

# *Fourth Ezra and Second Baruch*

Reconstruction after the Fall

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4EZRA AND 2BARUCH WITH THE  
(DIS-) ADVANTAGE OF RABBINIC HINDSIGHT

Steven D. Fraade

1. *Introduction*

The “late” Jewish apocalypses of *4Ezra* and *2Baruch*, usually dated to the very end of the first century or beginning of the second century CE, during the period between the revolts against Rome of 70 and 135 CE, and considered to have been composed in Palestine in either Hebrew or Aramaic, are often thought to represent a transitional period in the history of ancient Judaism between the end of the Second Temple period and the beginnings of rabbinic Judaism. This is due not only to their putative datings, provenances, and original languages, but also to their emphases (somewhat more for *2Baruch* than for *4Ezra*) on the centrality of study and observance of Torah law for the rewards of the righteous and the eschatological fulfillment of Israel’s covenantal destiny. To give just one example, Albertus F.J. Klijn, in his introduction to his translation of *2Baruch*, states (under “Provenance”): “[T]he work shows a close acquaintance with Jewish rabbinical literature,” and (under “Cultural importance”), “The author opened a way for studying the Law after a period of apocalyptic expectations. He was an expert on both apocalyptic imagery and rabbinic teaching, and, as such, was one of the Jews who managed to bring Judaism into a new era.”<sup>1</sup> While it was fairly common, prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, to assume that these texts’ emphases on legal piety placed them within the purview, if not authorship, of the Pharisees, over sixty years after that discovery we should be more cautious about assuming that in the periods both before and after the destruction of the second temple, either the Pharisees or the Rabbis had an exclusive claim to Jewish legal pietism. There were other such shows in town, some of which we know, others of which we can only surmise.

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<sup>1</sup> In James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (vol. 1; New York: Doubleday, 1983), 617, 620, henceforth referred to as *OTP*.

I take my charge differently: to read these texts from the perspective of someone more schooled in early rabbinic literature than in apocalyptic literature, in order to see what lines of similarity and difference might emerge, *without* presuming any direct contact or familiarity between the two, or any overall confluence of form or content. Although my general remarks will relate to both *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*, limits of space have caused me to focus mainly (but not entirely) on the former (chaps. 3–14). Although *2 Baruch* is often thought to be the closer of the two to “proto-rabbinism,” due to its stronger emphasis on the study and practice of Torah (“Law”), I was more drawn to the points of overlap between *4 Ezra* and early rabbinic literature. The nature of my remarks will be more schematic than comprehensive, again due to limits of space, but also so as to fulfill what I understand to be the primary purpose of my comments: to generate discussion.

## 2. Overall Literary Structures and Chronological Horizons

Although both *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* (like the early rabbinic corpora) are composite texts that include a variety of literary forms, two stand out in the overall structure of these texts, with both functioning as central media of revelation: visions and dialogues. As in the prior prophetic and apocalyptic literatures, symbolic and allegorical visions play a central role, both as forms of *privileged* divine communication to the eponymous protagonists of these texts and as ways of structuring the texts themselves.<sup>2</sup> These visions in turn become the focus of interpretive attention, as they need to be decoded, in the case of Ezra by the *angelus interpres* Uriel, in order for their meanings to become apparent to both the protagonist and to the text’s audience. While the visions are conveyed within the narrative to the eponymous protagonists alone, their textualization renders them more broadly (albeit indirectly) available to the apocalyptic readers/auditors. Although the interpretation of scriptural visions (and metaphors) is certainly an important function of midrashic exegesis, it does not play the central structuring role that it does in these two apocalypses, with the possible exception of *heikhalot/merkavah* mystical texts, whose relation to apocalyptic literature on the one hand and to rabbinic literature on the other

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<sup>2</sup> *4 Ezra* (see 13:39–40) seems to emphasize the exclusivity of visionary revelation to its protagonist more than does *2 Baruch*, which seems to emphasize more the exclusivity of revelation to Israel as a whole (see 48:24). This requires further inquiry.

is a subject of extensive scholarly dispute into which I cannot enter here.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, the *explicit* interpretation of (as distinct from allusion to) scriptural verses or passages, so much the defining trait and structuring device of early rabbinic midrash, is notably absent from both apocalypses.<sup>4</sup> Whether this is a function of chronology (development) or ideology requires further discussion. But in any case, it says a lot regarding different ways of conceiving of and configuring ongoing revelation and reception.

Similarly central to the contents and literary structuring of both apocalypses, and as a medium of revelation, is dialogue (largely with respect to theodicy and eschatological expectation) between the eponymous protagonists and either God or an angelic intermediary. While there are ample scriptural antecedents for this (e.g., Job), this is not a central feature or structuring device in early rabbinic literature. However, dialogue *is* a central aspect of early rabbinic discourse in the largely anonymous questioning-and-answering redactional hand by which the teachings of midrash, Mishnah, and gemarah are rhetorically configured. Particularly in its midrashic manifestations, dialogues are as much between named protagonists as between the anonymous exegetical voice and the scriptural text on the one hand, and the implied “reader/student/auditor” of the midrashic text on the other. Here the stronger dialogical analogue is between early rabbinic scriptural commentary and the allegorical commentaries of Philo of Alexander (which in turn reflect dialogical aspects of Alexandrian Homeric exegesis), with their employment of questions and answers with respect to an interpreted text on the one hand, and an interpretive community on the other.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For an overview, see Michael D. Swartz, “Mystical Texts,” in *The Literature of the Sages. Second Part: Midrash and Targum; Liturgy, Poetry, Mysticism; Contracts, Inscriptions, Ancient Science; and the Languages of Rabbinic Literature* (ed. Shmuel Safrai, Zeev Safrai, Joshua Schwartz, and Peter J. Tomson; Assen: Royal Van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 393–420.

<sup>4</sup> The same is true of Second Temple Jewish literature more broadly, but with important exceptions. See my articles, “Looking for Legal Midrash at Qumran,” in *Biblical Perspectives: Early Use and Interpretation of the Bible in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Proceedings of the First International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, 12–14 May, 1996* (ed. Michael E. Stone and Esther G. Chazon; Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 28; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 59–79; “Looking for Narrative Midrash at Qumran,” in *Rabbinic Perspectives: Rabbinic Literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Proceedings of the Eighth International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, 7–9 January, 2003* (ed. Steven D. Fraade, Aharon Shemesh, and Ruth A. Clements; Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 62; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 43–66.

<sup>5</sup> See the essays in Maren R. Niehoff, ed., *Homer and the Bible in the Eyes of Ancient Interpreters: Between Literary and Religious Concerns* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), especially the essay

However, while the commentaries of both Philo and the early Rabbis are characterized by rhetorically charged dialogue, they are of very different sorts.

Finally, both apocalypses have as a temporal framing, a sense of *imminent* eschatological expectation, something mainly lacking in early rabbinic literature (which is not to say it does not have its own eschatological horizon). In both *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*, at one point God or his angel expresses impatience with the eponymous protagonist's incessant questioning with regard to divine justice, whether in the past or present: "But now why are you disturbed, seeing that you are to perish? And why are you moved, seeing that you are mortal? And why have you not considered in your mind what is to come rather than what is now present" (*4 Ezra* 7:15–16); "You, however, should not think about this in your heart and you should not be afflicted because of the things that have been. For now the end of times is at stake whether it be property, happiness, or shame; and not its beginning" (*2 Baruch* 19:4–5).<sup>6</sup> In a sense, the urgency of the end of times renders the concerns of the protagonists about the present or past (except to the extent that the latter presages the imminent eschatological future) largely irrelevant. By contrast, the temporal horizon of early rabbinic discourse is defined by the *perpetual present* as it is suspended in the *longue durée* between scriptural beginnings and *deferred* eschatological ends.<sup>7</sup> Again, whether this difference is a function of chronology (development) or ideology, or the product of their confluence, requires further discussion.

### 3. *Torah Destroyed/Hidden/Forgotten and Restored*

As if to frame and provide the overarching narrative of *4 Ezra*, 4:23 and 14:21 state that the Torah revealed to Moses was destroyed with the Babylonian destruction of the first temple in 586 BCE, only to be restored through its re-revelation to Ezra thirty years later: "[T]he Law of our fathers has been made of no effect and the written covenants no longer exist" (4:23); "For your

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by Yakir Paz, "Re-Scripturizing Traditions: Designating Dependence in Homeric Scholarship and Rabbinic Halakhic Midrashim."

<sup>6</sup> Translations of *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* are from *OTP*. See my treatment of the latter passage in *From Tradition to Commentary: Torah and its Interpretation in the Midrash Sifre to Deuteronomy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 154–158.

<sup>7</sup> See the afterword to my book, *Legal Fictions: Studies of Law and Narrative in the Discursive Worlds of Ancient Jewish Sectarians and Sages* (JSJSup 147; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 579–581.



Law has been burned, and so no one knows the things which have been done or will be done by you" (14:21).<sup>8</sup> Without the Torah, the covenant, with its written legal terms, cannot function, nor can the history or future of God's relations with Israel be discerned.

While it is nowhere stated in Scripture that the Torah was destroyed with the first temple, there are biblical and post-biblical texts that similarly characterize a period of its absence or unavailability (and subsequent restoration). Most directly relevant is the account of Ezra's public reading of the Torah in Nehemiah 8. According to this account, following the public reading, the heads of the clans gathered with the priests and Levites to study the words of the Torah, including instructions for the observance of the festival of Sukkot, soon to commence.<sup>9</sup> According to Nehemiah 8:17, "The whole community that returned from the captivity made booths and dwelt in booths—the Israelites had not done so from the days of Joshua son of Nun to that day—and there was great rejoicing" (NJPS). Clearly, those gathered are depicted as having read and implemented instructions with which they were unfamiliar, with the narrator suggesting that these instructions had not been followed, and presumably had not been available for consultation, since the days of Joshua.

A similar motif is expressed in 2 Kings 22, according to which a Torah scroll (usually identified with the book of Deuteronomy, or some early form thereof), discovered hidden in the temple, is revealed to King Josiah by the scribe Shaphan, leading to religious reforms occasioned by the contents of that scroll. According to 2 Kings 22:13, the king fears divine wrath "because our fathers did not obey the words of this scroll to do all that has been prescribed for us" (NJPS). Presumably they "did not obey the words of this scroll" since the scroll had been out of circulation for some time and is only now being restored to its authoritative role.

Along similar lines, the *Damascus Document* seeks to relieve David of responsibility for having practiced polygamy (not to mention adultery), in violation of Deuteronomy 17:17, by claiming that David "had not read the sealed book of the Law (ספר התורה החתום) which was in the ark [of the

<sup>8</sup> See Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (trans. Henrietta Szold and Paul Radin; 7 vols.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1913–1938), 6:446 n. 50; Michael Edward Stone, *Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 426–427.

<sup>9</sup> While the specific instructions of Neh 8:15–16 might be presumed to derive from Lev 23:33–43, the specifics of the two passages are decidedly different.

Covenant], for it was not opened in Israel from the death of Eleazar and Joshua, and the elders who worshipped Ashtoreth. It was hidden (ויטמן) and [was not] revealed until the coming of Zadok.<sup>10</sup> David's sin, therefore, can be assumed to have been inadvertent.<sup>11</sup> The question of David's culpability aside, it is claimed here that from the time of Joshua to the time of Zadok, the high priest of Solomon's Temple, the Torah scroll was sealed away in the ark, inaccessible for reading or consultation, only to be restored to its authoritative role after David's misdeeds. In each of these cases, a presumed lapse of practice is attributed to an absence (and subsequent restoration) of Torah.

In early rabbinic texts, the idea of the Torah becoming unavailable is expressed less in terms of its physical damage or removal, than in terms of a fear of its being forgotten, perhaps being reflective of a more general anxiety about memorization and forgetfulness in a predominantly oral system of reception, storage, and transmission.<sup>12</sup> With respect to Ezra, note the following two rabbinic passages:

Were it not for those who arose and established the Torah, would it not have been forgotten from among Israel? Had not Shaphan in his time, Ezra in his time, and R. Akiba in his time stood up, would it not have been forgotten?<sup>13</sup>

For in ancient times when the Torah was forgotten from Israel, Ezra came up from Babylon and established it. When it was again forgotten, Hillel the Babylonian came up and established it. When it was again forgotten, R. Ḥiyya and his sons came up and established it.<sup>14</sup>

In these passages, Ezra takes his place within a chain of learned figures who re-establish the Torah by saving it from being forgotten, a chain that begins within the Bible and culminates with rabbinic sages, establishing, in a sense, chains of tradition repeatedly interrupted and heroically restored.

<sup>10</sup> CD 5,2–5 (trans. Geza Vermes).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Lev 4:22; 1Kgs 15:5; 11QTemp 57.17–19; 4QMMT C 25–26.

<sup>12</sup> See Shlomo Naeh, "אומנות הזיכרון: מבנים של זיכרון ותבניות של טכסט בספרות חז"ל", in *Mehqerei Talmud III: Talmudic Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Professor Ephraim E. Urbach* (ed. Yaakov Sussmann and David Rosenthal; Jerusalem: Magnes, 2005), 543–589.

<sup>13</sup> *Sifre Deut.* 48 (ed. Finkelstein, 112; trans. Hammer, 104), as well as the continuation, on which see my article, "Rabbinic Polysemy and Pluralism Revisited: Between Praxis and Thematization," *AJS Review* 31 (2007): 13–15.

<sup>14</sup> *B. Sukkah* 20a. For other rabbinic texts that speak of a practice having been forgotten and restored/arranged (שכחום וחזר וסדרום), see: *b. Shabb.* 104a; *b. Yoma* 80a; *b. Sukkah* 44a; *b. Meg.* 3a; 18a.

4. *Ezra as a Second Moses*

Implicit in *4 Ezra*, but barely below the surface, is the representation of Ezra as a second Moses, a second receiver and transmitter of divine revelation. Just as Moses is addressed by God from a bush (Exod 3:1–6), so is Ezra, although it is not said to be burning (*4 Ezra* 14:1–2). Just as Moses is gone from the people for forty days and nights to receive revelation (Exod 24:18), so is Ezra (*4 Ezra* 14:36). Just as Moses receives both exoteric and esoteric revelation (*4 Ezra* 14:6), so does Ezra (*4 Ezra* 14:26; 14:45–46).

But there are also differences, albeit not emphasized. Moses ascends a mountain to receive revelation (Exodus 19), whereas Ezra goes to an uncultivated field (*4 Ezra* 14:37), although they both might be thought of as places of solitude. While Moses is said not to have eaten or drunk anything while on Mt. Sinai for forty days and nights, Ezra, according to *4 Ezra* 9:24–25, subsisted in the field on a simple diet of flowers.<sup>15</sup> Whereas Moses records himself what is revealed to him (except perhaps for the last eight verses of Deuteronomy<sup>16</sup>), Ezra, according to *4 Ezra* 14:24, is accompanied by five scribes who do the actual writing, in a previously unknown script (14:42).<sup>17</sup> While some of these traditions (minimally, motifs) find expression in early rabbinic sources, others are unique (so far as I can tell) to *4 Ezra* (e.g., Ezra being addressed from a bush). To begin with, early rabbinic texts make the comparison between Moses and Ezra much more explicitly, directly, and exegetically:

R. Yose says: Ezra was worthy for the Torah to have been given by him, had not Moses preceded him. It is said of Moses “going up,” and it is said of Ezra “going up.” It is said of Moses “going up,” as it is said, “And Moses *went up* to God” (Exod 19:3). It is said of Ezra “going up,” as it is said, “That Ezra *came*

<sup>15</sup> According to rabbinic sources, Moses was like the celestial angels in partaking of neither food nor beverage while on Mt. Sinai for forty days and nights. See Exod 34:28; Deut 9:9, 18; *b. Yoma* 4b; *Gen. Rab.* 48:14 (ed. Theodor-Alback, 491); *ʿAbot R. Nat.* 1 (ed. Schechter, 1). For fasting or a vegetarian diet in preparation for receiving revelation or entering a spiritual state, see 1 Kgs 19:8; Dan 10:2–3; 2 *Bar.* 9:2; 20:5–6; *4 Ezra* 5:13, 20; 6:31, 35; *Apocalypse of Abraham* 9:7; Philo *Leg.* 3:138–145 (LCL 1:392–399); *Moses* 2.14 (68–70) (LCL 6:482–485); Matt 4:2; Luke 4:2; Josephus *Vita* 11 (LCL 1.4–7).

<sup>16</sup> On which see *Sifre Deut.* 357 (ed. Finkelstein, 427–428) and sources cited in Finkelstein’s notes ad loc. On the larger question of the role of Moses as recorder of revelation, both at Sinai and thereafter, see my article, “Moses and the Commandments: Can Hermeneutics, History, and Rhetoric Be Disentangled?” in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel* (ed. Hindy Najman and Judith H. Newman; JJSup 83; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 399–402, with notes.

<sup>17</sup> See Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 6:443–444 n. 44; Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 410–411, 439; and below.

up from Babylonia" (Ezra 7:6). Just as, in the case of "going up" which is said of Moses, he taught Torah to Israel, as it is said, "At the same time the Lord commanded me to teach you laws and rules" (Deut 4:14), so, in the case of "going up" which is said of Ezra, he taught Torah to Israel, as it is said, "For Ezra had dedicated himself to study the Teaching of the Lord so as to observe it, and to teach to Israel laws and rules" (Ezra 7:10).<sup>18</sup>

Both Moses and Ezra ascended (Moses literally, Ezra figuratively), in order to teach Torah to Israel. The fact that Scripture uses much the same language to describe their ascending and teaching of Torah "laws and rules," suggests that Scripture itself is equating their roles.

Similarly, the notice in 4 *Ezra* 14:42, that the five scribes who accompanied Ezra "wrote what was dictated, in characters that they did not know," is usually associated with an early rabbinic tradition (in the continuation of the previously cited passage) that Ezra introduced the "square" "Aramaic" (or "Assyrian") script, to replace the "Hebrew" script in which the Torah was originally recorded:<sup>19</sup>

Also through him [Ezra] were given a script and a language, as it is said, "a letter written in Aramaic [script] and translated [into Aramaic]" (Ezra 4:7). Just as its translation [language] was Aramaic, so too its script was Aramaic. And it says, "But they could not read the writing, nor make known its meaning to the king" (Dan 5:8). This teaches that on that very day it was given. And it says, "And he shall write a copy [or, an altered version] of this law" (Deut 17:18): a Torah which is destined to be changed.<sup>20</sup>

Thus far, the passage credits Ezra with having introduced both the Aramaic script and language (just as, it is presumed, Moses had previously introduced the Hebrew script and language), script and language going, as it were, hand in hand. However, whereas the script of the Torah was permanently changed (to "Aramaic") by Ezra, its language (although perhaps briefly changed) remained the same (Hebrew) as it had been. The continuation of the passage, which will not concern us here, presents other rabbinic views that assert either that such a change of script did not take place, and that the Torah was always written in the Hebrew language and the Aramaic (Assyrian) script, or that if there had been a change in script, it had only been for a short while, after which it was restored (not changed) by Ezra.

<sup>18</sup> *T. Sanh.* 4:7 (following MS Erfurt). Cf. *p. Meg.* 1:11 (71b-c); *b. Sanh.* 21b-22a.

<sup>19</sup> See note "j" in *OTP* ad loc.; and above, n. 17.

<sup>20</sup> *T. Sanh.* 4:7 (following MS Erfurt). Cf. *Sifre Deut.* 160 (ed. Finkelstein, 211); *p. Meg.* 1:11 (71b-c); *b. Sanh.* 21b-22a. See Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 4:355-356; 6:443-444 nn. 41-44; Shlomo Naeh, "על כתב התורה בדברי חז"ל (א): המסורת על החלפת הכתב בידי עזרא", *Leshonenu* 70 (2008): 125-143.

According to a later elaboration of this tradition (*b. Sanh.* 21b), it was the Israelites of Ezra's time who chose, as a sort of compromise, to retain the Hebrew language of the Torah (as revealed by Moss) but to change its script to Aramaic/Assyrian (of Ezra), which is how it is preserved. Thus, the Hebrew language and the (original) Hebrew script are *not* inextricably linked to one another. This is, most likely, a retrojection from a later time when Hebrew and Aramaic vied with one another (as with Greek) for cultural priority, especially with respect to scriptural reading (Hebrew), translation (Aramaic), and interpretation (mainly Hebrew). Interestingly, the newly-introduced, and at first unrecognized, Aramaic/Assyrian script went on not just to be that used among Jews for the Hebrew and Jewish Aramaic languages, but, ultimately, for later Jewish hybrid languages (Judeo-Arabic, Ladino, Yiddish, and others). What begins as a simple statement of an unrecognized script in *4 Ezra* develops into a complex discussion of the relation of language to script in revelation, and of the ways in which Ezra was not just a second Moses as teacher of Torah, but a scribal innovator of lasting consequence. This is not to presume that the early Rabbis knew of *4 Ezra* (or vice versa), but it does suggest that they are employing, each in its own way and for its own purposes, a shared tradition of indeterminable origin, or at the very least a common motif.

### 5. Exoteric and Esoteric Revelations

As previously mentioned, Ezra, like Moses before him (*4 Ezra* 14:6), receives and transmits a twofold revelation: one for everyone, the other for a wise and pious elite. It is repeated, as if for emphasis:

And when you [Ezra] have finished, some things you shall make public, and some you shall deliver in secret to the wise; tomorrow at this hour you shall begin to write (*4 Ezra* 14:26).

And when the forty days were ended, the Most High spoke to me saying, "Make public the twenty-four books that you wrote first and let the worthy and the unworthy read them; but keep the seventy that were written last, in order to give them to the wise among your people. For in them [the books] is the spring of understanding, the fountain of wisdom, and the river of knowledge."<sup>21</sup> (*4 Ezra* 14:45–47)

Before considering some specific aspects of these passages, which are the most explicit and detailed statements of a twofold revelation in a pre-

<sup>21</sup> See Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 6:446 n. 50; Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 439–441.

rabbinic Jewish text, it should be noted that we have several more implicit expressions of twofold revelations in ancient Judaism: categories of *nigleh* (manifest) and *nistar* (hidden), and *torah* (teaching) and *mishpat* (judgment) in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the notion of a “second law” in the book of *Jubilees* (cf. 6:22; and perhaps the *Temple Scroll*), literal (physical) and allegorical (spiritual) levels of meaning in Philo, the book of Deuteronomy as a *mishneh torah* (second Torah), the rabbinic conception of Oral and Written Torahs,<sup>22</sup> the interlinear synagogue performance of Hebrew Scripture and Aramaic targum,<sup>23</sup> and eventually the Christian canon of an Old and New Testament. Notwithstanding the profound differences between these, they share a sense that what was to become the text of the Hebrew Bible required some sort of accompaniment, complement, or successor, whether unfolding over time or simultaneously revealed in a historical instant, and whether for an inclusive or exclusive audience of readers/auditors.

These passages in *4 Ezra* 14 are unique in stating explicitly that the two categories of revelation are intended for different audiences, with the esoteric to be kept secret as a superior source of wisdom for the elect. In enumerating the numbers of books in each (without itemizing them), *4 Ezra* suggests that both are in principle closed canons; even if the numbers twenty-four and seventy are symbolic, they denote “complete” composites.<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, no distinction is drawn between the two sets of books with regard to their languages, scripts, manners of writing, manners of reading or study, or modes of written/oral transmission, the last being so central to the rabbinic differentiation between Oral and Written Torahs. Presumably, *4 Ezra* is included within the seventy esoteric books. Those who read it or hear it read, thereby becoming privy to its secrets, can, as a consequence, count themselves among the worthy and wise.

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<sup>22</sup> See my article “Concepts of Scripture in Rabbinic Judaism: Oral Torah and Written Torah,” in *Jewish Concepts of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction* (ed. Benjamin D. Sommer; New York: New York University Press, 2012), 31–46, with references to previous scholarship.

<sup>23</sup> See my articles, “Rabbinic Views on the Practice of Targum, and Multilingualism in the Jewish Galilee of the Third-Sixth Centuries,” in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity* (ed. Lee I. Levine; New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 253–286; “Targumim,” in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (ed. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 1278–1281.

<sup>24</sup> Twenty-four is the number of hours in a day, seventy is the multiple of seven and ten, two important “complete” numbers (and the number of nations according to Genesis 10, the number of elders in the wilderness according to Num 11:16, and many more). Josephus (*C. Ap.* 1.38) lists twenty-two books of Scripture, being the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. According to *Numbers Rab.* 13:15–16, the written Torah contains twenty-four books, whereas the Oral Torah contains eighty. See Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 441 nn. 19–20 for other sources.

Notwithstanding the fundamental difference in mode of performance and transmission from the rabbinic Oral Torah, scholars have compared the seventy esoteric books of *4 Ezra* to *late* rabbinic midrashic traditions that state that God's mysteries are contained within the Oral Torah (Mishnah). According to these traditions, the rabbinic Oral Torah is not to be written lest it be appropriated by the nations via translation (as happened to the Written Torah once translated into Greek), in support of their claim to be the true Israel, presumably a reference to Christianity.<sup>25</sup> Here the primary distinction being drawn is between Israel and the nations, with an emphasis on maintaining Israel's distinct identity as defined by its sole possession of the Oral Torah (or the Mishnah in particular), rather than between those within Israel who are worthy or not worthy of receiving God's secret wisdom. Compared to *4 Ezra*, these rabbinic traditions are only mildly esoteric.

By contrast, *4 Ezra*, like other apocalyptic writings, is interested less in differentiating Israel from the nations than in distinguishing the righteous and wise from everyone else. Toward this end, *4 Ezra* presumes that all of humanity has been commanded by God and is in possession of his law and commandments, only to spurn them:<sup>26</sup>

For God strictly commanded those who came into the world, when they came, what they should do to live, and what they should observe to avoid punishment. Nevertheless they were not obedient, and spoke against him. ... They scorned his Law, and denied his covenants; they have been unfaithful to his statutes and have not performed his works (*4 Ezra* 7:21–22, 24).

For this reason, therefore, those who dwell on earth shall be tormented, because though they had understanding they committed iniquity, and though they received the commandments they did not keep them, and thought they obtained the Law they dealt unfaithfully with what they received (*4 Ezra* 7:[72]).

Early rabbinic traditions speak similarly of the descendants of Noah who were undeserving of the Torah as a whole since they were unable to uphold just the seven universal commandments with which they were charged at

<sup>25</sup> *Pesiqta Rabbati* 5 (ed. Friedmann, 14b). For late parallels, see *Tanḥuma Wayyera'* (ed. Buber, 88) 6; *Tanḥuma Wayyera'* 5; *Tanḥuma Ki Tissa'* 34. For discussion, see Marc Bregman, "Mishnah and LXX as Mystery: An Example of Jewish-Christian Polemic in the Byzantine Period," in *Continuity and Renewal: Jews and Judaism in Byzantine-Christian Palestine* (ed. Lee I. Levine; Jerusalem: Merkaz Dinur and the Jewish Theological Seminary, 2004), 333–342; Bregman, "Mishnah as Mystery," in *Mehqerei Talmud III*, 101–109 (Hebrew).

<sup>26</sup> For further discussion, see Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 194–195.

the time of Noah.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, before God gave the Torah to Israel at Mt. Sinai he offered it first to the nations, who rejected it out of hand once they heard that it contained moral commandments that contradicted their very way of life.<sup>28</sup> The point of these early rabbinic traditions is not to justify the final, imminent destruction of the world's human inhabitants (except for a small righteous remnant), as it is for *4 Ezra*, but to justify Israel's ongoing self-understanding as being the sole recipients and observers of Torah. In this respect, these midrashim are closer to *2 Baruch* 48:24: "For we are all a people of the Name; we, who received one Law from the One. And that Law that is among us will help us, and that excellent wisdom which is in us will support us."

### 6. *Revelation to Be Continued*

Once revelation is revealed, is the revelatory process ended? The prophetic model would suggest otherwise. In *4 Ezra* 12:10–13 we find, following Ezra's vision of an eagle, as follows: "He [God] said to me [Ezra], 'This is the interpretation of this vision which you have seen: The eagle which you saw coming up from the sea is the fourth kingdom which appeared in a vision to your brother Daniel. But it was not explained to him as I now explain or have explained it to you ... ..'" Daniel's vision of a fourth beast, symbolizing a fourth (and final) foreign kingdom (Dan 7:7ff.), commonly presumed to be the Hellenistic empire, is here re-visioned by Ezra as representing the Roman Empire, symbolized by the eagle. In other words, Daniel's vision is updated, re-calibrated to refer to the current empire of the "author's" time, precisely as the book of Daniel had done to the prophecy of Jeremiah.<sup>29</sup> But rather than being presented as textual interpretation per se, it is framed as a visionary revelation superior to the original one experienced by Daniel.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, *Sifre Deut.* 343 (ed. Finkelstein, 396); *Mekhilta of R. Ishmael Bahodesh* 5 (ed. Lauterbach, 2:235–236); with my discussion of these texts in *From Tradition to Commentary*, 32–36 with notes; as well as my article, "Navigating the Anomalous: Non-Jews at the Intersection of Early Rabbinic Law and Narrative," in *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity* (ed. Laurence J. Silberstein and Robert L. Cohn; New York: New York University Press, 1994), 145–165.

<sup>28</sup> E.g., *Sifre Deut.* 343 (ed. Finkelstein, 395–397) and parallels, on which see Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary*, 32–37 with notes.

<sup>29</sup> Compare *4 Ezra* 11:39–46; *2 Bar.* 39:5–6; Josephus, *Antiquities* 10.208–210. For the book of Daniel's re-calibration of Jeremiah's prediction of seventy years of exile and foreign subjugation (Jer 25:11–14; 29:10–11) to seven-times-seventy years, see *4 Ezra* 9:1–2, 24–27.



The true meaning of Daniel's vision was not revealed to him, as it was to Ezra (that is, to the audience of *4 Ezra*), since the time of the fourth empire (Rome) had not yet come in Daniel's time. This literary phenomenon has been referred to as "the ignorant messenger."<sup>30</sup>

A remarkably similar expression is found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, *Peshet Habakkuk* 7.3–6:

[A]nd God told Habakkuk to write down that which would happen to the final generation, but he did not make known to him when time would come to an end. And as for that which he said, "That he who reads may read it speedily" (Hab. 2:2): interpreted this concerns the Teacher of Righteousness, to whom God made known all the mysteries of the words of his servants the Prophets (trans. Vermes).

The Teacher of Righteousness stands precisely in relation to Habakkuk (and to the end of time) as Ezra stands in relation to Daniel. The latter-day prophet is given the divine insight with which to reveal the previously concealed meaning of what was revealed to (or through) an earlier prophet.

Although such a close fit cannot be found in early rabbinic literature, the following story, though very different, merits comparison:

Rab Judah said in the name of Rab, When Moses ascended on high he found the Holy One, blessed be He, engaged in affixing coronets to the letters. Said Moses, "Lord of the Universe, who stays your hand?" He answered, "There will arise a man, at the end of many generations, Akiba b. Joseph by name, who will expound upon each tittle heaps and heaps of laws." "Lord of the Universe," said Moses, "permit me to see him." He replied, "Turn around." Moses went and sat down behind eight rows [and listened to the discourses upon the law]. Not being able to follow their arguments he was ill at ease, but when they came to a certain subject and the disciples said to the master, "Whence do you know it?" and the latter replied, "It is a law given to Moses at Sinai," he was comforted. Thereupon he returned to the Holy One, blessed be He, and said, "Lord of the Universe, you have such a man and yet you give the Torah by me!" He replied, "Be silent, for such is my decree." Then said Moses, "Lord of the Universe, you have shown me his Torah, show me his reward." "Turn around," said he; and Moses turned round and saw them weighing out his flesh at the market-stalls. "Lord of the Universe," cried Moses, "such Torah, and such a reward!" He replied, "Be silent, for such is my decree."<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> See Yair Furstenberg, "The *Agon* with Moses and Homer: Rabbinic Midrash and the Second Sophistic," in *Homer and the Bible in the Eyes of Ancient Interpreters*, 299–328.

<sup>31</sup> *B. Menahot* 29b (trans. Soncino, slightly altered). For discussion, see Shlomo Naeh, "על תעתיקים וקוצים (ב): כתב התורה בדברי חז"ל (ב): תעתיקים וקוצים", *Leshonenu* 72 (2010): 89–123.

Although not portrayed in terms of prophecy, Moses does partake of divinely revealed future scenes. Allowed to listen in on the study house of R. Akiba, whose scholars are engaged presumably in interpreting the Torah which Moses revealed, he is unable to understand what they are saying, but is relieved to hear that they give him credit as the originator of at least some of the laws that they are expounding. The rabbinic students, presumably with R. Akiba at their head, stand in relation to Moses as the Teacher of Righteousness does to Habakkuk, and as Ezra does to Daniel. In each case, the latter ones understand what was revealed to (through) the former ones, as could not the former ones themselves.

While the means and modes vary, all three texts—apocalyptic, sectarian, and rabbinic—claim for themselves, and hence for their readers/auditors, a privileged role in continuing and expanding revelation.

### 7. *After Esau Comes Jacob*

Returning to the question of apocalyptic ends, while early rabbinic literature does not exhibit the same immediacy of eschatological expectations as do *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*, it would be a mistake to deny the importance such expectations, even if deferred. In *4 Ezra* 6:7–10 we find:

I answered and said, “What will be the dividing of the times? Or when will be the end of the first age and the beginning of the age that follows?” He said to me, “From Abraham to Isaac, because from him were born Jacob and Esau, for Jacob’s hand held Esau’s heel from the beginning. For Esau is the end of this age, and Jacob is the beginning of the age that follows. For the beginning of a man is his hand, and the end of a man is his heel, between the heel and the hand seek for nothing else, Ezra!”

Central to apocalyptic reflection on history, especially as it is understood to be approaching its end, is viewing it as divided into a fixed number of divinely-determined epochs, whose divisions correspond to the succession of foreign empires, the end of the last of which will signal the beginning of the eschatological age (cf. Daniel 7). If Esau represents Rome, then the anticipated fall of Rome, will immediately lead to the ascendancy of Jacob/Israel.<sup>32</sup>

Compare the following from the early rabbinic midrash *Sifre to Deuteronomy*:

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<sup>32</sup> On this as a re-calibration of Daniel 7, see above, n. 29.

Another interpretation: “He said: The Lord came from Sinai [and shone upon them from Seir]” (Deut 33:2): In the future, when the Holy One, blessed be He, is about to punish Seir, He will shake the entire world, together with its inhabitants, as He did at the giving of the Torah, as it is said, “O Lord, You came forth from Seir, [advanced from the country of Edom, the earth trembled, the heavens also dropped water, yea, the clouds dropped water]” (Judg. 5:4). And it says, “Then his brother emerged, holding to the heel of Esau; so they named him Jacob” (Gen 25:26). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel, “No nation will be able to come between you [and Esau].”<sup>33</sup>

We find in these two passages an identical understanding of Gen 25:26, *alluded to* in the apocalypse and *explicitly cited* (in conjunction with the interpretation of two other verses) in the midrash, but very differently framed. In the apocalypse it is contained in a dialogical divine revelation to Ezra, in response to his urgent query in expectation of an imminent divine visitation at the end of the present and final age of history. In the midrash it is contained in an ongoing commentary to the book of Deuteronomy, in which God’s self-disclosure to Israel at Sinai is understood to presage the final punishment of the nations, Seir (= Edom = Esau = Rome) in particular. In other words, revelation prefigures redemption. The interpretation of Gen 25:26, that as at birth so too at the final redemption, Jacob (= Israel) will immediately follow Esau (= Rome), is presented as the *direct* speech of God to Israel, presumably as a whole. With the eventual fall of Rome will come not another foreign empire, but the redemption of Israel from all foreign rule and forever hence. However, there is no sense here of when, nor an apparent desire to know when, that will happen. Both passages, apocalyptic and midrashic, share a comforting confidence in there being a divine plan to history, with the assurance of a positive outcome for Israel. However, they express it in very different ways as appropriate to their respective literary structures and temporal horizons (as possible functions of one another), which returns us, finally, exactly to where we began.

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<sup>33</sup> *Sifre Deut.* 343 (ed. Finkelstein, 397), with minor adjustments to Finkelstein’s text based on the better manuscripts. Translation is from Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary*, 38. For fuller discussion see *From Tradition to Commentary*, 38–39 with notes. For significantly later rabbinic texts that express the same tradition, with additional discussion, see Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 160–161.

### 8. *Conclusions*

In examining a number of passages from *4 Ezra* (mainly) and *2 Baruch* in light of early rabbinic “parallels,” I hope to have demonstrated the strong comparative and contrastive advantages of viewing them in light of one another, with respect to both the traditions they incorporate and the rhetorical structures by which they do so. There are many more such instances that would yield similarly fruitful results.<sup>34</sup> However, I have found nothing to support the view, with which we began, that these “parallels” evince in the apocalypses a “close acquaintance with Jewish rabbinical literature,” or that either of their “authors” was an “expert [in] rabbinic teaching.”<sup>35</sup> Notwithstanding the striking similarities in content that we have seen, which could be attributed to a variety of factors other than *direct* familiarity between the creators of the two kinds of texts, the very different *forms* of those texts, and consideration of their possible performative purposes, needs to be compared as much as their shared contents. The differences of form are as telling as the similarities of contents (which in any case are very partial), especially when difference is considered in view of similarity, and vice versa, which is at the heart of the comparative enterprise. Each needs to be “read” in its own terms and socio-cultural-historical setting, even as each benefits from being “read” in the light of the other.

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<sup>34</sup> E.g., conceptions of an “inclination to evil,” the tension between divine attributes of justice and mercy, and the rescue of the temple vessels from the destroyed temple.

<sup>35</sup> See above, n. 1.