AN INTERTESTAMENTAL APOCALYPSE: THE BOOK OF FOUR EZRA

Abstract

Book 4 Ezra is a magnificent literary production of Judaic origin. Here we find a profound moral vision and a highly literary way of thinking. The book is a historical apocalypse, reflecting the crisis, that will lead to the destruction of the Temple by the army of the Roman general Titus. It is however an anthropological apocalypse because it speaks of man's destiny in a difficult world. In the book, we have a series of seven visions, which are divided into two parts: the first three visions consist of a threefold dialogue of Ezra with the angel Uriel, and the other four visions comprise the true apocalyptic part – the woman in mourning, the vulture with twelve wings and three heads, The Son of God and Ezra, the successor of Moses. Ezra's Apocalypse highlights the important role of fasting and prayer, which are true drivers of moral progress. The author of the book affirms the existence of two worlds, willed by God. At the end of this world, the Messiah will come and establish a new kingdom. The law is presented as a guide and as a guardian. Ezra convincingly asserts the existence and presence of divine mercy in this world. The idea of a mediator, resurrected and full of glory, has Christian connotations.

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Introduction

Old Testament Apocrypha constitutes a vast literature comprising works written in various places and over a rather long period of time. In order for a book to be included in this virtual collection, the essential prerequisite is that the pseudepi-

graph author should be a known Old Testament character and that the theme tackled therein should be a typically Jewish one. The authenticity of such authors has been challenged since ancient times. Apocrypha is acknowledged as pseudepigrapha with varied content. Some of them – such as 4 Ezra – are apocalyptic writings. The word 'apocalypse' meant 'to remove the veil', so 'revelation' in a literal sense. Whereas Greeks conceived of time as cyclical, the man of the Scriptures envisaged it as linear, thus believing that history advances towards an end. A man of God, i.e. a prophet, intervenes within history, revealing to his fellow men God's plan which will come to pass. God will establish His kingdom in this world definitively. However, the day when that is to happen remains unknown, as a 'veil' conceals the end of history from the eyes of men.

In times of crisis, the prophet knows that, in order to preserve hope, one needs more than mere words. One needs something mysterious, that ordinary people are not privy to. Thus, prophecy becomes an apocalypse. As such, the authors of such books use symbolic language, fraught with imagery, which is far more suggestive than abstract words. One resorts to pseudonyms, thus placing writing under the patronage of a famous figure from the past. Apocalypses also use encrypted language, abundant in colours, numbers, and traditional imagery. They are generally pessimistic. Their world is a negative one, ruled by Satan. History acquires a deterministic meaning. Everything has been written and decided in the heavenly books.

Among the Old Testament religious personalities featured as 'authors' of intertestamental writings with apocalyptic content, Ezra stands out in particular. He was a priest, a scholar and a religious reformer. The Bible describes him as *'a scribe well-versed in the Law of Moses'* (1 Ezra 7:6a). Rabbinical tradition holds Ezra in especially high regard, considering him a *'second Moses'* when it comes to his knowledge of the Torah. The author of 4 Ezra, implicitly Ezra himself, addresses God, lamenting that the Law of Moses is fading away (4 Ezra 14:21) and that the exiled Jews have not only lost their motherland but also their spiritual values. This is why God gives Ezra a full cup to drink (4 Ezra 14:39), so that he may be able to write things to be made known to people and thus prevent them from losing their way.

Biblical Literature Attributed to Ezra

There are several Biblical books, both canonical and non-canonical attributed to the name of Ezra (Chirilă 2018, 364-5).

The Book of 1 Ezra contains 10 chapters and starts by presenting the early years

of the Jewish Restoration (Bowker 1999, 160-1). The Edict of Cyrus authorised the return of the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem and the commencement of the rebuilding of the Temple. The inhabitants of Samaria and its surroundings opposed these works, yet the Temple was inaugurated in 516 BC. Ezra came to Jerusalem and officially promulgated the Torah as the king's law after the scribe priest had demanded the dissolution of intermarriages between Jews and Gentile women. This action is dated 458 BC. The book of 1 Ezra is included under this same title in the Latin translation and as 'Ezra B' in the Septuagint (Paul 2010, 38).

The Book of 2 Ezra, or Nehemiah, (1-13) comprises the activity of Nehemiah, who worked on rebuilding the towers of the city of Jerusalem and solving various social and religious issues. He travelled to Jerusalem twice, from 445 onwards (Abadie & de Martin de Viviès 2017, 17). The Book of 2 Ezra is included under that same title in the Latin translation, as well as in the Septuagint (Ezra C), while, in the Hebrew Bible, it appears as 'Nehemiah'.

The Book of 3 Ezra (called Ezra A in the Septuagint) (Langlois 2009, 823) recounts the return to Jerusalem of the exiled Jews of Babylon, following the Edict of Cyrus. Then follows an account of the question discussed at the court of Darius as to which of the following was the most powerful in the world: wine, the king, or women, but, in the end, it was the truth that stood out as the most powerful. The Jews re-established the cult in Jerusalem, built an altar and attended to the issues raised by neighbouring peoples. Having completed the work on the Temple, they inaugurated it and celebrated the Passover (Chirilă 2018, 780-7). The book is called '3 Ezra' in the Latin version, being considered Deuteronomistic, and 'Ezra A' in Greek, where it is considered Anagignoskomena (= good to read) (Langlois 2009, 822).

The Book of 4 Ezra was the most widespread and most widely used non-biblical Jewish writing among early Christian communities (Paul 1975, 66). Its kinship with the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch (Dupont-Sommer et Philonenko 1987, CVII-CXXII) is unanimously acknowledged. The book dates back to the late first century of the Christian era and the author is a Pharisee, who did not necessarily live in Palestine. This apocalypse is actually limited to chapters 3-14 of the book.

The Book of 5 Ezra is nothing other than chapters 1-2 of 4 Ezra, as it is of Christian origin. A classic theology of substitution is developed here: Israel was abandoned by the Lord in favour of the new people, the Christian people (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 51).

The Book of 6 Ezra consists of two chapters (15 and 16) which conclude the book of 4 Ezra. This appendix is of Christian origin (Langlois 2009, 827). A conflict between the Persians and the Romans in the 3rd century AD is evoked here, which also serves as a clue as to the date when the book was written (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 51). The conflict results in depopulated territories and the author asks vigilance of the recipients, in a manner similar to 1 Cor. 7,29-31 (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 51-2).

Other writings which have circulated under the name of Ezra are the following: the Greek Apocalypse of Ezra, the Vision of the Blessed Ezra (in Latin), and the Questions of Ezra (in Armenian) (Caquot et Philonenko 1987, CXI). The presence of the book in the Vulgate ensured its certain dissemination. The Latin translation, similarly to some Eastern versions, was based on a Greek text, which appears to have been a translation of a Semitic (probably Hebrew) original text.

The Contents of the Book

The Book of 4 Ezra consists of three parts:

- a prologue (1-2)
- a series of seven visions (3-14)
- an epilogue (15-16) (Caquot et Philonenko 1987, CXI-CXII).

The prologue (1-2) presents Ezra and his call to mission. God reveals to him the message that he is to make known to the people. The ungodly will be punished, while the righteous will be saved. Rejected by Israel, Ezra turns his attention to the pagan world. He then contemplates in a vision a crowd that praises the Lord and receives crowns and laurels from the Son of God (TOB 2010, 2017-20).

The second part of the book constitutes the actual Apocalypse of Ezra (3-14), comprising seven visions. In reality, it is only the fourth, fifth, and sixth ones that can strictly speak, and qualify as 'visions' (Langlois 2009, 827).

The first three parts of the book contain a series of questions and answers, which will find their solution in the visions to come. The fictional framework, chosen by the author, includes 'conversations' and 'visions'. The conversations take place in Ezra's room, while the visions occur outdoors, outside his abode (4 Ezra 9:26; 12:51) (Geoltrain 1987, 1440, 1454). Ezra receives an angel whom he questions about current religious matters. The angel reveals to him certain mysteries about sin, the end of the world, and the fate of the chosen. The first three visions have a similar structure: an introduction, Ezra's prayer and dialogue with the angel, revelations, predictions, and a conclusion

(Stone 1990, VII). Ezra's conversations with the angel are preceded by fasting (4 Ezra 5:20; 6:35) (Geoltrain 1987, 1440-654). The 'visions' are prepared by techniques conducive to ecstasy: chewing grass and flowers (4 Ezra 9:24; 12:51).

The religious way of thinking underlying the 'conversations' is in line with the books of Job and Ecclesiastes, while the 'visions' derive from Daniel and 1 Enoch (Caquot et Philonenko 1987, CXII). The 'conversations' concern the fate of Israel and the destiny of every man in general. Ezra's questions are caused by the national catastrophe that Israel went through: *'Our sanctuary is forsaken, the altar is overthrown, our Temple destroyed'* (4 Ezra 10:21).

Why did God choose one single people out of all the peoples only to then scatter them among the Gentiles? Ezra does but expresses his own anxieties here. He does not start a theological debate, where he might formulate a thesis to condemn, but lets the angel do so. He would like to find a meaning to the anxiety pervading the community of believers that he himself is a part of.

The events of AD 70 are foreshadowed by the ones in 587 BC, which provide the historical 'typology' of the event.

The first vision (3:4-5:20), which might more fittingly be called a revelation, begins with Ezra's long lamentation (34-36). Wondering about the origin of evil, he provides an overview of the history of Israel, from the Patriarchs to the Exodus, during which time, in spite of all the gifts of the Law, the nature of man did not change for the better (3:20-22) (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 36). Pagans are great sinners as well. For the author, 'Babylon' (Rome) is far more sinful than Jerusalem. So it is natural for one to wonder: why are the pagans the ones ruling? The answer to the question will be revealed in the dialogue with the angel Uriel (*'God is my enlightenment'*) (Caquot 1987, 481, 495, 500), whose role is to clarify the recipient's conundrums. In fact, Uriel makes Ezra admit to his own limitations: *'Weigh me the weight of fire, or measure the wind, or call back the day that is past'* (4:5) (Geoltrain 1987, 1402). Obviously, Ezra does not know the answers. How could he then understand the will of the Most High, if he is unable to know what is happening on earth? Nevertheless, Ezra has both the wisdom and the ability to judge certain circumstances correctly. He does not demand to know the divine mysteries, but only the reason why Israel is under the dominion of the ungodly (Geoltrain 1987:1404). The angel's answer is the mere statement that the evil found in Adam continues to manifest an evil potentiality in humans. Ezra is eager to see the end of the oppression of his people. The Archangel Jeremiel (Caquot 1987, 471)

shows that deliverance will not come until the ranks of the righteous have been filled. In other words, history follows the course that God has set for it (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 37). The omens of the end of the world, according to 4 Ezra, would be the abandonment of truth and faith, the expansion of injustice, the stars changing their purpose, a generalised imbalance in nature, and universal despair.

The second 'vision' (5:20-6:34). The first part of this section presents the way in which the people of Israel were chosen (5,20-30). These singular people were selected by God from among all the nations, yet now the former is ruled over by the latter. If God has an issue with His people, why does He not take it up directly with them? The dialogue with the angel takes the same turn as in the first vision. One must admit that Ezra has his limits and is not very knowledgeable. How could he possibly understand the divine mysteries? The debate veers towards a recurring question in apocalyptic literature: what will happen to those who died before the day of judgment? (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 38) The image described by the angel is that of a circle, each man being thus positioned at the same distance from the Judgment, just like any point on a circle is at the same distance from the centre (4 Ezra 5:42) (Geoltrain, 1411). The earth is compared to a woman, who is unable to give birth to ten children at the same time but can only do it one by one. The same is true for the generations that live on earth. The earth itself is like an elderly mother, whose children are increasingly listless. Before specifying the end of the world, the text evokes a time of Esau (= Rome) and a time of Jacob (= Israel), which is soon to come. The author believes that the end of the Roman Empire will be followed by the rule of Israel over the Gentiles. In answer to Ezra's question, the angel will add to the list of signs portending the end of the world:

- the books of judgement will be opened and seen by all
- premature and precocious children will be born
- agricultural land will become barren
- seed reserves will suddenly disappear
- trumpets will be heard (the classic theme in Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature Mt 24:31; 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Is 4:16; Rev 8, etc.)
- friends will become enemies (Geoltrain 1987, 1413u).

The third 'vision' (6:35-9:2). Following preparations similar to the ones for the previous vision – seven days of fasting – Ezra resumed his dialogue with the Lord via the angel. The first part of this vision is dedicated to creation (6:35-39)

(Geoltrain 1987, 1415-17). The author repeats the great themes of Genesis 1, in order to evoke the act of creation, while also making a few changes. In 6:47, he specifies that the seas occupy only one-seventh of the earth's surface. He gives special importance to the creation of the mythical monsters Behemoth and Leviathan, suggesting that these fantastic beasts will serve as the main course at the future feast (Denis et al. 2000, 821u). The author insists on the fact that the world was created for the benefit of Israel and only for Israel (6:55). He shows deep contempt for the pagans (6:56). As such, the dominion of the Gentiles over Israel appears incomprehensible. The humiliation of Israel and their journey along the narrow path will lead the chosen people to salvation (7:12-14). An original theme is tackled after that, namely that of a temporary messianic kingdom (7:28-29) (Geoltrain 1987, 1420).

4 Ezra 7:29 explicitly evokes the death of the Messiah, stating that He obeys the common law, for all who have a human soul shall die (Geoltrain 1987, 1420). The death of the Messiah marks the beginning of the great eschatological stages: the death of all the living and the judgment of all men, who will go either into the fiery pit of Gehenna or to the garden of Eden. In reality, it appears that only the Gentiles will be the ones to fill Gehenna (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 40). The angel tells Ezra that everything that is rare is also precious. The righteous are precious in the eyes of the Lord and He rejoices in their salvation (7:49-58) (Geoltrain 1987, 1423). The ungodly are of no value (4 Ezra 7:61). According to 4 Ezra 7:81-87, the souls of the ungodly will be judged in seven stages, which will take seven days (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 41).

The third vision expounds on the decline of the soul in an entirely original and detailed fashion. The souls of the righteous shall go to God, while the souls of the ungodly shall meet with a sinister fate. Given that everything has been decided, is it still possible to pray for the dead? Ezra believes that the righteous can pray for sinners, especially for those who were their nearest (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 40-1). However, the answer is categorical: judgment is irrevocable; no one can intervene on behalf of anyone (4 Ezra 7:105) (Geoltrain 1987:1428). Ezra challenges this answer, invoking biblical arguments: Abraham interceded for the inhabitants of Sodom (Gn 18:26) and so did Moses for the sinful Israelites (Ex 32:30), and the list can go on (Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, Elijah, Ezekiel...). Yet, in this case, one should bear in mind that this is eschatological time, which works according to a completely different logic. Ezra considers himself a sinner because of the Adamic sin (Geoltrain 1987, 1429). The angel reminds him that abiding by the law of Moses saves him from the fate

of the ungodly. In spite of what has been said, Ezra utters a long intercessory prayer for Israel (8:20-36) (Geoltrain 1987, 1433). Yet nothing can move his interlocutor (8:51,55). Few people will be saved, the equivalent of a single grape out of a cluster, or a small tree out of a large forest.

The fourth vision (9:26-10:59). The first three visions are not, strictly speaking, 'visions', in the sense of the apocalyptic literary genre of a mysterious phantasm followed by an interpretation. Rather, they are long conversations with the Lord through an angel. The fourth vision is the one that marks the debut of the classic form of the genre. In this case, the preparations are a lot more mysterious, without involving any fasting (9:23-25) (Geoltrain 1987, 1439-40). The food he eats is strictly vegetarian - grass, flowers - from the fields, far from the city. This echoes Adam's own food. Flowers might facilitate a vision. Foregoing fasting in the preparatory stage might mean that the time of mourning has passed, yet the time of joy - marked by meat and wine - has not arrived yet. The vision revolves around a woman dressed in mourning clothes (torn garments and ashes on her body), who is sobbing. When asked by Ezra what the cause of her suffering is, she recounts her sorrow: she was barren for 30 years, then gave birth to a son, who died on his wedding day (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 44). Ezra rebukes the woman, reminding her that Jerusalem, along with the entire country, has lost countless children. He bids her to be comforted by Zion (10:20). The desolate widow turns into a dazzling woman who suddenly transforms into a city that rises under his eyes. Turning to the angel that serves as his interpreter, he learns that the woman represents Zion. This second part of the vision foreshadows the future glory of Jerusalem.

The fifth vision (11:1-12:51). This vision is directly linked to the previous one and occurs during a night dream. It features the image of an eagle with twelve wings and three heads, of which the middle one is much larger than the other two (Langlois 2009, 827). Furthermore, its wings move in a peculiar way, as new ones appear, while others disappear, and some reign over the earth (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 45-6). A roaring lion addresses the eagle, announcing its immediate disappearance. The eagle is actually the fourth kingdom in the vision of Daniel (4 Ezra 12:11; Dn 7:7-8). The eagle's wings and heads are the various kings succeeding one another, while the lion represents the Davidic Messiah (Geoltrain 1987, 1452). The international situation in the time of 4 Ezra was different from the one in the time of Daniel. The Greeks made way for the Romans, so the eagle represents the latter. In connection with the

book of Daniel, the author proposes an update: the vision remains the same, yet the interpretation changes (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 47).

The sixth vision (13:1-58). The context of this vision is related to Daniel 7. In the book of Daniel, the striking figure is that of a being, such as the son of man, who comes on the clouds of heaven and has power over the whole of the earth. In 4 Ezra, a man is seen coming out of the sea and flying on the clouds of heaven. A crowd of people from all over the world gather to attack him. However, they will be destroyed before any battle begins (Langlois 2009, 828). The man then calls another peaceful crowd of happy and sad people. This man is actually the Son of God (12:32), who destroys the ungodly nations and gathers the ten tribes of Israel that were taken captive by the Assyrians. The interpretation echoes a legendary account according to which the exiles will remain hidden until the end of the world in a region located at the springs of the Euphrates (cf. Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, XI, 133). The Messiah comes out of the water, out of the sea. The sea does not symbolise the deeds of evil, but the hidden, mysterious, unfathomable nature of the Messiah. Nevertheless, the identity of 'those that be with him' (13:52) remains a mystery: Enoch? Elijah? or the angels?

The seventh vision (14:1-5). The last vision explicitly places Ezra in the position of Moses' successor. The scribe is called by God to a forty-day mission and carries with him many writing tablets. He will be accompanied by five companions, whose names are encountered in biblical literature (Sareas = Seraiah in Ezra 7,1; Dabrias = Dibri in Lev. 24,11; Shelemiah in Ezra 10:39; Ethan in 1 Chr 2:6 and Aziel (uncertain) in 1 Chr 4:3) (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 50). Ezra comes to a field full of flowers, where he imbibes a drink that makes him wise. For forty days, Ezra will speak continuously, while his five companions will endeavour to write down his words (Geoltrain 1987, 1464). Ezra manages to write 94 books (14:45-47). The end of the book describes Ezra's ascension to heaven, in fulfilment of that which was announced in 14:9.

Christian Amendments

The Book of 5 Ezra (4 Ezra 1-2). This book is actually a Christian introduction to the Jewish 'apocalypse' – 4 Ezra – intended to guide the overall reading. The author begins by detailing Ezra's genealogy, drawing inspiration from 3 Ezra 8:2, 1 Ezra 7:1-5, and 1 Chr 6:1-14. Ezra's mission is strictly prophetic. He will have to condemn the sin of Israel (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 51). The author then develops a classic theology of substitution. Israel is forsaken by the Lord, Who will choose a new people (1:33-37).

These new people will enjoy all the promises made to Israel: 'Thus says the Lord onto Ezra: "Proclaim to my people that I will give them the kingdom of Jerusalem, which I promised to Israel. I will take their glory for myself and give them the eternal dwelling places which I had prepared for them"' (2:10-11) (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 51). Ezra's mission is aimed at the Gentiles, whom he is to urge to receive and obey their shepherd (cf. Jn 10:11). The introductory part ends with a vision in which a young man crowns the chosen ones (an innumerable crowd similar to Rev 7:9) and that man is none other than the Son of God Himself.

The Sixth Book of Ezra (4 Ezra 15-16). The Christian author resumes his discourse to provide the epilogue of the book. The core of it is the announcement of violent conflicts in the land of the Assyrians, the battle between the peoples of the 'Arab dragon' (a confederation of tribes around Palmyra) and the Carmanians/ Carmonians (the Sassanid Persians) (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 51). This might be an evocation of a conflict between the Romans and the Persians of Shapur I (240-273), which suggests that this appendix was drafted in the late 3rd century AD. The conflict draws Babylon (i.e. Rome) into a vast scene of the judgement of the Gentiles (15:46-16:16). Wars leave behind a depopulated land and the author asks for increased vigilance of the recipients (16:41-45). Ezra urges his interlocutors to admit their sins in order to escape the final judgment.

Other Works Attributed to Ezra

The literature attributed to Ezra has been well-received in the Christian world. Various quotations from 4 Ezra are found in patristic literature – the Apostolic Constitutions, Clement of Alexandria, etc.

The Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Bible, also included 4 Ezra, even after the Council of Trent. This ensured its wide dissemination within the Western Christian world. 4 Ezra is also included in the Slavic Bibles. There are further works attributed to Ezra:

- the Greek Apocalypse of Ezra (written in Greek during the first Christian millennium)
- the Vision of Ezra, written in Latin under the title *Visio Beati Ezdrae* (9th-11th century)
- the Apocalypse of Sedrach (in Greek, prior to the 11th century)
- the Questions of Ezra (in Armenian, inspired by 4 Ezra) (Abadie et de

M. de Viviès 2017, 52)

- the Revelations of Ezra (in Latin, 9th century).

All these writings testify to the scribe's popularity as a pseudonym. A somewhat anecdotal account mentions that, in 1492, Christopher Columbus, who was in need of sponsors for the expedition he was preparing, resorted to 4 Ezra. In order to convince the Spanish sovereigns of the existence of yet unexploited lands, he does not hesitate to quote from the book of 4 Ezra 6:42: 'On the third day, you shall command the waters to gather into the seventh part of the earth. You will drain and preserve the other six parts, so that they may become useful places, sown and planted' (Geoltrain 1987, 1416). According to this verse, the oceans only make up the seventh part of the planet. And, given their immensity, there are still many stable places to be discovered.

The Origin and Construction of the Book

The Book of 4 Ezra has been preserved in its entirety only in a few Latin sources. The Latin version has its origins in the Greek one, as do the other versions: Syriac, Armenian, Ethiopian, Georgian, Arabic, and Coptic. There are further versions (one in Armenian and another in Georgian) that stem from the Latin one (Langlois 2009, 829). Chapters 1-2 and 15-26 are absent from the Eastern versions. They only contain the Apocalypse of Ezra (ch. 3-14). It is only the Latin version and some versions derived from it, such as the Armenian one, that retains the two sections. In some manuscripts, the two sections appear as 2 Ezra and 5 Ezra (Metzger 1983, 517-559). The first section that speaks of the Son of God shows that the author is familiar with the New Testament. It is believed to have been drafted in the 2nd century AD by a Christian author (Myers 1995). The last part, which alludes to events that may have taken place in the 3rd century AD, may have been compiled at the end of that century.

The writing of the Apocalypse of Ezra, with its seven visions, containing frequent allusions to the destruction of Jerusalem, may be dated to the late 1st century or the early 2nd century AD (Langlois 2009, 829). The fifth vision (4 Ezra 11-12), that of the Eagle, often alludes to the political events that are dated to the reign of Domitian (81-96). Based on an analysis of the syntax and vocabulary of the book, most specialists have determined that the original language of the Apocalypse of Ezra was a Semitic one, either Hebrew or Aramaic (Langlois 2009, 830).

Conclusions

The author of 4 Ezra behaves in the spirit of chapter 8 of the book of Nehemiah, in which Ezra reads from the Book of the Law before the people, by the Water Gate in the city of Jerusalem. The drink that Ezra consumes here (4 Ezra 14:3) explicitly reveals the typology that makes Ezra a new Moses. After the text of the Law was burned in the Temple fire of 586, he is tasked with receiving the text of the mysterious writings which will be intended only for the initiated.

This book might also be a response to the conclusion of the Hebrew biblical canon, as decided by the Council of Jamnia (90-100 AD).

The author of 4 Ezra defends with conviction the legitimacy of apocryphal and apocalyptic literature.

Many theological themes are found in this book: the notion of the 'wicked heart', the title of 'Son' – given to the Messiah, and the importance of knowledge. Essene ideas, such as enlightenment, asceticism, and esotericism, often come up in the book.

Christian religious communities after AD 70 often invoke the great figures of the biblical past, looking up to them as role models.

As the faithful, legitimate heirs, successors, and companions of Ezra, the scribes are the ones inspired to convey to the Church a brilliant and profound work that was rejected by the Synagogue.

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