CHAPTER ONE

2BARUCH AND THE LAND

This study will explore the conception of Israel’s Land as a redemptive category in the second century c.e. pseudepigraphon 2Baruch. According to the current scholarly consensus, the Land had either been rejected or become of minor importance to 2Baruch. In this study I will discuss the presuppositions behind this consensus with regard to the spatial epistemology it assumes.

2Baruch: Destruction and Consolation

2Baruch is commonly described as a Jewish apocalyptical and eschatological text composed in Palestine in response to the destruction of the Second Temple (70 c.e.). 2Baruch presents itself as “The Apocalypse of Baruch son of Neriah.” The text thus invokes the authority of the famous scribe of the prophet Jeremiah, and sets the plot of its frame narrative in the last part of Baruch’s life at the very end of the First Temple period. It is generally acknowledged, however, that 2Baruch uses this narrative background to discuss the reactions to the destruction of the Second Temple and the subsequent annihilation of the centre of Jewish power and worship in the first centuries c.e.

2Baruch consists of several ordered series of narrations, prayers and laments, apocalyptic visions or revelatory dialogues with their respective interpretations, followed by public addresses and speeches. In addition, the last ten chapters of 2Baruch (78–87) include an epistle, the so-called Epistola Baruch. The plot of the frame narrative, as well as the ongoing dialogue between God and Baruch, provides 2Baruch with a unified structure. The dialogue between God and Baruch ensures Baruch’s gradual acceptance of the current catastrophe and gives him a growing understanding of God’s plan for the redemption of Israel. The ongoing dialogue between God and Baruch gradually convinces Baruch that the crisis is part of God’s master plan: the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, and the dispersion of the wicked tribes signal that the end of the world is approaching. Due to the universal extent
of godlessness, the entire corruptible world will be destroyed. God tells Baruch not to grieve over the current situation of Israel, since the catastrophes he is witnessing are all necessary steps towards Israel’s final redemption. Those who remain obedient to God and his Law will outlive the afflictions of the corruptible world and will achieve redemption, first in the Messianic era and then in the incorruptible other world together with the righteous among the resurrected dead. Consoled by the words of God, Baruch urges the small group of followers who are with him to study and live according to the Law and to keep up their hopes for that other world. As long as Israel obeys the commandments, God will eventually keep his promises in accordance with the covenant of the patriarchs. During the last days of his life, Baruch prepares his followers for the coming judgement and the subsequent redemption of the righteous, and he writes letters\(^1\) to the dispersed tribes, urging them to return to righteousness and thus take part in the coming bliss.

Consoling Baruch: The Covenant, the Other World, and the Land

The preceding summary outline of 2 Baruch suggested the centrality of the Law, the covenant and the notion of the two worlds to the text. Several scholars have rightfully suggested that obedience to the Law and the commandments is the main message of 2 Baruch, since a life lived according to the Law will secure resistance to affliction in the corruptible world, a positive outcome to God’s judgement and subsequently redemption in the other world.\(^2\) In 2 Baruch, obedience to the Law is intimately connected to covenantal faithfulness.\(^3\) Israel is both obliged

\(^1\) One of them is presented as the Epistola Baruch (78–87), the other is just mentioned briefly (77:19).
