

THE INTRA-JEWISH DIALOGUE IN 4 EZRA 3:1-9:25

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The analysis of the first three visions of 4 Ezra¹ (3:1-9:25)² offered below seeks to address two areas of scholarly inquiry. The first inquiry concerns the significance of the time of 4 Ezra's composition, which lies in close proximity to the tragedy of 70 C.E.,³ for the understanding of the book. Produced in the face of the stiffest challenge to Judaism yet, 4 Ezra offers an unparalleled vista

¹For a comprehensive introduction, see Michael E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 1-47; for a brief introduction, see B. M. Metzger, "The Fourth Book of Ezra: A Translation and Introduction," *OTP*, 515-559; see also Bruce W. Longenecker, *Eschatology and the Covenant: A Comparison of 4 Ezra and Romans 1-11*, JSNTSS 57 (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 40-49.

²For this paper I shall deal only with the first section (3:1-9:25), because the author's intra-Jewish dialogue within the framework of contemporary deuteronomic debate is most apparent in these verses. Furthermore, although there are signs of later interpolations, like 9:7b (Christian?) within the main body of the section, 3:1-9:25 appears to be a solid unit. I tend to agree with Sanders's view that the final visions of the book may be later additions (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977], 418). Concerning the unity of 4 Ezra, see the historical review by Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 11-21; his own view appears on pp. 21-23. For another review of the history of investigation about the literary unity of 4 Ezra, see the excellent summary in Heinrich Hoffmann, *Das Gesetz in der frühjüdischen Apokalyptik*, Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments, vol. 23 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 218-220. See also on the matter of literary unity, M. A. Knibb, "Commentary on 2 Esdras," in *The First and Second Books of Esdras*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 109; Michael P. Knowles, "Moses, the Law, and the Unity of 4 Ezra," *NT* 31 (1989): 257-274; Edith McEwan Humphrey, *The Ladies and the Cities: Transformation and Apocalyptic Identity in Joseph and Aseneth, 4 Ezra, the Apocalypse and the Shepherd of Hermas*, JSPSS 17 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 57-58; and Bruce W. Longenecker, *2 Esdras*, Guides to Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 86. In this volume, Longenecker tries to establish the unity of 4 Ezra through an analysis of the literary structure, comparing Ezra's experience with that of Moses.

³Robert A. Bartels states: "This date is highly important to the understanding of the particular struggle with which the writer was faced. The fall of Jerusalem had occurred, and it was fresh in his mind" ("Law and Sin in Fourth Esdras [sic] and Saint Paul," *LQ* 1 [1949]: 319-320). Concerning the date, see Knibb, 101-105; Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 9-10; and Longenecker, *2 Esdras*, 13-14. Second Baruch, by comparison, is already more objective in its reflection of the tragedy. Yet both 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch stand out as the most brilliant works from the period. They sought to pioneer new ways of looking at the old questions in light of the fall of Jerusalem. Note Gwendolyn B. Sayler, who states that "the similarities between the books [4 Ezra and 2 Baruch] indicate that they originated in a common milieu" (*Have the Promises Failed? A Literary Analysis of 2 Baruch*, SBLDS 72 [Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984], 111); she aptly adds, 130, "that 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch are controlled by different agendas, and thus represent significantly different responses to the events of 70 C.E." Also note Andrew Chester, who states: "Both of these works [4 Ezra and 2 Baruch] are important for understanding the development of eschatology and messianism in Judaism in the post-70 period" ("The Parting of the Ways: Eschatology and Messianic Hope," in *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, A.D. 70 to 135*, ed. James D. G. Dunn [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1992], 248, emphasis supplied).

into the vortex of a radical and emotional reaction⁴ mounted from within Judaism against both the particularist and the universalist—in other words, traditional—interpretations of covenantal theology. The book is a valuable source of information for understanding how fragmented Second Temple Judaism moved toward the direction of unified Rabbinic Judaism as an aftermath of the destruction of the Temple.⁵

The second area of scholarly research I wish to address concerns the inquiry into the literary and conceptual relations that exist between 4 Ezra and Paul.⁶ Fourth Ezra is the first Jewish work outside of Paul that tried to move beyond the traditional framework of universalism and particularism⁷ to

⁴Isolde Andrews describes well the literary function of hostile emotion in 4 Ezra. In "Being Open to the Vision: A Study from Fourth Ezra," *Literature and Theology* 12 (1998): 231-232, she states that "these unhappy thoughts open Ezra's first vision and [the author] goes on to challenge God with an historical narrative."

⁵Geert Hallböck states: "[4 Ezra] was written when Jewish ideology was at a critical turning-point, i.e., on the transition from antique Judaism to early rabbinical Judaism" ("The Fall of Zion and the Revelation of the Law: An Interpretation of 4 Ezra," *JSTOT* 6 [1992]: 287). On the balance, however, it appears that 2 Baruch has received greater attention in this respect. See A. F. J. Klijn, who states: "In this connection it is plausible that 2 Baruch is often seen as the product of rabbinical circles. Even Johannan ben Zakkai, or his disciples, have been suggested as the author of 2 Baruch" ("Recent Developments in the Study of the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch," *JSP* 4 [1989]: 8). It seems that both 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra became the most immediate precursors of the Mishnah's theology. Others, such as *Testament of Abraham*, *Apocahypse of Abraham*, *Testament of Sederach*, *2 Enoch*, *4 Baruch*, *Assumption of Moses*, and *Apocahypse of Zephaniah* either followed or led up to the groundbreaking theological efforts of 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra. It is an aim of this paper to call attention to 4 Ezra as also being an important precursor of Rabbinic Judaism. See also W. Harnisch, *Verhängnis und Verheissung der Geschichte: Untersuchungen zum Zeit- und Geschichtsverständnis im 4. Buch Esra und in der syr. Baruchapokalypse* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1969), 227; P. Bogaert, *Apocahypse de Baruch: Introduction, Tradition du Syriaque et Commentaire*, Sources chrétiennes, nos. 144-145 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1969), 1:438-444; and J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 172.

⁶Michel Desjardins speaks for many Pauline commentators when he notes that the anthropological condition of sin referred to in 4 Ezra is the same as that found in Rom 5 ("Law in 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra," *JR* 14 [1985]: 34-35). But Bartels is perhaps the most outspoken advocate of the affinity that exists between 4 Ezra and Paul. On p. 319 he states: "The problem of law and sin as it is dealt with in IV Esdras [sic] (chaps. 3-10) is especially striking when put alongside of Paul's treatment of it"; again on p. 327: "The reader of Paul and of IV Esdras [sic] (IV Ezra) is struck, however, with the affinity which exists between Paul and the apocalypticist"; then on pp. 328-329, after showing the parallels between 4 Ezra and Romans in some detail, he declares: "Literary dependence of Ezra upon Paul is no question here" (329). Unfortunately, however, he goes on to explain without much basis (besides what he offers from 4 Ezra and Romans) that "the parallels only serve to show the general religious atmosphere which surrounded the Jews of the Diaspora" (329; but note p. 326). See also Longenecker, *Eschatology*, 22: "The structural similarities are especially evident when 4 Ezra is compared with Paul's letter to the Roman Christian communities, chs. 1-11 in particular"; but Longenecker's explanation runs along similar lines as Bartels's: "'Ethnocentric covenantalism' provides the best backdrop against which 4 Ezra and Romans 1-11 should be read." (34); W. O. E. Oesterley, *II Esdras (The Ezra Apocahypse): With Introduction and Notes* (London: Methuen, 1933), xxxviii-xliv, compares 4 Ezra with the NT, particularly with Paul, under the title "The Importance of the Book for New Testament Study."

⁷Longenecker aptly states that "for both Paul and the author of 4 Ezra, traditional understandings concerning the God of Israel's history need to be informed (or corrected) by the

systematically and radically reorder the semantic field of meaning⁸ with respect to covenant, election, Abraham, and creation.⁹ What is particularly significant is that Paul preceded 4 Ezra.

The perspective from which I wish to address the two areas of scholarly inquiry in this paper is the intra-Jewish dialogue taking place in 4 Ezra.¹⁰ It is easy to miss the systematic and highly intellectual contribution 4 Ezra is making to the self-understanding of Judaism. One reason for this is its dramatic and visionary style of writing. Another reason is its often deeply emotional language.¹¹ After all, at the time of the writing, the tension-filled history of Israel—a frustrating history of promise and nonfulfillment—had finally collapsed. Ezra's words echo through and through with sorrow, revealing to the reader the heart of anguish out of which the theology of 4 Ezra arose.¹² But as will be seen, the author's intention is to engage the reader in a systematic and unemotional dialogue.¹³

revelation of God's eschatological ways" (*Eschatology*, 170). There seem to be two basic ways of explaining 4 Ezra's radical departure. According to Longenecker, it was a creative fusion: "Traditional [scholarly] formulations of the 'two eschatology' approach . . . tended to cite inconsistencies in the eschatological portrayals of 4 Ezra as evidence of two distinct eschatological traditions (the national and the universal) which have been fused together by the author/redactor" (*ibid.*, 47-48); but according to Hallbäck, it was something of a break: "Many interpreters have seen this shift from the collective to the individual as a marked reversal to a universalistic orientation in 4 Ezra, indicative of a break with the narrow-minded Jewish particularism" (290).

⁸Longenecker: "Their [4 Ezra and Romans] authors argue independently of each other that an ethnic exclusivism of this kind involves an inherently flawed understanding of the covenant, which they then seek to repattern along different lines" (*Eschatology*, 170).

⁹Hallbäck, 277-278, identifies the themes of the visions somewhat differently as "the story of the Creation, the story of Israel, its election and fate, and the coming judgment."

¹⁰Scholars have taken note of the intra-Jewish dialogue taking place in 4 Ezra from various angles, without saying as much (*ibid.*, 287; similarly, 292). So also A. P. Hayman, who states: "The anguished tone of IV Ezra reflects his own mental turmoil at the realization of how inadequately traditional Jewish theodicy explains the problem of evil, sin, and justification" ("The Problem of Pseudonymity in the Ezra Apocalypse." *JSJ* 6 [1975]: 55); Christopher Rowland states: "The issues which are raised are what we would have expected Jews to have struggled with after the traumatic experience of 70 C.E." ("The Parting of the Ways: the Evidence of Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic and Mystical Material," in *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, A.D. 70 to 135*, ed. James D. G. Dunn [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1992], 221); and Chester, 270, states: "In 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra, the issue is bound up with concern with theodicy; that is, the question of what has become of righteous Jews who have perished in the revolt against Rome, as well as the fate of the Jewish people as a whole."

¹¹E. Breech, "These Fragments I Have Shored Up Against My Ruins: The Form and Function of 4 Ezra," *JBL* 92 (1973): 267-274, with his scheme of grief to consolation, tries to arrive at an experiential understanding of the book.

¹²Desjardins, 31, notes aptly that "4 Ezra has a definite post-holocaust mood to it."

¹³Such an unflappable temperament, characteristic of many apocalyptic works, should not be confused with rational discourse, as we shall see. Michael E. Stone aptly notes that the apocalyptic mode of thought is "non-logical in that it employs other organizing principles than logical consistency between the meanings of its statements" (*Features of the Eschatology of IV Ezra*, HSS 35 [Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989], 23).

In order to more fully appreciate the presence of intra-Jewish dialogue in 4 Ezra, one needs to consider the overall literary structure of 3:1-9:25. The section is composed principally of dialogues between Ezra and his heavenly visitors, and it is divided into three sustained dialogue units of 3:1-5:20, 5:21-6:34, and 6:35-9:25. Each of these dialogue units is introduced by Ezra's fasting and supplication in behalf of Israel and humankind, which is immediately followed by the revelations of the heavenly messengers (mostly Uriel) and Ezra's anguished appeals.

The dialogues form a cacophonous and extended exchange between what Israel had understood in the past to be true about God and the new insights that the author discovers in the indifferent datum of Israel's recent disastrous history.¹⁴ A closer look, however, reveals that the author's true voice is to be found in the speeches of Uriel, rather than those of Ezra.¹⁵ The chief reason for this is that it is in Uriel's speeches that we find the traditional—both universalistic and particularistic—interpretations of Israel's cardinal beliefs about election, covenant, creation, and Abraham systematically reordered. By contrast, Ezra's speeches merely affirm, without much reinterpretation, the same traditional elements.

For example, in 8:34-35 Ezra raises his complaint against God by appealing to the traditional theology about covenant and mercy. This passage contains both the particularist language of covenant mercy and the universalist concern for all humankind.

But what are mortals, that you are angry with them; or what is a corruptible race, that you are so bitter against it? For in truth there is no one among those who have been born who has not acted wickedly; among those who have existed there is no one who has not done wrong.¹⁶

In stark contrast, the impassive voice of Uriel (8:37-41) delivers fresh insights. Not surprisingly, the author speaks for God:

For indeed I will not concern myself about the fashioning of those who have sinned, or about their death, their judgment, or their destruction; but I will rejoice over the creation of the righteous, over their pilgrimage also, and their

¹⁴The function of the smaller disputations occurring between the major statements appears to be to field possible objections that could be raised against the author's new revelation.

¹⁵For the discussion regarding whose voice—Ezra's or Uriel's—represents the author's own conviction, see Desjardins, 31-32. "D. Rössler and A. L. Thompson believe that the seer's voice represents the author's *alter ego*, while E. P. Sanders and W. Harnisch have argued the opposite, stating that the divine position best reflects the author's." D. Rössler, *Gesetz und Geschichte: Untersuchungen zur Theologie der jüdischen Apokalyptik und der pharisäischen Orthodoxie* [Neukirchen: Kreis Moers, 1962], 106; A. L. Thompson, *Responsibility for Evil in the Theodicy of IV Ezra: A Study Illustrating the Significance of Form and Structure for the Meaning of the Book*, SBLDS 29 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 157; Sanders, 417-418; Harnisch, 60-67. Hallböck notes that "the first three visions . . . start with a complaint from Ezra provoking a dialogue with Uriel the angel, who concludes the talk with a revelation of eschatological secrets" (271-272). I am in full agreement with Hallböck's view that the angel's speech constitutes the conclusion of each dialogue. I go a bit further and suggest that the angel's speeches constitute the real point of 4 Ezra.

¹⁶Unless otherwise noted, quotations from 4 Ezra are from the NRSV.

salvation, and their receiving their reward. As I have spoken, therefore, so it shall be. "For just as the farmer sows many seeds in the ground and plants a multitude of seedlings, and yet not all that have been sown will come up in due season, and not all that were planted will take root; so also those who have been sown in the world will not all be saved."

The God whom the author presents to the reader is not the personal, compassionate, and forgiving God of Scripture. Rather, he is a being who is impersonal and indifferent like the seasonal cycle of planting and harvesting. No amount of appeal based on what Judaism has previously believed about God and his merciful ways can change God's indifference. Like the seeds that perish according to the laws of probability and nature, lost Jews and lost humans are of no value to God. This is the author's version of Jewish covenant theology, which he believes is the only way to make sense of God in the face of the great tragedy.

It seems, however, that exegetes have missed the intensely intra-Jewish nature of the dialogues because their concern has been chiefly soteriological. Sanders, for example, writes that "in IV Ezra one sees how Judaism works when it actually does become a religion of individual self-righteousness. In IV Ezra, in short, we see an instance in which covenantal nomism has collapsed. All that is left is legalistic perfectionism."¹⁷

It is hoped that through the analysis offered below, further light may be shed on the questions about how as a community Second Temple Judaism was processing the theological and emotional grief of 70 C.E., and about the role that Paulinism may have played in the process, if any.

Covenant

The first dialogue unit of 3:1-5:20 addresses the question of the covenant. First, the traditional theology is expounded, using the traditional covenant language:

When those who dwelt on earth began to multiply, they produced children and peoples and many nations, and again they began to be more ungodly than were their ancestors. And when they were committing iniquity before you, you chose for yourself one of them, whose name was Abraham; and you loved him and to him only you revealed the end of the times, secretly by night. You made with him an everlasting covenant, and promised him that you would never forsake his descendants; and you gave to him Isaac, and to Isaac you gave Jacob and Esau. And you set apart Jacob for yourself, but Esau you rejected; and Jacob became a great multitude (3:12-16).

¹⁷Sanders, 409; for criticism of Sanders, see Longenecker, *Eschatology*, 18, 21, where Longenecker correctly criticizes Sanders for being too concerned with soteriology and failing to take into consideration "the background of the prevailing covenantalism of his day" (21). Longenecker himself, however, is preoccupied with soteriology. He states: "I have concerned myself only with those passages which are most relevant to the question of how each author interacts with ethnocentric covenantalism on matters of the law and the people of God" (*ibid.*, 36). Hallbäck, 280, tries to interpret 4 Ezra too much from an individualistic soteriological perspective, seeing a shift in "the emphasis from the problem of national misfortune to the individual's distress." Again, he states: "The very selective salvation turns the problem of national fate into one of individual fate before the coming judgment" (280); and "Now it is no longer the collective contrast of *Babylon* and *Zion* he sees, but the individual '*the evil heart*' versus *the Law*" (285).

The passage elaborates its covenant theology with a particularistic focus. There is no indication in the passage that the world at large is a concern. Rather, Ezra takes for granted that there is an uninterrupted transition from Abraham to Jacob, and by implication, from Abraham to Moses (cf. vv. 17-19). God chose Abraham from a world full of evil people and established a covenant with him concerning his posterity. At the same time, Jacob is the true fountainhead of Abraham's posterity: "Jacob [rather than Esau] became a great multitude" (v. 16). Without question, Ezra's focus in this passage is God's covenant with physical Israel—a form of particularism.

In Ezra's complaint that follows, however, the focus shifts dramatically to the universalistic side.¹⁸ Let us look at the passage in detail.

Yet you did not take away from them their evil heart, so that your Law might bring forth fruit in them. For the first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were also all who were descended from him. Thus the disease became permanent; the law was in the people's heart along with the evil root. . . . So you delivered the city into the hands of your enemies. . . . Now therefore weigh in a balance our iniquities and those of the inhabitants of the world; and so it will be found which way the turn of the scale will decline. When have the inhabitants of the earth not sinned in your sight? Or what nation has kept your commandments so well? You may indeed find individual men who have kept your commandments, but nations you will not find (3:20-22, 27, 34-36).

The universalistic theology of this passage flows mainly in the negative direction and tries to relativize the prized position of the Jews in salvation history. First, in apparent contrast to the passage that precedes, Ezra begins his complaint with Adam rather than Abraham or Jacob. Ezra speaks of the evil heart of Israel as being on a par with that of the rest of the nations.¹⁹ Second, in this passage a Jewish writer other than Paul utters, for the first time, that the Mosaic covenant was an impossibility. Ezra charges that God already knew, or at least he should have known, that it would be impossible for Israel to keep the laws when he gave them to Moses: "The law was in the people's heart along with the evil root. . . . So [i.e., by giving the law] you delivered the city into the hands of your enemies" (emphasis supplied). In short, Israel was doomed like anyone else when the law was given. Finally, the universalism of this passage bears more than a passing resemblance to Paul's universalism in Rom 5. As in Rom 5, the Mosaic covenant does not stand on the same plane as Abraham as an extension of his covenant,

¹⁸Cf. Longenecker, *Eschatology*, 46.

¹⁹Oesterley, xxx, states: "It is in accordance with this world-view of our Seer that he regards the Law as having been intended not for the Chosen People alone, but for the Gentiles too; thus, in speaking of humanity in general, the transgression of Adam is referred to in vii. 11." See also Desjardins, 33-34; and Hallböck, 278, states: "The principle of this history is that in spite of God's attempts to eradicate sin once and for all in the deluge, and in spite of his then favouring a specially elected people, the impact of sin has remained *universal* in the history of mankind. It was implanted in Adam, and after him every human being is born with an evil heart" (emphasis supplied).

but it connects directly to Adam and his transgression.²⁰

It is important to note at this point that the intention of the author of 4 Ezra is to reject both traditional particularism and universalism. He wants to move beyond the soteriological straightjacket and find an altogether new way of thinking. The author's new revelation comes in Uriel's voice:

Your understanding has utterly failed regarding this world, and do you think you can comprehend the way of the Most High? . . . If you can solve one of them for me, I will show you the way you desire to see, and will teach you why the heart is evil. . . . Go, weigh for me the weight of fire, or measure for me a measure of wind, or call back for me the day that is past. . . . You cannot understand the things with which you have grown up; how then can your mind comprehend the way of the Most High? (4:2, 3, 5, 10).

The new insight the author gleans from contemplating the fall of Jerusalem is that there can be no rational understanding of how God deals with Israel or with humans.²¹ Fourth Ezra rejects both the universalistic and the particularistic understandings as inadequate rational constructs. The fall of Jerusalem, which is simultaneously the complete breakdown of the covenant history and an act of God, simply defies all rational and ethical explanations.²² The author considers the nonrational language as the most appropriate vehicle for comprehending and communicating the meaning of such an event.

Ezra objects to the concept of nonrationality:

I beseech you, my lord, why have I been endowed with the power of understanding? For I did not wish to inquire about the ways above, but about those things which we daily experience: why Israel has been given over to the gentiles as a reproach. (4:22-23).

Uriel reiterates his point in 4:26ff.: One cannot understand the present; a true understanding can come only in the end time. This revelation, which seems to constitute the climax of the first dialogue, makes a startling admission that even God cannot cause the promises to be fulfilled in this age because of its extremely evil character: "The age is hastening swiftly to its end. For it will not be able to bring the things that have been promised to the righteous in their appointed times, because this age is full of sadness and infirmities" (4:26ff.).

²⁰Longenecker, *Eschatology*, 22-23, states: "The authors of 4 Ezra and Romans 1-11 develop their respective cases with two common convictions in their sights: (1) the pervasiveness of sin throughout humanity, and (2) the effectiveness of God's grace within the covenant. . . . This condition of sinfulness includes all humanity." It is, however, important to note that, according to my analysis, the author of 4 Ezra treats Paul's Adam theology within the framework of universalistic covenant theology, which he rejects; see also Oesterley, xxxviii-xliv, under the subtitle, "The Importance of the Book for New Testament Study."

²¹Andrews, 233; Bartels, 327, states: "Another parallel is in both Paul's and Ezra's acknowledgment that God's ways are inscrutable and beyond finding out" (Rom 9:6-29).

²²Nonrational language seems to be the author's definition of apocalyptic. Longenecker, *Eschatology*, 150, seems to be suggesting the same thing when he states: "In the final episodes, Ezra, having accepted Uriel's case, receives confirmation of his new perspective through the eschatological visions, which themselves conform to Uriel's description of God's ways." In other words, the author of 4 Ezra had to resort to visionary language in order to convey his message.

It appears that the author of 4 Ezra is inviting his readers to think the unthinkable: God is unable to make good on his covenant promises. In order to comprehend this kind of theology—that some things are impossible even for God—one needs to adopt a nonrational language. C. C. Rowland aptly states that “the character of the divine secrets which were revealed [in the apocalypses] is not easily defined and includes almost anything which the human mind cannot comprehend.”²³

The rest of the first dialogue is made up of questions about the end, among which an interesting comment appears regarding the place of the mind in relation to the question about the end:

Then [i.e., in the end] shall reason hide itself, and wisdom shall withdraw into its chamber, and it shall be sought by many but shall not be found, and unrighteousness and unrestraint shall increase on earth. One country shall ask its neighbor, “Has righteousness, or anyone who does right, passed through you?” And it will answer, “No.”

In other words, the end is an absolutely evil time during which reason and wisdom will vanish. One simply cannot make sense of such a time.

The notion that God cannot honor his promise in the present time because of its overwhelming evilness shakes the foundation of Israel’s covenant theology. If almighty God can renege on his promise, for whatever reason, then what basis could there be for Jewish hope? The author’s aim in the first dialogue, therefore, is to dismiss as a rationalization of the historical process both the particularist and the universalist ways of thinking about the covenant and to set the stage for the unveiling of his new, nonrationalist paradigm. It is interesting that, for the author, covenant theology as a whole represents the rational side of Israel’s theology. In order to comprehend the unparalleled event of the present, he feels compelled to reject the rational, cause-to-effect construct of the covenant language.

Election and Abraham

The repudiation of the traditional covenant theology leads directly to the question of the election of Israel in the second dialogue (5:21-6:34).²⁴ Even if the author of 4 Ezra rejects the traditional formulations of covenant theology, he does not reject the election of Israel.

Ezra once again opens his discourse with a particularist formulation of election:

O sovereign Lord, from every forest of the earth and from all its trees you have chosen one vine, and from all the lands of the world you have chosen for yourself one region, and from all the flowers of the world you have chosen for yourself one lily, and from all the depths of the sea you have filled for yourself one river, and from all the cities that have been built you have consecrated Zion

²³Christopher C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven* (London: S.P.C.K., 1982), 94.

²⁴Andrews, 232, states: “Ezra’s conversations in successive dream-visions deal with theodical problems concerning the tension between Israel’s fate and election.” See also Bartels, 320.

for yourself, and from all the birds that have been created you have named for yourself one dove, and from all the flocks that have been fashioned you have provided for yourself one sheep, and from all the multitude of people you have gotten for yourself one people; and to this people, whom you have loved, you have given the Law which is approved by all (5:23-27).

This passage is an unmistakable particularist, deuteronomic²⁵ discourse, which speaks eloquently of election as God's favoring of one nation, Israel, above all other nations. Furthermore, the particularist bias of the passage is evident in the nonchalant manner in which it speaks about the rest of the world and the way in which it speaks of the law as the identifying mark of the chosen people.

The next passage (vv. 28-30) contradicts the particularist beliefs about the election:

And now, O Lord, why have you given over the one to the many, and dishonored the one root beyond the others, and scattered your only one among the many? And those who opposed your promises have trodden down on those who believed your covenants. If you really hate your people, they should be punished at your own hands (5:28-30).

Here the language changes from "one dove" and "one tree" of the preceding passage to the notion of "one among many." The destruction of Jerusalem at the hand of Gentile nations means that Israel can expect no more from God than any other nation can.²⁶ Is Israel just one nation among many? The question that the passage implies is both rhetorical and universalistic: In what sense is Israel special in relationship to the rest of the world?

Once again, Uriel's reply rejects both the particularist and the universalist options and offers a new revelation that intimates that God's promises to Israel do not concern Israel of the present age (5:33, 40): "Do you love him more than his Maker does? . . . [Y]ou cannot discover my judgment, or the goal of the love that I have promised my people."

Uriel goes on to disclose what will happen at the end time, for he envisions a time in which the whole world will be converted. In unfolding his new revelation, Uriel makes a surprising, if enigmatic, revelation (6:7-10) about Abraham's relationship to Israel's election:

I [Ezra] 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 Abraham, 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 end of a man is his heel, and the beginning of a man is his hand; between the heel and the hand seek for nothing else, Ezra!"²⁷

²⁵For the purpose of this essay, I found it impractical to maintain the distinction between *deuteronomic* and *deuteronomicist*, as suggested by Frank M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 274, n. 1. Accordingly, both categories have been referred to as *deuteronomicist*.

²⁶Desjardins, 34; and Hallbäck, 278.

²⁷Stone's translation in *Fourth Ezra*, 143-144; see also his discussion about the textual

The question is about how to divide the end of the first age from the beginning of the second, or perhaps the final, age. To use the wording of the text itself, the first age refers to "this age" and the second, or the final age, refers to "the age that follows." Stone maintains in his commentary, with the majority of scholars, that Esau represents Rome.²⁸ This interpretation is problematic, as it fails to explain adequately the meaning of the preceding statement "from Abraham to Abraham." The main problem is that it can in no way be demonstrated that Rome stands in some positive relationship to Abraham, as in the case of Esau. Rome does not go back to the time of Abraham, nor does it come onto the scene of history as the result of the promise given to Abraham. Stone himself admits that the statement "from Abraham to Abraham" is "unclear."²⁹ The most reasonable way to interpret the parable is to consider Esau as representing the age of the nations, inasmuch as Abraham was promised that he would become the father of many nations (Gen 17:4).

Abraham, the original receiver of the covenant promise, lies outside of history in the parable, marking both the beginning and the end of the present age. "From Abraham to Abraham" means that the promise given to Abraham is in hiatus with Esau intervening. This seems to be an answer to the first question: "What will be the dividing of times?" The promise of Gen 17:4 is divided by two aeons, just as the two progeny—Esau and Jacob—were born to him. Esau claimed his birthright as an offspring of Abraham, just as much as Jacob did. Like Esau, the nations (Christians?) can claim to be the children of Abraham through the promise given in Gen 17:4 that Abraham will be the father of many nations.³⁰ Whatever obscurity, the point about Abraham seems to be reasonably clear: the things that were promised to him will not find their fulfillment in this age because the fulfillment is interrupted by the birth of Esau, who represents this evil age,³¹ namely, the age of the nations.

For the author of 4 Ezra, however, the two ages are successive rather than overlapping. Just as Jacob emerged from the womb immediately after Esau, the first age must end before the next age can come. Furthermore, between the end of this evil age (i.e., Esau's heel) and the beginning of the coming age (i.e., Jacob's hand)—"for Jacob's hand held Esau's heel from the beginning"—there is no obstruction.³² In other words, there is no room for the "already-and-not-

problems (ibid.). For this study, I am following Stone's harder reading as opposed to the NRSV's.

²⁸There is a protracted discussion in scholarship about how to understand the two aeons. See Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 159-161; idem, *Features of the Eschatology*, 47-53.

²⁹Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 160.

³⁰It is possible, in this manner, to see Rome as a descendant of Abraham. What I oppose is singling out Rome as Esau.

³¹Samuel Sandmel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 83.

³²Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 161. I am not here suggesting an allegorical reading of hands and heels, only that the age to come "will follow immediately."

yet theology" in the thinking of 4 Ezra. This present age belongs to Esau, whose evil kind stand in the way, obstructing the fulfillment of the covenant promise given to Abraham. The coming age will suddenly dawn with nothing coming in between.

What is remarkable about this parable is that the age of Esau, representing the present age of the nations, certainly must include the present Jewish nation. By the same token, the coming age, represented by Jacob—another way of saying Israel, hence new Israel, i.e., the true children of Abraham—also comprises all the nations of earth that have been renewed:

It shall be that whoever remains after all that I have foretold to you (i.e., this evil age) shall be saved and shall see my salvation and the end of my world. And they shall see the men who were taken up, who from their birth have not tasted death; *and the heart of the earth's inhabitants shall be changed and converted to a different spirit.* For evil shall be blotted out, and deceit shall be quenched; faithfulness shall flourish, and corruption shall be overcome, and the truth, which has been so long without fruit, shall be revealed (6:25-28; parentheses and emphasis supplied).³³

Nevertheless, 4 Ezra reserves a special place for the physical descendants of Israel in the end time: the ending of Zion's humiliation will either result in or signal the end time: "It is said, 'The days are coming when I draw near to visit the inhabitants of the earth, and when I require from the doers of iniquity the penalty of their iniquity, and when the humiliation of Zion is complete.'"

In conclusion, 4 Ezra tries to eschew both the particularistic and the universalistic ways of speaking about election. Election does not belong exclusively to Israel, nor does it concern the nations of the present age. His solution is rather to take Abraham out of this age and place him above and beyond it as a unique phenomenon in history. The election of Abraham concerns the end time and not the present age. Inasmuch as physical Israel belongs to this age, Abraham's election does not benefit them in the present age. At the same time, Abraham cannot be truly considered the father of many nations in this age, because his election concerns the universal posterity of the age to come.³⁴

³³The same basic motif is repeated in 6:55-7:44, but with respect to a universal judgment. The space does not allow us to pursue the same detailed study as above through the whole of 4 Ezra, but enough has been said to suggest what might constitute its basic theological orientation. See the misreading of 6:55f. in W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 63: "The most extreme expression of contempt towards the latter [the Gentiles] is found in 4 Ezra. Thinking of the Gentiles the author writes [and Davies quotes 6:55f.]" The passage, however, is voicing a view that the author of 4 Ezra is dismissing, rather than the one he is endorsing.

³⁴Scholars have repeatedly noted the postponement of eschatology in 4 Ezra to an undesignated time at the end. Bartels, 323-324: "The course and duration of the present world have been predetermined, and the decisive moment will soon arrive (4:33-50). 'Eschatology enters the picture. All of the difficulties are to be solved by the coming of an entirely new age.'" Collins states: "Although none of Uriel's arguments consoles Ezra, Ezra's despair is gradually eroded by repeated assurances from Uriel concerning the eschatological cure to the disease of sin" (*The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 162, as summarized by Longenecker, *Eschatology*, 47). Hallbäck, 266,

This manner of speaking creates a conflict between creation and election because election takes place within and belongs to the created order, which is passing away.

Election and Creation

The third dialogue begins with a recitation of the creation story (6:38-54) in the style of *Jub.* 2:1-16. Ezra closes it with an appeal based on the hard-line particularistic theology about Israel's election (vv. 55-56). The Gentiles are about as significant to God as a drop of water (cf. *Ps.-Philo.* 7:3, 12:4; 2 *Bar.* 82:5). They are mere "spittle." In contrast, God has chosen Israel alone to inherit his creation (cf. *Pss. Sol.* 14:5), being blessed "above all the nations" (cf. *Pss. Sol.* 11:9; 11:8-11; *Ps.-Philo* 11:1; 19:8; 30:4; 35:2).³⁵

All this I have spoken before you, O Lord, because you have said that it was for us that you created this world. As for the other nations that have descended from Adam, you have said that they are nothing, and that they are like spittle, and you have compared their abundance to a drop from a bucket (vv. 55-56).

The next three verses, however, reveal that the neat particularist, deuteronomic construct has been thrown into disarray by the tragedy of 70 C.E. (vv. 57-59):³⁶

And now, O Lord, these nations, which are reputed to be as nothing, domineer over us and devour us. But we your people, whom you have called your firstborn, only begotten, zealous for you, and most dear, have been given into their hands. If the world has indeed been created for us, why do we not possess our world as an inheritance? How long will this be so?

After a lengthy discussion about the implications of rejecting the deuteronomic theology of creation and election, the author presents, in 7:132-8:3, a refutation of the universalist theology on the same subject. Ezra argues that God should have compassion on sinful humans³⁷ because they are his creation: "He shows patience toward those who have sinned, since they are his own creatures" (v. 134). The call for compassion is couched in the traditional language of election akin to that found in *Exod* 34 and appeals to God's merciful character. But in keeping with its universalistic character, the

states: "Uriel again appears and shows how Ezra is incapable of comprehending, and he repeats his reference to the coming time of salvation"; see also Oesterley, xxx-xxxvii, under the subtitle "Eschatology." What they fail to note, however, is that for the author of 4 Ezra the age to come lies beyond history.

³⁵Longenecker, *Eschatology*, 30.

³⁶Cf. Bartels, 320: The observation that Israel had been handed over to the Gentiles "raises in the writer's mind the question, 'why.' The tragedy, which had taken place, was completely incongruous with the writer's view of the place of the Jewish people in God's plans. To him, as to all Jews, they were the 'Elect.'"

³⁷Oesterley, xxviii-xxx, discusses this universalistic aspect of 4 Ezra under the subtitle "Universalism."

present passage makes no mention of the elevated place of the Jews. Rather, by combining the language of election—e.g., compassion, mercy, patience—with the language of creation—namely, God's creation and sustenance of all humankind—Ezra appeals, in the manner of Moses, to God's fatherly compassion in behalf of all humans (vv. 132-140):

I answered and said, "I know, O Lord, that the Most High is now called merciful, because he has mercy on those who have not yet come into the world; and gracious, because he is gracious to those who turn in repentance to his law; and patient, because he shows patience toward those who have sinned, since they are his own creatures and bountiful, because he would rather give than take away; and abundant in compassion, because he makes his compassions abound more and more to those now living and to those who are gone and to those yet to come—for if he did not make them abound, the world with those who inhabit it would not have life—and he is called the giver, because if he did not give out of his goodness so that those who have committed iniquities might be relieved of them, not one ten-thousandth of humankind could have life; and the judge, because if he did not pardon those who were created by his word and blot out the multitude of their sins, there would probably be left only very few of the innumerable multitude."

Ezra's final discourse that began in 6:38 seems to comprise two appeals: one based on God's particular concern for the elect (6:57-59), and the other, which is based on God's universal concern for his creation (7:132-140). At the same time, these appeals provide a clue that the theme of the present dialogue unit is creation in relationship to election. Furthermore, the author seems to intend that this final dialogue unit function as the conclusion to the preceding two. The author seems to hint at this in the closing parable of 9:14-22, where the basic theme of election and creation surfaces again. The unmistakable allusion to the first vision (5:23-27) in verse 22 seems to be an attempt to tell the reader that the three major dialogue units should be seen as a coherent whole. Moreover, there seems to be a self-evident logical progression in these dialogues: The thesis of the first dialogue that the language of covenant is a nonrational discourse and the thesis of the second dialogue that election concerns the end time and not the present age, culminate in the final dialogue that discusses the questions about the relationship between election and creation.

Accordingly, the parable of 9:14-22 fully bares for the reader what 4 Ezra has been preparing to say about the election of Israel in this age and merits a closer look:

I answered and said, "I said before, and I say now, and will say it again: there are more who perish than those who will be saved, as a wave is greater than a drop of water." He answered me and said, "As is the field, so is the seed; and as are the flowers, so are the colors; and as is the work, so is the product; and as is the farmer, so is the threshing floor. For there was a time in this age when I was preparing for those who now exist, before the world was made for them to live in, and no one opposed me then, for no one existed; but now those who have been created in this world, which is supplied both with an unfailing table and an inexhaustible pasture, have become corrupt in their

ways. So I considered my world, and saw that it was lost. I saw that my earth was in peril because of the devices of those who had come into it. And I saw and spared some with great difficulty, and saved for myself one grape out of a cluster, and one plant out of a great forest. So let the multitude perish that has been born in vain, but let my grape and my plant be saved, because with much labor I have perfected them.”

In 4 Ezra, as in *Sirach*, election is viewed as an act of creation, and creation as an act of election. Fourth Ezra, however, interprets this theme somewhat differently. For 4 Ezra, election is a process of elimination, through which God creates the people of the age to come. Verses 19-22 bring this point to the fore. Because of the Fall, the world was already as good as destroyed (vv. 19-20). But it was out of compassion that God decided to save some, which he undertook with great difficulty (v. 21). God cannot do anything for, and does not care about, those who perish because they were worthless from the beginning. Why should he be blamed for destroying what should have been destroyed in the first place?—so the argument seems to run.

The purpose of this argument seems to be to justify God's election of Israel. God let history continue because he wanted to save one seed, one vine (vv. 21-22). When considered in the light of vv. 15-16, the staggering proportion of this reasoning becomes clear: “I said before, and I say now, and will say it again: there are more who perish than those who will be saved, as a wave is greater than a drop of water.”³⁸ The author is arguing for the congruence of the properties of the lesser and those of the larger from which the lesser is taken. Israel, the lesser, is to the rest of the world as the drop of (ocean) water is to the rest of the waves and the ocean that produces them. Both share the same properties. As the drop is a representative sample of the sea, so is Israel the representative sample of the world. Israel is the good seed that was taken from a heap of bad seeds that were doomed to go wrong and subject to destruction. God is blameless in his doing, however, because the world was already spoiled at the Fall. Instead, he is fully justified in his effort to save, as it were, one good plant that will represent the whole from which it was taken.

The parables of the sea and the city in 7:3-9 also illustrate the same relationship of the few and many:

I said, “Speak, my lord.” And he said to me, “There is a sea set in a wide expanse so that it is deep and vast, but it has an entrance set in a narrow place, so that it is like a river. If there are those who wish to reach the sea, to look at it or to navigate it, how can they come to the broad part unless they pass through the narrow part? Another example: There is a city built and set on a plain, and it is full of all good things; but the entrance to it is narrow and set in a precipitous place, so that there is fire on the right hand and deep water on the left. There is only one path lying between them, that is, between the fire and the water, so that only one person can walk on the path. If now the city is given to someone as an inheritance, how will the heir receive the inheritance unless by passing through the appointed danger?”

³⁸Bartels, 323: “None who have been born have not sinned (cf. 8:34-35).”

The first parable contrasts the wide expanse of the sea with the narrow strait at its opening (vv. 3-4). This strait, functioning as an entrance, is so narrow that only a few can navigate through it (v. 5). The next parable seems to illustrate the same point. There is a city built on a plain, and full of good things (v. 6), but to get there one has to travel through a narrow path that passes between the fire and water (v. 7). This path is so narrow, it is said, that "only one person can walk on the path" (v. 9). The principle that these parables seem to illustrate is that the entryway of any entity is smaller, in fact much smaller, than the entity itself. As the gate is to a city, and as the strait is to the vast sea, so Israel is to the world, Israel being the entry point of the world. Thus v. 9 states: "If now the city is given to someone as an inheritance, how will the heir receive the inheritance unless by passing through the appointed danger?" Once again, vv. 10-11 reiterate the same principle: "So also is Israel's portion. For I made the world for their sake, and when Adam transgressed my statutes, what had been made was judged." Applying 4 Ezra's basic principle of the proportions to the problem of Adam's transgression, these verses seem say: When Adam transgressed, the world was judged as lost; God chose Israel (the lesser) to be his portion to represent the lost world (the larger); by saving the lesser, the larger will be also saved in the form of representation; and so Israel is to inherit the world.

Israel in these parables refers, however, to the deuteronomic system of Israel's covenant rather than to its political boundaries; hence, it addresses also the diaspora. The description that there is "fire on the right hand and deep water on the left" in front of the entrance (v. 7) is a clear allusion to the deuteronomic prohibition not to turn to the right hand or to the left of the Mosaic law (Deut 5:32; 17:11; 17:20; 28:14; Josh 1:7; 23:6). Consequently, the only pathway that passes "between the fire and the water" from this age to the entrance of the coming age (v. 8) is the covenantal system of Israel that operates in the context of deuteronomic curse and blessing. According to the author of 4 Ezra, this covenantal system is so narrow and difficult that only one person at a time can walk through it.

Considered together, these parables set forth a fascinating interpretation of election. Israel's election means that it has been elected to serve merely as an environment that provides an entry point into the world that is waiting to be inherited. The actual inheritance of the world, however, goes to those who manage to travel successfully through Israel's covenantal maze.

The discussion about the intercession of the patriarchs yields a further indication that 4 Ezra distinguishes the actual heirs from the general election of Israel. The implication is that the election of Israel is only the first step in the process through which the heirs are carefully culled from the world. Ezra replies:

I answered and said, "How then do we find that first Abraham prayed for the people of Sodom, and Moses for our fathers who sinned in the desert, and Joshua after him for Israel in the days of Achan, and Samuel in the days of Saul, and David for the plague, and Solomon for those in the sanctuary, and Elijah for those who received the rain, and for the one who was dead, that he might

live, and Hezekiah for the people in the days of Sennacherib, and many others prayed for many? If therefore the righteous have prayed for the ungodly now, when corruption has increased and unrighteousness has multiplied, why will it not be so then [i.e., in the end time] as well?" (7:106-111).

To this question, Uriel replies: "This present world is not the end; the full glory does not remain in it; therefore those who were strong prayed for the weak. . . . [N]o one will then [i.e., in the end time] be able to have mercy on someone who has been condemned in the judgment, or to harm someone who is victorious" (7:112, 115). The prayers of the saints, including those of Abraham, are simply denied of their efficacy for the coming world. In other words, the election of Israel that came through the patriarchs serves another purpose than the collective salvation of their descendants. The implication is that the election was the first step in the process of the selection of the heirs, and the judgment is the final step in the process, with no positive effect of the former upon the latter.

The resultant theological construct is that the election of the patriarchs and the people of Israel was paradigmatic of how God intends to *create* a new humanity. The election is a process of elimination, by which God culls out the choice seeds with which he can repopulate the world (7:132-8:3, 6, 38-41). Ezra, for example, appears to be one of those who will partake in this process of repopulation. In other words, election is creation, and creation is election. By electing a few, and then taking an ever fewer number from their descendants, God is creating a purified new humanity.³⁹ It is a "survival-of-the-fittest" kind of election theology—a Darwinian construct of salvation that was conceived of before Darwin! Significantly, 4 Ezra employs the term "contest" to describe this competitive process of salvation (7:127). The role of Moses was to introduce a system that would help weed out the worthless majority (v. 129). In this system, however, Moses functions as the convergence point for both Adam and Abraham. The Mosaic system of contest eliminates the corrupt children of Adam, who are responsible for the way this age is (vv. 118-126), and narrows down the process of selection to the final few whose election corresponds to that of Abraham.⁴⁰ Accordingly in 4 Ezra, the introduction of the new creation coincides with the total elimination of the present creation (7:30, 39-42; 9:1-6). Throughout the third dialogue, the author tries to answer objections that could be raised against this position. Among them, the most serious is the question about God's cruelty involved in such a cutthroat procedure of competition.⁴¹ Thus Ezra asks, Why did God then create the mind that can understand (7:62-74)? The human mind is certainly more than mere seeds. One reply is that the disobedient human

³⁹4 Ezra does not explicitly state how any of the nations becomes part of the pure humanity.

⁴⁰Hallbäck, 290, seems to be rather unclear on this point: "Many interpreters have seen this shift from the collective to the individual as a marked reversal to a universalistic orientation in 4 Ezra, indicative of a break with the narrow-minded Jewish particularism. . . . The shift from the collective to the individual complex of problems does not aim at universalizing the salvation; on the contrary, it introduces the Law as a decisive salvation factor. 4 Ezra testifies to an individualization of Judaism, but definitely not to an universalization."

⁴¹Hayman, 54.

mind is a worthless mind (vv. 72-75) that was condemned for destruction at the time of the Fall (v. 11). It is the mercy of God that he is trying to save at least a seed or two with which to repopulate the earth, as he did with Noah and his sons. At the same time, however, 4 Ezra tries to direct the mind of even those who have been elected for salvation to think in nonrational terms that would enable them to think the unthinkable. The ultimate unthinkable is that nothing that accords with the promises of the Bible will happen in this age.⁴²

Conclusion

It appears that the debate, which began with the return from the exile, between the universalist and the particularist concerning election, creation, covenant, and Abraham continued to be weighed throughout the Second Temple period, without coming to an agreement.⁴³ The most striking contribution of the author of 4 Ezra to Judaism appears to be that he persuaded the Jewish thinkers to abandon the traditional covenantal paradigms of universalism and particularism. He accomplished this by urging his people to think the unthinkable: it is possible to forge Israel's new identity with the law at the center without tying it to the notion of conditionality, that obedience to the law ushers in the time of deuteronomistic blessing, namely, the age to come. Moreover, the author cuts loose any earthly ties Israel might have had to Abraham. First, the promise given to Abraham is shown as applying to the coming age, and not to this age. Second, using the idea of competition, election is defined as an ongoing process of creation rather than an event that happened with the ancestors in the distant past. In short, what the author of 4 Ezra wants is to divest Judaism of its former deuteronomistic framework as the basis for holding out hope for this age.

A similar theological tendency can be seen in the Mishnah's way of discussing and defining the laws without heavy reliance on the deuteronomistic framework of curse and blessing, the ancestors, and the end time. Hallbäck states:

[4 Ezra] shows how the problem [of circumstances meeting traditional Jewish interpretations] may be surmounted by emphasizing the Law as a decisive mediator . . . between collective expectations and individual responsibility. And this was exactly what the surviving rabbinical Judaism fell back on. In this way 4 Ezra becomes an almost emblematic symptom of the transition from antique to rabbinical Judaism.⁴⁴

⁴²Perhaps, for this reason, the rest of 4 Ezra is written in a symbolic language about the future. Longenecker, *2 Esdras*, 97: "Uriel's perspective, which Ezra seems later to accept, is marked out by the underlying conviction that God's activity is determined by the divinely pre-ordained timetable of history, and that hope lies not in divine grace in the present but in the dramatic in-breaking of God in the final stages of this age and in the next"; and Tom W. Willett states: "Neither work saw any hope of a reconciliation of their problems in the present, but instead looked to the future when the present world order would be overthrown and retribution would occur" (*The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 162, as summarized by Longenecker, *Eschatology*, 47).

⁴³Longenecker, *Eschatology*, 32, speaks appropriately of "a significant degree of tension among the variety of Jewish groups of that time"; cf. Hallbäck, 291.

⁴⁴Hallbäck, 292.

It is also noteworthy that 4 Ezra's theology bears more than a passing resemblance to Paul's. Fourth Ezra's basic presuppositions about Abraham, Israel, covenant, creation, and election are also found in Galatians and Romans.⁴⁵ In Paul's theology, Abraham stands by himself above history and connects directly to the Messiah (Gal 3:16). Abraham's election had a different purpose than to benefit Israel (Rom 9:8; Gal 3:7-8). And Paul establishes a direct link of death between Adam and Moses (Rom 5:12-14). This raises an important question about who influenced whom. In my judgment, the direction of flow is unquestionably from Paul to 4 Ezra. Not only did Paul write before the destruction of the Temple and 4 Ezra afterwards, but these ideas are completely absent from any of the Second Temple period literature written before Paul,⁴⁶ including Philo, Josephus, and the Dead Sea Scrolls, which we do not have the space to examine here.

Two observations are in order. First, Paul should not be read in the light of 4 Ezra or Rabbinic Judaism, but the other way around. Second, the author of 4 Ezra does not have the intention of "circumcising" Paul's teachings and passing them on to his people. Rather, the author of 4 Ezra wants to characterize and dismiss Paul's ideas as a subset of Jewish universalism.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the author of 4 Ezra seems to want to make Paul's point about Abraham moot by setting Paul's own covenantal argument on its head. The author does this with the notion that the promise given to Abraham belongs to the end time, not to the present age. By rejecting the notion that the end can come through an earthly Messiah and relegating the fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham to an unknown end time, the author of 4 Ezra invalidates any application of the Old Testament prophecies to an event occurring within the framework of history. The net effect of this thinking for Judaism appears to have been the development of its identity and theology quite apart from Abraham, the Messiah, and the end time.

⁴⁵Bartels, 325-326.

⁴⁶See D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, eds. *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 1, *The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament. 2. Reihe, 140 (Tübingen: Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001). Interestingly, in this rather detailed and comprehensive investigation of the Second Temple period literature, no evidence has turned up that any Jewish writer before Paul had entertained the unique ideas found in Paul; contra Bartels, 329; but note on the same page: "Literary dependence of Ezra upon Paul is no question here."

⁴⁷Longenecker, *Eschatology*, 168, states: "Universalism proved, of course, to be the controversial point of Paul's gospel since it appeared to deny the effectiveness of God's election of, and dealings with, the people of Israel as the particular focus of his affection and attention."