

Losing the Temple and Recovering the Future

This book explores the Jewish community's response to the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. The focus of attention is *4 Ezra*, a text that reboots the past by imaginatively recasting textual and interpretive traditions. Instead of rebuilding the Temple, as Ezra does in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Ezra portrayed in *4 Ezra* argues with an angel about the mystery of God's plan and regives Israel the Torah. Drawing on Walter Benjamin, the imaginative project of *4 Ezra* is analyzed in terms of a constellation composed of elements from pre-destruction traditions. Ezra's struggle and his eventual recommitment to Torah are also understood as providing a model for emulation by ancient Jewish readers. *4 Ezra* is thus what Stanley Cavell calls a perfectionist work. Its specific mission is to guide the formation of Jewish subjects capable of resuming covenantal life in the wake of a destruction that inflects but never erases revelation.

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An Analysis of 4 Ezra

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Preface

This preface begins with three moments:

1. When I was a graduate student, working on writing as a metaphor, my advisor James Kugel gave me a copy of Michael Stone's commentary on *4 Ezra*. Kugel understood my fascination with writing and interpretation, but he also knew that *4 Ezra* was that perfect bridge between biblical and rabbinic Judaism, between writing and orality, between darkness and light. He said that he knew that I would work on *4 Ezra*. Although I did not yet understand how central *4 Ezra* would be in my own thinking and intellectual development, he did. I thank Jim for his vision as my teacher, my mentor, and now, almost twenty years later, my most treasured colleague.
2. In 2008, I gave a lecture in Munich on the concept of exile and revelation. In a spare hour on a Friday afternoon, I decided to run over to the Brandhorst Museum. I wandered to the first floor where I was enveloped by Cy Twombly's *Roses*. I froze in place for about twenty minutes just staring at the paintings. I was literally turned around in an exhibit that was mounted on multiple walls, as was Ezra in the fourth episode of *4 Ezra*. Twombly's *Roses* exhibited the very compassion, trauma, and beauty that Ezra was

taught to comprehend by Zion, the mourning woman, and the angel Uriel. I wrote to Twombly before that summer and he soon after granted me permission to exhibit his *Roses* on the cover and the pages of my own work. It is of tremendous sadness to me that he died before I completed the book, but I dedicate this book to his memory, to the depth of his experience, and to his inspired works. His *Roses* series, with Rilke's poetry inscribed across the canvases, somehow captured the eternal promise and beauty of the Torah in *4 Ezra*. May Cy Twombly's memory continue to shine brightly.

3. I heard Jonathan Lear discuss his book, *Radical Hope*, in March 2009 at the University of Toronto. That lecture, and my subsequent reading of that book, transformed this project immeasurably. Suddenly I understood the fourth and seventh visions. Lear explained Radical Hope in terms of the Crow Indians, but also in terms of a biblical exemplar, Psalm 137. Although he did not develop the deep connections to the trauma of the first destruction in 586 BCE and the second destruction in 70 CE, he did not have to. Lear's characterization of destruction and trauma, his characterization of the need to be silent and then again to imagine, to hope, and to build – even amid a persistent destruction – resonated with the ancient Jewish past about which I was writing and thinking. I acknowledge that profound connection and influence.

Parts of this book have made use of some of my recently published articles:

“Angels at Sinai: Exegesis, Theology and Interpretive Authority,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 7 (2000): 313–333.

“Between Heaven and Earth: Liminal Visions in *4 Ezra*,” in *Other Worlds and Their Relation to This World: Early Jewish and Christian Traditions*, edited by Tobas Nicklas, Joseph Verheyden, and Erik Eynikel, 151–168, Supplements to the *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 143 (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

“Configuring the Text in Biblical Studies,” in *A Teacher for All Generations: Essays in Honor of James C. VanderKam*, 2 vols.,

edited by Eric F. Mason et al., 3–22, Supplements to the *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 153 (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

“How Should We Contextualize Pseudepigrapha? Imitation and Emulation in 4 Ezra,” in *Flores Florentino: Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Early Jewish Studies in Honour of Florentino García Martínez*, edited by Anthony Hilhorst, Émile Puech, and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, 529–536, Supplements to the *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 122 (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

“The Idea of Biblical Genre,” in *Prayer and Poetry in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature: Essays in Honor of Eileen Schuller on the Occasion of Her 65th Birthday*, edited by Jeremy Penner, Ken M. Penner, and Cecilia Wassen, 308–321, Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 98 (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

“The Inheritance of Prophecy in Apocalypse,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*, edited by John J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

“Reconsidering Jubilees: Prophecy and Exemplarity,” in *Enoch and the Mosaic Torah: The Evidence of Jubilees*, edited by Gabrielle Boccaccini and Giovanna Ibbá, 229–243 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

“‘Sin’ and ‘Torah’ in 4 Ezra,” in *Anthropology and Ethics in Early Judaism and the New Testament – Reciprocal Perceptions*, edited by Matthias Konradt and Esther Schlöpfer, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

“Towards a Study of the Uses of the Concept of Wilderness in Ancient Judaism,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 13 (2006): 99–113

“Traditionary Processes and Textual Unity in 4 Ezra,” in *4 Ezra and 2 Baruch: Reconstruction after the Fall*, edited by Matthias Henze, Gabriele Boccaccini, and J. M. Zurawski (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

“The Vitality of Scripture within and beyond the Canon,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 43 (2012): 497–518, edited by Hindy Najman, Itamar Manoff, and Eva Mroczek.

“How to Make Sense of Pseudonymous Attribution: The Cases of 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch,” in *Companion to Biblical Interpretation in Early Judaism*, edited by Matthias Henze, 308–336 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012).

“The Exemplary Protagonist: The Case of *4 Ezra*,” in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the Scriptures*, edited by Eibert Tigchelaar, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium (Leuven: Peeters, in press for 2014).

I thank the publishers of the volumes and journal issues in which these essays appeared for their permission to use parts of these essays in my book.

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My colleague Robin Darling Young and I have coproduced the translation of the Syriac of *4 Ezra* that I have cited in this book. I thank Robin for her partnership and generosity in our work together. I also thank Joseph Amar with whom I began my work on the Syriac of *4 Ezra* in 2004. My students at the University of Notre Dame, the University of Toronto, and Yale University have enriched my own thinking about *4 Ezra* in numerous ways. I co-taught a seminar with Stephen Davis in the spring of 2012 on Reading Practices in Antiquity. The course contributed to my rethinking of my book and I am deeply appreciative of that collaboration. I thank my colleagues who have sharpened my thinking, especially those who have inspired and informed this project through conversation, friendship, and intellectual generosity: Harry Attridge, Joel Baden, Stanley Cavell, Adela Yarbro Collins, John Collins, Stephen Connell, Arnold Davidson, Stephen Davis, Mary Rose D’Angelo, Joseph Fernando, Steven Fraade, Paula Fredriksen, Michael Fried, Sol Goldberg, Oded Irshai, Cathy Jonasson, Robert Kraft, Christina S. Kraus, Timothy Langille, Julia Lauwers, Joshua Levinson, Kathryn Lofton, Dale Martin, Eva Mroczek, Judith Holt Newman, Irene Peirano, Benjamin Pollock, Maurice Samuels, Konrad Schmid, Ryan Stoner, Harry [Skip] Stout, Loren Stuckenbruck, Rina Talgam, Galina Vaisman, James VanderKam, and Kirk Wetters.

Some colleagues read through and commented on the manuscript. I thank them now for their generosity and friendship and for their detailed comments and corrections: Robert Brody,

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For the past decade my life has been transformed each day by my two lights: Marianna and Ezra. They have each taught me how to hope again. Paul Franks helped shape the conceptual framework and never tired of critiquing and pushing me to sharpen my own thinking and writing. He has been with me during each stage of my work on *4 Ezra*. It is to Paul that I dedicate this book. He is my strength and my radical hope.