

CHAPTER FOUR

THE APOCALYPTIC SOLUTION OF THE VISIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

The wisdom debate between Ezra and Uriel comes to an end, though not a conclusion, with the end of the protracted third dialogue. The lament that introduces the fourth episode was discussed at the end of the previous chapter because it is more closely related to the dialogues than to the visions. At the conclusion of that lament, Ezra notices a mourning woman on his right, and engages her in dialogue. Unbeknownst to Ezra, this is no ordinary woman but a vision of the heavenly Zion, whose identity is revealed only at the end of their conversation, when she is suddenly transformed before his eyes into a splendid city. Uriel then interprets the symbolism of the vision, which includes the woman's conversation with Ezra. Ezra's dialogue with the mourning woman thus serves as a bridge between the dialogues with Uriel and the more typically apocalyptic symbolic dream-visions, in which Uriel takes on the role of *angelus interpretis*.¹

¹ Frances Flannery-Dailey has argued that the first six episodes of 4 Ezra all contain dreams; only the epilogue is a fully "waking revelation." The dreams in the dialogues are message-dreams, the fourth episode contains a message-dream that transforms into a symbolic dream, and the fifth and sixth episodes consist of symbolic dreams and their interpretations. See her *Dreamers, Scribes and Priests: Jewish Dreams in the Hellenistic and Roman Eras* (JSJSup 90; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 212–20.

While it is of course true that the first dialogue concludes with a notice that Ezra awoke (5:14), Flannery-Dailey assumes that the entire dialogue (including Ezra's lament) was a dream, and then argues that the second and third dialogues are also dreams, based on structural similarities to the first dialogue and on the fact that Uriel commands Ezra to rise (which she equates with waking) once in the second dialogue (6:13) and once in the third (7:2). The command to rise occurs before the end of the second dialogue, however, and immediately after Ezra's introductory lament in the third dialogue, before Uriel says anything else. Since Flannery-Dailey equates the command to stand with Ezra's waking, the third "message dream" must then consist entirely of Ezra's own words in his lament! She interprets the decreasing length of Ezra's first three dreams as evidence of Ezra's "progression" in the dialogues: "He has been transformed from *active dream participant* in the first dream, to a *passive recipient of waking revelation* in the second dream, to an *active participant of waking revelation* in the third dream" (ibid., 216, emphasis hers). She concludes that the author of 4 Ezra "appears to rank waking

The two dream-visions that follow the pivotal fourth episode, the visions of the Eagle and the Man from the Sea, both draw extensively upon the book of Daniel, especially Daniel 7. In fact, the exegetical relationship of the Eagle vision to Daniel is made explicit at the beginning of its interpretation: “The eagle that you saw coming up from the sea is the fourth kingdom that appeared in a vision to your brother Daniel. But it was not explained to him as I now explain it to you” (12:11–12, Stone’s translation). Just as the author used allusions to Job to draw attention to the genre of the dialogues (see chapter III, sections 1 and 2, above), so he underscores the shift to the genre of interpreted symbolic visions by acknowledging his debt to Daniel. By reinterpreting Daniel 7 such that the “fourth kingdom” (Dan 7:23) is Rome, the author of 4 Ezra placed himself in the same relation to Daniel as the author of Daniel stood to Jeremiah when he interpreted the “seventy years” of the exile (Jer 25:11–12) to mean “seventy weeks” of years (Dan 9:2, 24–27).²

The visions of the Eagle and the Man from the Sea portray, in two different scenarios, the triumph of Israel over its enemies through the agency of the Messiah. The vision of the Man from the Sea also describes the ingathering of the lost tribes to the land of Israel, while the vision of Mourning Woman develops the motif of the revelation of the heavenly Zion on earth in the messianic age. Thus the eschatology of the visions is primarily a national one, deriving ultimately from prophetic traditions, in contrast to Uriel’s focus on individual salvation in the dialogues, which derives from an eschatological wisdom background, as I argued in the previous chapter. The visions represent a typically apocalyptic theology, in that they emphasize that the Most High is in control of human history and will act soon to bring an end to the suffering of his chosen people in this world. The type of salvation they envision is corporate and entirely dependent on divine initiative, whereas the few who will be saved in the final judgment, according to Uriel, will have earned their reward by their own striving to live in accordance with the law.

revelation higher” than dream revelation, but does not explain why he then chose the form of symbolic dreams for the fourth, fifth and sixth episodes.

² On the reinterpretation of Jer 25:11–2 in Daniel 9:24–27, see Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 482–95, 507–509; John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 353–59.