followed by an explanation of how he and his contemporaries saw themselves as standing at a pivotal time in the history of interpreting the Bible. A listing of some examples from Charles's work illustrates the point. The address concludes with several comparisons between biblical studies as practiced a century ago and today and with an imaginative look at what Charles might have thought had he been able to attend a twenty-first century Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature.

After retiring and finishing the *Hermeneia* commentary on the Book of Jubilees, I researched and wrote a biography of R. H. Charles, a pioneer in the field of early Jewish apocalypses and other pseudepigrapha.¹ Charles had always been one of my academic heroes and remains so today. I wanted to know more about this man, whose publications had proved so fundamental in the study of early Judaism and whose name kept showing up in the footnotes of scholars in the field and in my own. His work simply could not be ignored, even a century after his time. I developed a mental image of Charles as a large, genial man who edited the famous two-volume set through which many of us had been introduced to early Jewish texts, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (1913). The second volume (*Pseudepigrapha*) gave me an orientation to 1 Enoch and Jubilees when those works were starting to be at the center of my interests. It did not take too much digging around to discover that my mental image of Charles was hopelessly wrong. Charles seems not to have been a large man, and *genial* is not the first word that comes to mind when reading his comments about the work of others.

The surviving information about Charles the man is not extensive, but I pursued what was available and had the assistance of people at a number of institutions with which Charles was associated—especially the British Academy,

¹The book is under contract to be published by Oxford University Press.

Oxford University Press, and the National Library of Scotland, where the correspondence between Charles and T. & T. Clark is preserved—an effort in which I was assisted by two graduate students, Elizabeth Stell and Kaitlynn Merckling. That information and the content of his own writings brought into focus an Irishman who worked at a pivotal time in the history of biblical scholarship and at an equally historic moment for religious institutions as they wrestled with the emerging results of higher criticism. He was an enthusiastic practitioner of higher criticism, on both scriptural and extrascriptural texts, and he was active in ecclesiastical debates about what modern experts were saying regarding the Scriptures. The whole scene at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century and Charles's role in the developments proved fascinating to explore and analyze.

I will first offer a sketch of Charles's life, his publications, and his place in the development of modern biblical studies. I will then give some reflections about his world and work in comparison with our situation today one hundred years later.

I. A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF R. H. CHARLES

Robert Henry Charles was born in Cookstown, County Tyrone, in the northern part of Ireland in 1855, and he died in London in 1931 at the age of seventy-five. He was educated at several Irish schools, the last of which was Trinity College, Dublin; in all of them he compiled dazzling records. At Trinity College, Dublin, he trained for the Anglican priesthood and, in 1883, took up pastoral work in London. He served three parishes in East London from 1883 to 1889, first as a deacon and from 1884 on as a priest. He was in East London in part because he wished to work in socially disadvantaged parishes, and in them he labored tirelessly. It seems that at some point during this time he developed an interest in early Jewish eschatology, since he saw it as important for understanding the world of the New Testament. He also published his first book entitled *Forgiveness and Other Sermons*.²

The work in the London parishes proved so exhausting that he and Mary, the lady he had married in 1886, spent a year in Germany, where he regained his strength and pursued his study of Jewish apocalypses in earnest. As an aside, I should add that the Charleses personally suffered from a flu pandemic while in Germany—a disease that was graciously called the Russian or the Asiatic Flu and that killed some one million people worldwide. Upon returning to England in late 1890, the Charleses took up residence in Oxford, where, despite having held no permanent position for many years, Charles produced a remarkable series of commentaries, critical editions, and studies of Jewish texts. It was not until 1910 that he was named a fellow of Merton College. He had, however, incorporated in Exeter College soon after arriving in Oxford, and held some lectureships from time to

²R. H. Charles, *Forgiveness and Other Sermons* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1887).

time. In 1913 he was, much to his surprise, appointed a canon of Westminster, and at the Abbey he assumed the position of archdeacon in 1919 (the office entitled him to be called the Venerable R. H. Charles). He remained in this latter post until his death twelve years later.³ During the years of his association with the Abbey he continued writing scholarly books but also published more pastoral ones.

II. CHARLES'S PUBLICATIONS

Charles had hardly settled in Oxford when his articles on the book of Enoch started to appear. The first two date from 1891 and 1892,⁴ with his initial scholarly tome appearing in 1893. It carries one of those entertaining titles typical of the time: *The Book of Enoch Translated from Professor Dillmann's Ethiopic Text, Emended and Revised in accordance with Hitherto Uncollated MSS. and with the Gizeh and Other Greek and Latin Fragments Which Are Here Published in Full*, edited with Introduction, Notes, Appendices, and Indices by R. H. Charles, M.A., Trinity College, Dublin, and Exeter College, Oxford (Oxford: Clarendon). In light of how famous Charles became, it may be comforting to learn that his proposal for this book was at first rejected by Oxford University Press. That decision was later reversed, and the volume, nearly four hundred pages in length, appeared in due time. It was a stunning first book—a translation of and commentary on 1 Enoch that showed his familiarity with all the textual materials and problems for the 108-chapter composition and with the scholarly literature on it.

The Book of Enoch Translated ushered in an extraordinary succession of technical works over the next two decades in Oxford. Charles's books published from 1895 to 1912 consisted of two on Jubilees,⁵ two more on Enoch,⁶ two on the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,⁷ one each on 2 Enoch, 2 Baruch, the Assumption

³Much of this information about Charles's life can be found in C. F. D'Arcy, "A Brief Memoir," in R. H. Charles, *Courage, Truth, Purity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1931), xiii–xxxv.

⁴R. H. Charles, "The Ethiopic Manuscripts of Enoch in the British Museum," *ExpTim* 3 (1891): 135; Charles, "The New Greek Fragment of Enoch," *The Academy* 42 (1892): 484.

⁵He had already published a translation of Jubilees serially in *JQR* 5 (1893): 703–8; 6 (1894): 184–217, 710–45; 7 (1895): 297–328. The books were *Maṣḥafa Kufālē, or the Ethiopic Version of the Hebrew Book of Jubilees Otherwise Known among the Greeks as Hē leptē Genesis*, *Anecdota Oxoniensia: Semitic Series* 8 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1895); and *The Book of Jubilees: or, The Little Genesis* (London: Black, 1902).

⁶R. H. Charles, *The Ethiopic Version of the Book of Enoch*, *Anecdota Oxoniensia: Semitic Series* 11 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1906); and *The Book of Enoch, or 1 Enoch: Translated from the Editor's Ethiopic Text* [...] (Oxford: Clarendon, 1912).

⁷R. H. Charles, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Translated from the Editor's Greek Text and Edited, with Introduction, Notes, and Indices* (London: Black, 1908); and *The Greek Versions of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1908).

of Moses, the Ascension of Isaiah, and Fragments of a Zadokite Work,⁸ along with two books on the future life and immortality.⁹

Nineteen thirteen was the year he was appointed canon of Westminster, so it is not clear in each instance which of the five books he published that year belong to his Oxford period and which to the Westminster phase of his life. They included the two-volume *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, his first commentary on Daniel, and his first book on Revelation.¹⁰ The other surveyed religious developments and eschatology.¹¹ There are five additional books that definitely belong to the Westminster years: his two-volume commentary on Revelation, his Schweich Lectures on Revelation, a book on the Decalogue, and his large commentary on Daniel.¹² One unexpected book was his translation of the Ethiopic version of John of Nikiu's *Chronicle*.¹³

Lest one think Charles was neglecting his priestly duties at the Abbey, he took his regular turn preaching there (and elsewhere), and four volumes of his sermons were published,¹⁴ as were three topical books that arose directly from

⁸R. H. Charles, *The Book of the Secrets of Enoch* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1896); *The Apocalypse of Baruch: Translated from the Syriac* [...] (London: Black, 1896); *The Assumption of Moses* (London: Black, 1897); *The Ascension of Isaiah* (London: Black, 1900); and *Fragments of a Zadokite Work* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1912).

⁹R. H. Charles, *A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life: In Israel, in Judaism, and in Christianity; or, Hebrew, Jewish, and Christian Eschatology from Pre-prophetic Times till the Close of the New Testament Canon*, Jowett Lectures 1898–1899 (London: Black, 1899; 2nd ed., 1913); and *Immortality: The Drew Lecture Delivered October 11, 1912* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1912).

¹⁰R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913); *The Book of Daniel: Introduction, Revised Version with Notes, Index and Map*, NCB (New York: H. Frowde, Oxford University Press; Edinburgh: T. C. & E. C. Jack, 1913); *Studies in the Apocalypse, Being Lectures Delivered before the University of London* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1913).

¹¹R. H. Charles, *Religious Development between the Old and New Testaments*, Home University Library of Modern Knowledge 88 (New York: Henry Holt; London: Williams & Norgate, 1914).

¹²R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920); *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, Schweich Lectures 1919 (London: Oxford University Press, 1922); *The Decalogue, Being the Warburton Lectures Delivered in Lincoln's Inn and Westminster Abbey, 1919–1923* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1923; 2nd ed., 1926); *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1929).

¹³R. H. Charles, *The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu*, Text and Translations Society, Series 3 (London: Williams & Norgate, 1916).

¹⁴R. H. Charles, *Sermons Preached in Westminster Abbey* (London: Macmillan, 1917); *The Adventure into the Unknown and Other Sermons Preached in Westminster Abbey* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1923); *The Resurrection of Man and Other Sermons Preached in Westminster Abbey* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1929); and *Courage, Truth, Purity*.

his preaching.¹⁵ Besides his books, he wrote some monograph-length articles for reference works¹⁶ and many other shorter ones. R. H. Charles wrote a lot!

Charles delved deeply into the subjects he studied. True, he recycled some of his work, but he also searched for all the available evidence, including looking for manuscripts in European libraries and repositories and, of course, in the British Museum. He seems to have read everything written on the ancient texts he edited and translated. No textual problem was too insignificant for him to treat. He learned to read some of the less familiar languages in which pseudepigraphic works survived—including Ethiopic and Armenian. He also took advantage of technological advancements of the time such as photography so that he could have photos of manuscripts always before him in his study while working on a text.

III. CHARLES'S ASSESSMENT OF THE STATE OF SCHOLARSHIP IN HIS TIME

Charles was, in his own estimation and in that of others, working at an auspicious time, a turning point in the history of scholarship on biblical and related texts. Critical scholarship had a strong history in Germany by the late nineteenth century, but developments came more slowly in Great Britain. Yet developments there were, with some of Charles's contemporaries playing crucial roles in them. Charles, who was fully abreast of what had been happening in Germany, elsewhere in Western Europe, and throughout the English-speaking world, believed that in his generation it had become possible for the first time to gain authentic insight into the original wording and meaning of texts from the biblical world. At last scholars were emerging from their long bondage to ecclesiastical dogmas, creeds, and institutions. With their new critical tools, they could search for the truth, not completely unfettered perhaps, but more so than before.

In part their attitude is understandable because just before and during Charles's lifetime many new texts or additional manuscripts of known works had surfaced. Experts were, moreover, now approaching sacred texts in different ways than their predecessors had—they could be studied just as the works of, say, Aristotle, were. Charles distinguished himself from almost all other critical scholars of the period by focusing on and, in his own way, mastering Jewish apocalyptic literature. This put him in a position, one unparalleled in earlier times, to comment

¹⁵R. H. Charles, *The Teaching of the New Testament on Divorce* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1921); *Divorce and the Roman Doctrine of Nullity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1927); *Gambling and Betting* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1924).

¹⁶To cite just one example, his article "Eschatology," in *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, ed. T. K. Cheyne and J. Sutherland Black (London: Black, 1901), vol. 2, cols. 1335–92, occupies fifty-eight pages of small print.

on books like Daniel and Revelation from comparative literary and historical perspectives.

To illustrate his conviction about a new day in scholarship, we should look at some of his remarks about two books on which he worked extensively: Revelation in the New Testament and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.

Revelation

One of Charles's contemporaries, F. C. Burkitt, claimed that understanding the book of Revelation was the ultimate goal of all his research into the Jewish apocalypses.¹⁷ Charles's book *Studies in the Apocalypse* contains a detailed history of the many approaches that had been taken to Revelation throughout Christian history. Most of them he could dismiss as misguided efforts made by readers with knowledge of no apocalypses outside of the Christian Bible. In the century or so before Charles's time there was a significant breakthrough when some readers started evaluating Revelation in its historical setting. He spoke most enthusiastically about the rise of historical criticism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Hope at last dawns on the long journey we have taken down the centuries. From this time forward we can reckon, on the whole, on a steady advance towards the solution of the problem. Progress may have occasionally to be made by round-about ways, wrong paths may for a time be pursued, side issues be mistaken for the problems-in-chief, and criticism thereby be obliged to retrace its steps after apparently spending its energies in vain. But, notwithstanding, possession in part of the promised land has been won, and its entire conquest is only a question of time.¹⁸

In Charles's day, the conquest of the promised land of understanding the Apocalypse seemed finally to have been attained. As he put it, "By means of the work of the past century, and particularly of the last fifteen years, the Apocalypse has ceased to be the hopeless riddle that the sanest and greatest scholars of earlier centuries held it to be."¹⁹ There was now also the possibility of studying John's Revelation in comparison with the Jewish apocalypses that were coming to light, due in no small part to his own publishing endeavors.

Charles believed that a thorough grasp of John's unusual Greek furnished a powerful tool for distinguishing John's words from what was added to the text. He wrote a grammar of John's Greek in which he could compare features of John's language with those in the many papyri from Egypt that were being published at the time. According to Charles, the language of John was that of someone who

¹⁷F. C. Burkitt, "Robert Henry Charles 1855–1931," *PBA* 17 (1931): 438.

¹⁸Charles, *Studies in the Apocalypse*, 44.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 77.

thought in Hebrew but wrote in Greek. Knowing the peculiarities of John's Greek allowed him to argue that John wrote Rev 1:1–20:3, with only a few additions and interpolations detectible here and there. The last part of Revelation, 20:4–22:21, was written in different yet better Greek, but with disastrous results for the book.

His theory was that an editor had ruined the end of the book of Revelation and thus obscured the message of the author. Specifically, he held that "*John died when he had completed 1–20³ of his work, and that the materials for its completion, which were for the most part ready in a series of independent documents, were put together by a faithful but unintelligent disciple in the order which he thought right.*"²⁰ Charles had harsh words for this student of John who managed to mangle his teacher's concluding paragraphs. He wrote, for example, "this shallow-brained fanatic . . . , whose dogmatism varies directly with the narrowness of his understanding, has often stood between John and his readers for nearly 2000 years. But such obscurantism cannot outlive the limits assigned to it; the reverent and patient research of the present age is steadily discovering and bringing to light the teaching of this great Christian prophet whose work fitly closes the Canon."²¹ Others have found difficulties in the order of material in the last chapters of Revelation, yet Charles's thesis of an unintelligent disciple of John putting together John's thoughts, which lay ready in separate documents, but confusing their order and otherwise misrepresenting them was, on his view, revolutionary, a feature that the very best modern scholarship had uncovered. Being able to differentiate John's Greek from that of the blundering student was a crucial factor in arriving at this conclusion.

Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs

Charles wrote in a similar vein about the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, a composition that had been introduced into England from Greece already in the thirteenth century. He read all the previous work on the Testaments, published essays on the recently discovered Aramaic Levi text,²² and, as we have seen, produced two volumes on the Testaments—a critical text and a translation with commentary. He maintained that the Armenian translation of the Testaments, made from the Greek version, supplied a new vantage point from which to view a central issue in assessing the composition.

There had been debate before Charles's time about whether the text was Jewish or Christian—a debate that continues today. A decision about the issue centers on a series of passages that refer to Jesus Christ. Did those verses—whose number

²⁰ Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:1 (that is, p. 50 of the Introduction; italics original).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1:lv.

²² For example, he coauthored, with Arthur Ernest Cowley, "An Early Source of the Testaments of the Patriarchs [*sic*]," *JQR* 19 (1907): 566–83.

is uncertain—mark the work as a Christian composition, or did a Christian (or Christians) make a few additions to what was originally a Jewish text?

The Christian material was present in the Greek manuscripts, the earliest surviving witnesses to the text. Some of those Christian passages, however, were absent from the Armenian manuscript tradition. This suggested to Charles and others that the Armenian translation reflected an earlier stage in the evolution of the text. In that earlier stage there was a more limited amount of Christian material. Such evidence made him suspect that there had been a gradual process of adding Christian touches to the text and that in the original version of the Testaments—written in Hebrew according to Charles—none of the Christian verses was present, that is, that it was a Jewish work through and through. Charles argued that it was in fact a Jewish book written in the late second century BCE. It underwent several redactions over the next three centuries (one Jewish, the others Christian), resulting in the present text.

That seemed a reasonable conclusion at the time, but experts soon pointed out that the Christian passages were just one kind of omission in the Armenian manuscript tradition for the Testaments.²³ Consequently, the absence of some Christian lines from them was perhaps not an indication they failed to appear at earlier stages in the transmission of the text; they were parts of larger-scale gaps in the Armenian version, not reliable evidence of what the underlying Greek contained.

As these two examples—the book of Revelation and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs—show, Charles shared in the enthusiasm aroused by the arrival of new textual information and the application of modern scientific methods of research to ancient works, canonical or noncanonical. He was not only supremely confident in the ability of modern scholars like himself to work his way back to the authentic text by applying sophisticated modes of analysis, he also thought he had noble predecessors in the endeavor. We might have expected him to name famous German critics like Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette or Julius Wellhausen, but he went farther back. He wrote in one of his published sermons: “Christ was the first Higher Critic.”²⁴ He said this in connection with Jesus’s teachings about matters such as the Sabbath. But Christ was not his only predecessor: he noted in the same sermon that Jesus and Paul criticized the leaders of their day and the typical beliefs of their time; in fact, they did not spare the Old Testament itself. As he put it, “Thus Christ and St. Paul were the greatest higher critics in the whole history of the Christian Church”;²⁵ and, in another book, “our Lord and St. Paul—the two greatest and most convincing Modernists of all history.”²⁶ Charles was convinced that he was in good company!

²³ See, e.g., J. W. Hunkin, “The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,” *JTS* 16 (1914): 80–97.

²⁴ Charles, *Adventure into the Unknown*, 259.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

²⁶ Charles, *Decalogue*, 152.

IV. THE ECCLESIASTICAL CONTEXT

I should say a few words about the wider context in which Charles and his contemporaries worked and about the challenges that the results produced by the critics posed for the churches. Ecclesiastical authorities did not worry about higher-critical conclusions regarding the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs or the book of Enoch. They did become concerned, however, when such conclusions affected the canonical Scriptures and raised probing questions about cardinal doctrines of the church. Almost all of the biblical scholars in Great Britain and Ireland at the time were churchmen. Many were Anglican but some belonged to dissenting churches. As churchmen, the critics, like Charles, had taken vows of ordination and thus were subject to ecclesiastical teachings and supervision.

Charles was an early member of a group eventually called the Union of Modern Churchmen. The men (they were all men) in the organization considered themselves faithful members of the church (mostly the Church of England) but firmly believed that it had to modify its teachings in light of the new knowledge being produced through the sciences. Famous examples were the conclusions of geologists about the age of the earth and Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection with its evolutionary implications. Geologists were uncovering evidence implying that the earth was far older than the chronology inferred from scriptural data suggested, thus opening up long stretches of time for developments like those hypothesized by Darwin to have taken place. The Modern Churchmen and others thought that ecclesiastical teachings on such matters should be revised to comport with what the scientists, including scholars of the Bible, had learned. The churches risked losing the allegiance of informed people if they did not act. The Modern Churchmen were not anti-Bible, they insisted; rather, they opposed traditional ways of reading it. They also were confident that what they understood as the very basics of the Christian faith would prove to be compatible with the results of modern research and discoveries.

The public face of the movement for years was Henry Major (1871–1961). He delivered the William Belden Noble Lectures at Harvard University in 1925–1926; these appeared in print as *English Modernism* in 1927.²⁷ The lectures articulate and defend the beliefs held by the Modern Churchmen—beliefs with which Charles, as a modernist, would have been comfortable. One was that revelation did not cease with the end of the biblical age; it continues into the present. Another was that Christian theology should accept “all sound literary and historical criticism of its

²⁷H. D. A. Major, *English Modernism: Its Origin, Methods, Aims* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press; London: Humphrey Milford, 1927).

Scriptures, Creeds, Institutions.”²⁸ When discussing a category of ecclesiastical teaching that he defined as dogmas whose proof depended on historical information (e.g., that Jesus rose on the third day), Major wrote, “Here Christians are in the hands of the higher critics and historians. What they decide at the bar of historical criticism, that the Christian Church must accept.”²⁹ Charles saw the papacy and the Catholic Church in its antimodernist phase as the antithesis of what an ecclesiastical body should be in such times, with its resort to authority rather than science.

While to an extent one can empathize with the positions of Major and those who agreed with him, one can also see why church leaders might find being so dependent on biblical scholars less than practical. Which critics’ views were to be followed and, if that could be determined, would churches have to change their teachings with each variation in scholarly theories? That would have required faster pivoting than ecclesiastical bodies have historically been able to execute.

V. REACTIONS A CENTURY LATER

Working on a biography of Charles has been immensely worthwhile, humbling, and mostly a lot of fun. True, there was some tedium when, for example, it turned out that he had published more volumes of sermons than I thought. And here I should add that one of his friends wrote in a memoir of him that, when Charles began his preaching career at Westminster, his early sermons were “emptying the Abbey.”³⁰ The friend added that he later improved to become an excellent pulpiteer.

On the basis of the biographical work, I have tried to compare the work of Charles (and his contemporaries) with the multiform scholarship that we carry out today. What did they do and how did they go about it? Is the way they treated texts a model for us or should we proceed differently?

We should, of course, appreciate the contributions made by Charles and his fellow scholars at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. So much of what they did—whether it was publishing and commenting on texts for the first time, providing new critical editions of them on a sturdier manuscript basis, or synthesizing their teachings—has enduring value. It would be a pity if in our modern scholarship, using whatever methods we prefer, we failed to read and take seriously what they wrote—if only to discover at times that what we thought was novel was quite familiar to them.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 8

³⁰ D’Arcy, “Brief Memoir,” xxvii.

Much remains the same in the work we do today, but much has also changed over the last 100 to 125 years.

Information

We have far more information than was available a century ago. To be sure, there is so much we do not know about the world of the Hebrew Bible, early Judaism, and early Christianity, but at least we are in a somewhat better position to study it than were Charles and his colleagues. They knew about and used the results of discoveries like the Elephantine and Oxyrhynchus papyri. But specifically for evaluating early Jewish writings, we have the benefit of more recent finds such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and other Judean Desert collections. In addition, we have information gleaned by archaeologists from the places where those writings were found and other locations. The new evidence has made a large difference.

Charles would have been very excited, had he known about the Dead Sea Scrolls. He died in 1931, sixteen years before the first scrolls were removed from Cave 1, but if he could have seen, say, the remains of the Aramaic copies of Enoch, he would have been thrilled. Then too he would have noticed that some of his innumerable emendations to the text of Enoch were off target.

Actually, Charles and his contemporaries were familiar with one of the texts we know from Qumran. Looking at what he had to say about it illustrates where we have some advantages. In his day that text went by the name that its editor Solomon Schechter gave to it—Fragments of a Zadokite Work; we call it the Damascus Document.

Schechter identified two copies of the work among the Cairo Genizah finds, one consisting of sixteen columns, the other, a partial copy, having just two columns. He published his transliteration, translation, and notes in 1910, but the edition furnished photographs of just two of the eighteen columns.³¹ Once he had studied Schechter's book, Charles, typically, thought he could do better and decided to make his own translation of the Hebrew texts. He contacted Schechter for permission to see the texts, but Schechter refused. Schechter also expressed doubt that Charles was up to the task of handling the Hebrew text and added that he was not allowing access to the manuscripts because he intended to publish a fuller, revised edition.³² Schechter had imposed a five-year embargo on anyone else seeing the

³¹ Solomon Schechter, *Fragments of a Zadokite Work*, Documents of Jewish Sectaries 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910).

³² See Schechter's essay "Reply to Dr. Büchler's Review of Schechter's 'Jewish Sectaries,'" *JQR* NS 4 (1913–1914): 449–74, esp. 474, where he mentions Charles; and Alex P. Jassen, "The Early Study of Jewish Law in the Damascus Document: Solomon Schechter and Louis Ginzberg in Conversation and Conflict," in *From Scrolls to Traditions: A Festschrift Honoring Lawrence H. Schiffman*, ed. Stuart S. Miller et al., Brill Reference Library of Judaism 63 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 204–6, for Schechter's revisions to what he originally wrote.

documents themselves—and he refused to make an exception for Charles. Charles was understandably displeased, as were others. Rather than wait until 1915, the end of the five-year embargo, Charles in 1912 published his own translation and notes, which first appeared as a short monograph; it was soon incorporated almost without change into the second volume of *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, where, it must be said, it really did not belong.

We must be generous in evaluating the work done by the first editor of and early commentators on a text like the Damascus Document. It betrays little about its specific historical setting, thus depriving the reader of vital aids for interpretation; the medieval copies also contained their share of textual difficulties. But, such allowances aside, Charles did draw some strange conclusions from it, although he was closer to a proper overall assessment of it than Schechter or later his colleague Louis Ginzberg were. In addition to its sizable legal section—an area in which Schechter and Ginzberg were far more competent than Charles—the text contains parts in which the writer instructs his audience in other subjects. One of the teachings is messianic, and it is encapsulated in a series of four nearly identical expressions. In three places the text reads “messiah of Aaron and Israel” (XII, 23–XIII, 1; XIV, 18–19; XIX, 10–11) and in one the nearly identical “messiah from Aaron and from Israel” (XIX, 33–XX, 1). Experts have debated since the text was found whether the phrases envision one or two messiahs. Charles thought it spoke of one messiah, and he believed he could identify him. As he read the evidence, “messiah of Aaron and Israel” referred to a messiah who would originate from a priestly line on his mother’s side, while from his father’s side he would come from a lay family. For him, the most appropriate candidates were Alexander and Aristobulus, the sons of the Hasmonean Mariamne and King Herod.³³

Identifying the messiah of the text allowed Charles to determine the date of the composition. Since Herod killed his young sons in 8 BCE, the book appeared between 18 (the year they returned from Rome) and 8 BCE. If the inference seems unlikely, we should note that Schechter, who identified the messiah as a priest, raised the possibility that “and Israel” meant that the messiah’s mother belonged to a lay family.³⁴

In the copies of the Damascus Document found in the Qumran area caves, one of the messianic references in the Genizah copies is present in full and one partially. When the same phrase turned up in the manuscript of the Rule of the Community from Cave 1 (1QS IX, 11) but with a *yod* ending on the construct of the term for *messiah* (indicating the plural), it may not have settled what the phrase means in the Damascus Document but it put it in a different perspective and cast more light on the identity of the group behind the text. The meaning of the phrase in the Damascus Document can still be debated, but the date of the earliest

³³ Charles, *Fragments of a Zadokite Work*, xv.

³⁴ Schechter, *Fragments of a Zadokite Work*, xiii n. 6.

Qumran copy containing it (4Q266, mid to late Hasmonean) probably rules out Charles's identification of who the messiah was, as do other considerations.

Another instance in which the Dead Sea Scrolls give us an advantage over earlier scholars like Charles has to do with the new information about Jewish groups. One feature of Charles's work that jolts the reader today is that he attributed many of the texts on which he worked to Pharisaic authors. In fact, he thought 2 Baruch, 1–2 Enoch, Ascension of Isaiah, Jubilees, Assumption of Moses, Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Psalms of Solomon, and the Sibylline Oracles all were from Pharisaic writers of one sort or another.³⁵ He distinguished apocalyptic, mystical Pharisees (1 Enoch), legalistic Pharisees (Jubilees), Quietistic Pharisees (Assumption of Moses), priestly Pharisees (Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs), and so on. Charles maintained that apocalyptically minded Pharisees likely became Christians, while the legalistic ones became the ancestors of rabbinic Judaism—a group about which he made some very disparaging comments.

If Charles were right about all these attributions, the Pharisees would have been a highly diverse group—in ways we never would have guessed from the ancient descriptions of them. Charles, it appears, thought that, if a text was not Sadducean it had to be Pharisaic, or if it emphasized the law it must have been written by a Pharisee. The Essenes did not come into consideration, in part because of misreading Josephus's descriptions of them.

The age of some of the Enochic booklets (the Astronomical Book, the Book of the Watchers) suggests that they may have been in circulation before the group to which Charles attributed them existed. A fresh perspective on the authorial question emerged when the substantial legal materials among the Qumran texts were published and evaluated. The information from the scrolls, with its contribution to our knowledge of Jewish groups and their positions, allows us to see a book like Jubilees in a different light, as an ancestor of the viewpoint defended in the scrolls. And that viewpoint was hardly Pharisaic.

So, there is progress, even if it is limited.

Technology

Technology, to say the obvious, has advanced so much in the last one hundred years. When I think, for example, of the enormous amount of information the internet has made accessible, it is a huge change from the time of Charles. The point was reinforced repeatedly in my work on the biography, which required a lot of reading in nineteenth century (and earlier) publications. I was so impressed with how many books and journals from the nineteenth century, whether in English, German, French, or Latin, are available online through the extraordinary resources of modern libraries. We are now also the beneficiaries of digital publishing. A

³⁵ Charles, "Apocalyptic Literature," in Cheyne and Black, *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, vol. 1, cols. 213–50.

couple of Charles's publishing misadventures exemplify what a difference this has made.

His first book on Enoch (1893) is a case in point. Charles had submitted the very technical manuscript to the publisher, and the publisher had set a considerable amount of it in type when Charles learned about the discovery and publication of a manuscript containing the first thirty-two chapters of Enoch in Greek. He had necessarily relied on the Ethiopic version for his translation and notes, because, though it is a granddaughter version, nothing of the original had survived and little of the intermediate Greek translation, the basis for the Ethiopic rendering, was available. Now the picture had changed drastically, and of course he wanted to include the new evidence in his book, lest it be outdated before it rolled off the presses.

The publisher allowed him to print his edition of the new Greek text in an appendix, but a result was discrepancies between different parts of the book. For example, in the preface Charles reported the number of instances in which his text of Ethiopic Enoch, which served as the basis for his translation, differed from the readings in the edition August Dillmann had published in 1851. The number of changes, according to his preface, was about 600, but he had written on p. 4 that they totaled 322. Since p. 4 had been set in print, it could not be changed. As he wrote, "However, as I could introduce only a limited number of these new readings into the Critical Notes already in type, the reader will not unfrequently have to consult Appendix C for the text followed in the Translation in the earlier chapters."³⁶

Incidentally, this happened more often to Charles. In the case of the Enoch book, it was not his fault and it was natural that he wanted to include the crucial new textual material. In the case of his commentary on Revelation it seems to have been his fault. Because of a late decision to establish his own critical text and write a grammar of the Greek in Revelation, the order of sections in the two-volume commentary became strange. First there is his introduction, and it is followed by the commentary on the entire book, stretching through the first volume and well into the second. Only after the commentary does the reader encounter Charles's Greek text (2:236–385) and English translation with notes (2:386–446). Inserting the English translation before the commentary might have been helpful to many readers because in the commentary Charles gave the lemmas, the units of text on which he was commenting, in Greek with no translation supplied. The reviewers would comment on the less-than-user-friendly sequence of sections. The printer, we may assume, began by setting the pages of the commentary in type, and Arabic numerals were used for them. The introduction, probably written after the commentary, would then have been placed before it with Roman numerals for its pages. When Charles received permission from the publisher to fashion his own Greek text and English translation, which are at times in conflict with the commentary

³⁶Charles, *Book of Enoch* (1893), vii–viii.

already set in type, there was no place for them except after the commentary where they would not affect the pagination.

Such oddities could be avoided much more easily today. It may seem a small matter, but we should count our blessings.

Approach

Another reflection stimulated by Charles's work has to do with the approach that he and others took to altering texts, or, as they believed, restoring them to a more pristine form. Charles emended ancient texts very frequently, to say nothing of spotting misplaced passages and moving them to their supposedly original places, and isolating sources, additions, interpolations, and the like. The frequency with which he changed texts is striking; so is the confidence with which he did so. The grounds undergirding his reasoning are sometimes precarious.

I would like to think that today we are more impressed than he was with how far removed we are from the ancient world and its ways and the caution needed in determining what should and should not be expected from an author writing or an editor revising a text in, say, the first century before the Common Era. An author of one of the obituaries of Charles commented that with his logical Western mind he was never really able to understand the apocalypses.³⁷ Whether it was his logical Western mind that was at fault is debatable. The approach he and others took to the texts was guided, I believe, by the unstated assumption that a modern European or American knew what ancient authors really meant and how they should have said it. Hence, the corrupt copies of their works could be fixed accordingly.

A change that Charles made in the text or rather wanted to make in Jub. 2:22–23 is one of my favorites. Jubilees 2:1–15 enumerates the twenty-two works God made on the six days of creation. The sequel speaks about God's election of Jacob's descendants out of all other peoples (vv. 19–22); to them he gave the gift of the Sabbath so that they could celebrate it with God and the supreme angels. Jubilees 2:23 then reads: "There were 22 leaders of humanity from Adam until him [Jacob]; and 22 kinds of works were made until the seventh day."³⁸ The passage in context has some pretty profound theological teachings and implications, such as pairing Jacob's place among the leaders of humanity (twenty-third) and the Sabbath (in twenty-third position, after the twenty-two works of creation), but early readers were attracted by the instances of twenty-two items—the works of creation and the heads of humanity before Jacob. The statements of those readers, some of whom used Jubilees, made Charles think that something was missing from the text of Jubilees. For example, Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis (died 403 CE), in his *Measures and Weights* cites from Jubilees' account of creation but, where the Ethiopic text

³⁷ Burkitt, "Robert Henry Charles 1855–1931," 443.

³⁸ The translation is from my *Jubilees: The Hermeneia Translation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2020).

lists the two sets of twenty-two, Epiphanius also refers to the twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet and twenty-two books (in the Bible).

Charles explained his solution in his 1902 commentary.³⁹ There was, he thought, a lacuna in the text following Jub. 2:22. After noting the readings of Epiphanius and others, he concluded from their evidence that their fuller listings actually came from Jubilees. He wrote: “Thus we should probably restore the lacuna as follows:— *As there were two and twenty letters and two and twenty (sacred) books and two and twenty heads of mankind from Adam to Jacob, so there were made two and twenty works, etc.*”⁴⁰

It would be exciting if Charles was correct, as we would have in Jub. 2 an explicit statement from a well-informed author that there were twenty-two special books—a surprisingly early documentation for what looks like a Jewish canon of scripture (second century BCE). But here again the Dead Sea Scrolls have provided a bit of contrary evidence. It is very likely that 4Q216 (4QJub^a) VII, 15 could have contained only the two groups of twenty-two that the Ethiopic version attests (works of creation, generations until Jacob). The fragmentary Hebrew evidence is a reminder that it is risky to change a text on evidence like that adduced by Charles in this instance.

Participants

Finally, another advantage we have today is that the range of participants in our field has become considerably wider and more diverse. When Charles and his contemporaries were active, the field of biblical studies was occupied almost exclusively by one kind of scholar—it was a world of men, and white men at that. There were indeed a few women, like the intrepid sisters Agnes and Margaret Smith, but almost no others. It was also a world of Christian clergymen, with few Jewish scholars. Impressive experts they were, but all belonged to roughly the same social set, with almost no one coming from outside their circles.

We could try an exercise in fantasy. Let’s imagine that Charles, who believed that there were innumerable worlds to which God might send a person after death, came back to life as a modern biblical scholar and had the privilege of attending an Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in a nonpandemic year. What would he have thought? Beyond the sheer size of the gathering, Charles would have noticed a rather different array of participants. The most obvious change from his time is the role of women in the field, but he would also have observed that there were many people of different nationalities and races. I hope he would have been happy.

³⁹ See already his 1895 *Maṣḥafa Kufālē, or the Ethiopic Version of the Hebrew Book of Jubilees*, 9 n. 47 to Ethiopic, n. 7 to Greek.

⁴⁰ Charles, *Book of Jubilees* (1902), 18 n. to v. 23 (italics original); see also §11 (xxxix–xli) in the introduction to the commentary, where he deals with this and the other lacunae he hypothesized in the text of Jubilees.

If he had looked at the program for the Annual Meeting, he would also have been in for a surprise. There is a stunning array of interests and methods employed to approach the evidence. We all operate by our own ways of doing scholarship, but we recognize that the perspectives offered by people who approach texts from standpoints unlike ours can be refreshing. It certainly has been my experience that diversity enlivens the discipline. One feature of the program that he would have applauded is the large part devoted to the literature and history of the Second Temple period, a field in which he was a pioneer and which received far less attention in his time than it does now.

What would his thoughts have been if he could see the lists of publications from the SBL or the vast assortment of books on display from the many publishers who participate in the meeting? Some of them might be what he would expect, but others would be decidedly different from the academic publications of his time. He may well have been shocked at how much was being published even in his limited area of study.

We often talk these days about diachronic and synchronic readings, borrowing the language of linguistics. Clearly, the diachronic approach has been the traditional one, and it was how Charles addressed texts, excavating them to uncover sources and redactions, ever in search of the original text behind the existing copies. I am not aware of any place in his literary corpus where he discussed the details of his own method and why he adopted it. Maybe it was self-evident. Searching for an original text is understandable, however many problems it raises, but so many modern studies of biblical and related literature take a synchronic approach, focusing on the existing text rather than how it might have come into being.

Charles would also find that the relationship between our fields and religious organizations has changed. Many scholars still do their research within ecclesiastical contexts and many do not, but the percentage of SBL members who are ordained clergy, whether Jewish, Christian, or of other faiths, is probably considerably smaller than among Charles's cohort. Modern religious groups have also had more experience dealing with the results of critical biblical scholarship. The levels of influence or supervision over people working in ecclesiastical or other religious contexts vary, but many scholars today work outside of institutional religious settings. Their reasons for getting into biblical studies may have had something to do with a religious context, but their work is not done in it.

Let me mention one last thought. Studying the life and career of Charles from a century later has made me wonder what scholars a hundred years from now will think about what we do, our successes and our blind spots. Upon reflection, that seems a somewhat arrogant thought. Why, if there is a world a century from now and there is a field of biblical studies, should we think our work will be remembered? It may not be, but there is a chance it will. We probably do not have a very good idea of what scholarly publications might look like then or what discoveries might take place in the meantime, but reflecting on the past can at the least make us more conscious of ourselves and the way we work in the present.