

I

Reboot

There is a tradition that is catastrophe.¹

Introduction

Changing the Questions

How can a culture survive destruction and exile? How can it renew itself when its leading institutions have been devastated?

Much has been written about the destruction and rebuilding of the Temple during the Persian period and, more recently, about the exile.² Much has also been written about the end of prophecy and the development of scribal culture during the Second Temple period.³ However, the *linkage* between the

¹ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, “Konvolut N.” ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 473.

² See James M. Scott, *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 56 (Leiden: Brill, 1997); Scott, *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 72 (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

³ See James L. Kugel, “Early Interpretation: The Common Background of Later Forms of Biblical Exegesis,” in *Early Biblical Interpretation*, eds. James L. Kugel and Rowan A. Greer (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), esp. “The Rise of Scripture,” 13–26; Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard

two – between destruction and reconstruction, between exile and return – remains largely undiscussed, and it is precisely this linkage that interests me. To thematize that connection, I must first characterize the questions underlying two contemporary scholarly bodies of literature, making clear that these are *not* the questions with which I am concerned.

One body of literature discusses the historiography of destruction and exile.⁴ How extensive was the destruction, how much of the population was exiled, and how did life continue in Judea? What, in Hans Barstad's words, was the exile?

Here I can quickly clarify where my interest differs from others. Barstad himself distinguishes, so to speak, my interest from his:

University Press, 1998), esp. "The World of Ancient Biblical Interpreters," 1–41; Kugel, "Topics in the History of the Spirituality of the Psalms," in *The History of Jewish Spirituality*, ed. Arthur Green (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 113–144; Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985). For more recent studies, see Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Jed Wyrick, *The Ascension of Authorship: Attribution and Canon Formation in Jewish, Hellenistic, and Christian Traditions*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). See also my article, "The Symbolic Significance of Writing," in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel*, eds. Hindy Najman and Judith Newman, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 83 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 139–173.

⁴ See Charles Cutler Torrey, *The Lives of the Prophets: Greek Text and Translation* (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis, 1946). Torrey's extreme view that there was no exile to speak of, and hence that the return was a myth, has been corrected by the more modest view that the exile was limited to Judah's elite, leaving the agricultural society of Judah economically viable and capable of paying tribute. This is entirely compatible with the cultural destruction that concerns me. See also Hans M. Barstad, *History and the Hebrew Bible: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 61 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 97; Robert P. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Cognitive Dissonance in the Prophetic Traditions of the Old Testament*, A Crossroad Book (New York: Seabury Press, 1979).

I am ... concerned with what the exile was rather than with what it became in later tradition. Indeed, the problem of what the exile became is also a very legitimate scholarly project, not least because this is mainly the description of the phenomenon which we may find in the Bible itself and, which, consequently, has constituted a part of our common cultural heritage to this very day.⁵

Unlike Barstad, then, I am concerned *not* with what the exile was, but with what the exile became in later tradition.

The specificity of my line of inquiry can emerge, however, only by contrast with another contemporary scholarly body of literature. Some scholars, who may also be said to be interested in what became of the exile, consider the end of prophecy, the development of scribal practices, and the growth of biblical traditions. When exactly did prophecy end? How were old traditions redacted and rewritten, and what role did interpretation play? What replaced the prophetic? Where in Second Temple developments may the seeds of early Christianity and rabbinic Judaism be found?⁶

⁵ Barstad, *History and the Hebrew Bible*, 97.

⁶ See my recent essays entitled “‘Sin’ and ‘Torah’ in 4 Ezra,” in *Anthropology and Ethics in Early Judaism and the New Testament – Reciprocal Perceptions*, eds. Matthias Konradt and Esther Schlöpfer, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013); “The Vitality of Scripture within and beyond the Canon,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 43 (2012): 497–518. On Ezra traditions, see e.g., Robert A. Kraft, “‘Ezra’ Materials in Judaism and Christianity,” in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der Neueren Forschung*, II.19.1, eds. Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1979), 119–136; Theodore A. Bergren, “Ezra and Nehemiah Square off in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha,” in *Biblical Figures outside the Bible*, eds. Michael E. Stone and Theodore A. Bergren (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 340–365; Michael A. Stone, “An Introduction to the Esdras Writings,” in *Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and Dead Sea Scrolls*, vol. 1 of *Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and Armenian Studies: Collected Papers* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 305–320. The Baruch literature is surveyed by J. Edward Wright, “Baruch: His Evolution from Scribe to Apocalyptic Seer,” in *Biblical Figures outside the Bible*, eds. Michael E. Stone and Theodore A. Bergren (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 264–289. See also J. Edward Wright’s popular study, *Baruch Ben Neriah: From Biblical Scribe to Apocalyptic Seer* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

If the first group of scholars I mentioned are interested in the continuities that persisted despite the exile, then this second group of scholars is interested in the discontinuities produced by the exile. What died? What was born? Uniting these two groups is the temporal direction of their interest: they view the exile and its aftermath progressively, moving forward from the past to the future by way of the present. My interest, as I hope to make clear shortly, has a more complex temporal structure: I am concerned, to use Barstad's words again, with what the exile became in later tradition – with the ways in which later traditions reimaged the exilic past in order to make the future possible.⁷

Prophetic Ends

Before I seek to justify this temporal complexity, translating it into a specific approach, I need to say more about the second body of literature discussed in the previous section for the idea of an end of prophecy threatens to occlude what interests me here.

Simply put, it is true that prophecy suffers a rupture in late ancient Judaism.⁸ Something ends. Indeed, as Michael Knibb has in effect argued, many texts from the “post-exilic” or “Second Temple” period resist such classifications, as they express a deep awareness of exile and destruction but evince no sense that there has been a return or that the Temple has been rebuilt.⁹ Even texts that recognize renewal give voice to a mixture of joy and sadness, restoration, and loss. But to say that prophecy ended, without further specification of prophecy's place

⁷ See the recent study of Derek Daschke, *City of Ruins: Mourning the Destruction of Jerusalem through Jewish Apocalypse* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

⁸ See my discussion of the Foucauldian notion of *rupture* in my unpublished dissertation, “Authoritative Writing and Interpretation: A Study in the History of Scripture,” PhD diss., Harvard University, 1998.

⁹ Knibb argues that Second Temple Judaism never overcame the first destruction as is demonstrated by exilic and postexilic scriptural traditions as well as the Dead Sea Scrolls. See Michael A. Knibb, “Exile in the Damascus Document,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 25 (1983): 99–117; Knibb, “Temple and Cult in Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphal Writings from before the Common Era,” in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel*, ed. John Day (London New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 401–416.

within the broader economy of divine-human relations, risks an oversimplification.¹⁰ Prophecy was never the only mode in which ancient Israel encountered God. There were always many varieties of what, in order to leave the matter as open as possible, I want to call *divine encounter*. Within the living, covenantal experience, there were ritual, prayer, song, and visionary ascent, as well as sacred writing and sacred reading.¹¹ Indeed, an exclusive focus on the prophet as the divine mouthpiece – signified by the “thus says the Lord” formula – springs no doubt from a far more recent Christian interest in the *ipsissima verba* of God.¹² All the modes of divine encounter suffered rupture. But there was no straightforward cessation of divine encounter. To understand how divine encounter survived, how it was reimagined, and how some modes became more or less central, it is essential to grasp, not only the diversity of divine phenomena, but also the diversity of their *ends*. What did each accomplish that others did not? What made some more readily accessible than others in extreme circumstances?

If the term “the end of prophecy” is to serve my purposes, it is best understood as signifying the ways in which distinct modes of divine encounter persisted, not in spite of destruction and exile, but *as transformed by them*. My question is no longer “When did prophecy cease?” but rather “How were the fragments of divine encounter retrieved under the conditions of a devastating

¹⁰ Already in *Oracles of God*, John Barton understood the variety and complexity of the revelatory that was persistent from the preexilic scriptural traditions and beyond. See *Oracles of God: Perceptions of Ancient Philosophy in Israel after the Exile* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1986), esp. chaps. 1 and 7.

¹¹ See Kugel, “Early Interpretation,” 13–26; Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 1–41; Kugel, “Topics in the History of the Spirituality of the Psalms,” 113–144; Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*. For more recent studies, see Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*; Wyrick, *The Ascension of Authorship*. See also my article, “The Symbolic Significance of Writing,” in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel*, eds. Hindy Najman and Judith Newman (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 139–173.

¹² See my forthcoming discussion of features of the genre of prophetic literature in “The Inheritance of Prophecy in Apocalypse,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*, ed. John J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

destruction and exile that were never overcome?” Ancient texts that express a loss of intimacy with the divine are not merely indicators that something died and, perhaps, that something else was born. The texts are doing the work of returning a culture to its life. This work should be understood as the goal, or telos, of prophecy in the late Second Temple and post-70 CE Jewish context.

There are many noncanonical texts from the period of approximately 300 BCE to 200 CE that continue to retrieve the fragments of divine encounter. This is not through the institution of the prophet, but rather through a number of different established modes of divine encounter. We can identify a variety of ways in which the work of returning a culture to its life manifests itself. I want to mention briefly a few such examples of divine encounter that express and continue the broader claim that is made in many Jewish Second Temple communities, namely that despite the rupture in the institution of the prophet, Jewish interpretive communities continue to claim to have access to the divine. Throughout this book I want to identify and name this phenomenon of continued forms of divine encounter even, and especially, in the face of a destruction that was never overcome. I will call this concept *revelation inflected by destruction*. What I mean by naming this concept is the following. A variety of forms of revelation continues in late Second Temple and post-70 CE Judaism, but the fact that the destruction of the First Temple was never fully overcome, coupled with the fact that the exile from the eighth century onward continues to play an important role in the anticipation of hope and redemption¹³ (another compromising

¹³ As Reinhard G. Kratz has pointed out, the end of the Northern Kingdom (Samaria) 720 BCE stood as the starting point for several biblical interpretations; e.g., the prophecy of doom in the books of the prophets and certain strata of the narrative books. See Kratz, *Prophetenstudien: Kleine Schriften II.*, FAT 74 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); Kratz, *Composition of the Narrative Books of the Old Testament*, trans. John Bowden (London: T&T Clark, 2000), 316–319. The destruction of 587 BCE was a further theological date that was adopted on several occasions (e.g., the Maccabean crisis, the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE). See Odil Hannes Steck, *Israel und das Gewaltsame Geschick der Propheten: Untersuchungen zur Überlieferung*

factor in the way the Second Temple period was described and received), effectively recasts persistent claims about accessing the divine via angelic mediation, dream, symbolic vision, inspired interpretation, and so forth. So although revelation continues, it does so in a manner that is transformed in a variety of ways. The absence of full-blown classical prophecies might suggest that while features of prophecy continue, the phenomenon of prophecy itself is muted (although persistent nevertheless). Destruction is never overcome, but revelation persists. It is the linkage between destruction and revelation that is captured in the phrase “revelation inflected by destruction.”

To illustrate this concept, I use the example of *4 Ezra*, which is a text written shortly after the destruction of the Second Temple and dated roughly to 100 CE.¹⁴ *4 Ezra* was originally composed in either Hebrew or Aramaic. While the Semitic original is now lost,¹⁵ the text survived in various translations

des Deuteronomistischen Geschichtsbildes im Alten Testament, Spätjudentum und Urchristentum, WMANT 23 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1967). Likewise, exile is, of course, reflected later in the book of Tobit or the prayer of Joseph in Qumran.

¹⁴ Even though the terminus ad quem is debated, the composition of *4 Ezra* is usually dated after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. On the historical basis for this dating, see John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, revised ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 196. For an analysis of the internal debate, see Michael Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990). The dating of *4 Ezra* is often linked to *2 Baruch*. For an evaluation of the research regarding the dating of *2 Baruch*, see Gwendolyn B. Saylor, *Have the Promises Failed? A Literary Analysis of 2 Baruch*, SBL Dissertation Series 72 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), 104–110. On the post-destruction social context of *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*, see Bruce W. Longenecker, “Locating *4 Ezra*: A Consideration of Its Social Setting and Functions,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 28 (1997): 271–293; Philip. F. Esler, “The Social Function of *4 Ezra*,” *Journal for the Study of New Testament* 53 (1994): 99–123; J. Edward Wright, “The Social Setting of the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch,” *Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha* 16 (1997): 83–98. For historical and literary context, as well as thematic links between *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*, see Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, chap. 7 “After the Fall: *4 Ezra*, *2 Baruch*, and the Apocalypse of Abraham,” 194–232.

¹⁵ On the original language of the text, see among others Joshua Bloch, “The Esra Apocalypse: Was It Written in Hebrew, Greek or Aramaic?” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 48 (1957/1958): 279–294; Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 10–11; Stanislaw Medala, “The Original Language of *4 Esdras*,” in *Intertestamental*

because it was widely disseminated in Christian circles.¹⁶ The extent of its dissemination is evident from the abundant tertiary and quaternary translations – Syriac and Latin, but also Ethiopic, Armenian, and Arabic, with fragments in Coptic and Georgian as well – that stem from a secondary Greek edition, which is extant only in a few quotations and one papyrus fragment (POxy1010) that preserves 15:57–59.¹⁷ Extensive work has been done to reconstruct the Greek version of 4 *Ezra*. The result of this work is an elaborate model describing the evolution of the text through its translations¹⁸ and demonstrating a significant Christian influence.¹⁹

The Latin tradition of 4 *Ezra* presents an interesting and complex case of textual transmission. As a result of this long process, 4 *Ezra* is associated with two additional texts, namely 5 *Ezra* and 6 *Ezra*, which appear respectively as chapters 1–2 and 15–16 in the Latin text.²⁰ These works have traditionally been described as Christian additions to the original nucleus of 4 *Ezra*, but this position has been rethought, and there are now more nuanced discussions of the religious context for 2 *Baruch* and 4 *Ezra*.

Essays in Honour of Józef Tadeusz Milik, ed. Zdzisław Jan Kapera (Kraków: Enigma Press, 1992), 313–326.

¹⁶ On the transmission and use of such works by Christians, see the essays collected in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, eds. James C. VanderKam and William Adler (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1996).

¹⁷ Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 1–9; Bruce M. Metzger, “The Fourth Book of Ezra,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols., ed. James Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 1:518–519.

¹⁸ Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 3; Theodore A. Bergen, “Christian Influence on the Transmission History of 4, 5, and 6 *Ezra*,” in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, eds. James C. VanderKam and William Adler (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1996), 102–127; Robert A. Kraft, “Towards Assessing the Latin Text of ‘5 *Ezra*: The Christian Connection,” in *Christians among Jews and Gentiles: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, eds. George W. E. Nickelsburg and George W. MacRae (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 158–169.

¹⁹ Bergren, “Christian Influence,” 107–113.

²⁰ Bergren, “Christian Influence,” 113–120, 127. See also Albertus F. J. Klijn, *Die Esra-Apokalypse (IV. Esra), Nach dem lateinischen Text unter Benutzung der anderen Versionen übersetzt und herausgegeben* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992).

For example, Robert Kraft has questioned the identification of 5 *Ezra* as a Christian text.²¹

While these much-needed reevaluations of the text destabilize existing assumptions about religious provenance, other approaches to the transmission history of such materials might be more illuminating. Instead of categorizing these texts in terms that still follow the established dichotomy between “Jewish” and “Christian” traditions, we might ask different kinds of questions: How do these texts expand older materials? What connection do these older materials have to the biblical figure of Ezra or to traditions tied to him? What common concepts and traditions do these Ezra traditions share with the texts attributed to another scribal-prophetic figure, Baruch?

The whole of 2 *Baruch* is extant in one Syriac manuscript datable to the sixth or seventh century.²² The epistle that appears at the end of the work is preserved in some Syriac manuscripts.²³ There is also a full Arabic version translated from the Syriac.²⁴ The surviving versions of 2 *Baruch*, like the surviving versions of 4 *Ezra*, are secondary or tertiary translations. Scholars have

²¹ Kraft, in his “Towards Assessing the Latin Text of ‘5 Ezra,’” addresses the question of 5 *Ezra*’s “Christianity,” saying, “Unless we assume that whenever words and phrases that occur in ‘biblical’ writings are also found elsewhere, the extra-biblical uses must be derivative, there is no way to determine whether a writing such as 5 *Ezra* is dependent on scriptural texts, is used by scriptural texts, or independently reflects the same sort of language that also appears in scriptural texts. In general, the parallels between 5 *Ezra* and early Christian literature are not sufficiently characteristic of Christian interests and activities to be persuasive” (165–166).

²² See Sven Dederer, “Apocalypse of Baruch,” *The Old Testament in Syriac* (Leiden: Brill, 1973); Robert H. Charles, *The Apocalypse of Baruch Translated from the Syriac* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1896); Albertus F. J. Klijn, “2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch,” in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:615–652; Pierre–Maurice Bogaert, *L’Apocalypse Syriaque de Baruch: Introduction, Traduction du Syriaque et Commentaire*, 2 vols. (Paris: Cerf, 1969).

²³ On these manuscript witnesses, see Mark Whitters, *The Epistle of Second Baruch* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 13; Klijn’s “Introduction,” in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:616.

²⁴ Fred Leemhuis, Albertus F. J. Klijn, and G. J. H. van Gelder, *The Arabic Text of the Apocalypse of Baruch: Edited and Translated with a Parallel Translation of the Syriac Text* (Leiden: Brill, 1986).

claimed that the Greek text was translated from a Hebrew – or at the very least a Semitic, that is Hebrew or Aramaic – original.²⁵ The transmission histories of *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*, then, seem to have followed similar trajectories. Like the Ezra materials, Baruch literature shows Christian influence, including striking parallels with ancient Christian literature.²⁶ The consensus, however, is that *2 Baruch* was composed by a Jewish author living in the land of Israel soon after the destruction of the Second Temple.²⁷

Throughout this book I focus on the Syriac version of *4 Ezra* and use a new translation that I have produced together with Robin Darling Young. I have chosen to focus on the Syriac version of *4 Ezra* since it best represents the Semitic-language vocabulary and syntax, or even the conceptual world of *4 Ezra*.

4 Ezra claims to describe a series of divine and angelic encounters experienced by Ezra. Although it is a text composed after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, it claims to be written shortly after the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE. Before embarking on our journey through these encounters, I want to explain why I have identified *4 Ezra* as the exemplary case for study of the concept of revelation inflected by destruction.

²⁵ Albertus F. J. Klijn, “The Sources and Redaction of the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 1 (1970): 65–76.

²⁶ See, among others, Bogaert, *L’Apocalypse Syriaque de Baruch*, 1:477; Saylor, *Have the Promises Failed?*, 159.

²⁷ Matthias Henze, *Jewish Apocalypticism in Late First Century Israel: Reading Second Baruch* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); Henze, “4 Ezra and 2 Baruch: Literary Composition and Oral Performance in First-Century Apocalyptic Literature,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131 (2012): 181–200; Rivka Nir, *The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Idea of Redemption in the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), argues that the work is best understood in the context of early Christian traditions, despite its lack of obviously “Christian” content. Nir’s work points out the intimate interconnectedness of the two traditions and reminds us that lack of obvious Christian references does not automatically make a work Jewish; however her distancing of the work from Jewish traditions is not ultimately convincing. See Matthias Henze, Review of *The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Idea of Redemption in the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch*, Rivka Nir, *Review of Biblical Literature* (2004).