THOSE WHO KNOW AND THOSE WHO DON’T: MYSTERY,
INSTRUCTION, AND KNOWLEDGE IN 2 BARUCH

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—For my favourite teacher—

The apocalyptic writing 2 Baruch begins, “The Revelations of Baruch son of Neriah.”¹ This introductory line of the Syriac manuscript provides a precise description of the content of the book that follows: 2 Baruch consists of a series of ordered episodes containing Baruch’s apocalyptic visions or revelatory dialogs with God, their respective interpretation, followed by Baruch’s instruction of his audiences based on his new insights.² Together, these episodes constitute the revelation of the mystery,³ i.e., God’s redemptive, eschatological, plan revealed to Baruch in a time of crisis.⁴

2 Baruch was in all probability produced by a Jewish milieu in Palestine in the decades after the fall of the second Jerusalem temple in 70 C.E. Most scholars today understand the work as a response to that destruction and as a deliberation over the situation of Jewish societies following

¹ 2 Baruch survives in a single complete Syriac witness, the so-called Codex Ambrosianus, which is a sixth or seventh century Bible manuscript. This remains the only known complete witness to the work to date. A fourth or fifth century Greek fragment containing 2 Bar. 12:1–13:2 and 13:31–14:3 was discovered in the rich finds of the Egyptian town of Oxyrhynchus in the early twentieth century. A Latin fragment (of 2 Bar. 48:33–34 and 36) survives in a citation found in Cyprian’s Test. 3.29. Three Syriac lectionary manuscripts, two dating from the thirteenth century and one from the fifteenth also include passages we recognize as excerpts of 2 Baruch. These manuscripts contain 2 Bar. 44:9–15 and 72:1–73:2. Cf. Liv Ingeborg Lied, “Recent Scholarship on 2 Baruch,” CBR 9/2 (2011): 238–76.

² Since the early days of scholarship, it has been suggested that 2 Baruch can be divided into seven episodes. Since the 1960s, scholars have commonly approached 2 Baruch as one coherent, though complex, literary composition, consisting of these ordered episodes.

³ 2 Baruch applies the word “mystery” three times, in 48:3; 60:1 and 81:4. In two of these contexts (48:3 and 81:4) the term refers to God’s hidden plan and order of redemption. In 60:1 the term is used to refer to the secret and ungodly rituals of the Amorites.

⁴ This is a commonly found, though not the only, understanding of the concept of mystery in apocalyptic texts. Cf. Benjamin L. Gladd, Revealing the Mysterion: The Use of Mystery in Daniel and Second Temple Judaism with Its Bearing on First Corinthians (BZNW 160; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 1, 22, 31, 106–107; Markus N. A. Bockmuehl, Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity (WUNT 2/36; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1990), 2, 32, 36–37.
the loss of the temple. \textit{2 Baruch} takes the destruction of the first Jerusalem temple as its narrative point of departure, however, and situates the plot of the frame narrative at the end of the life of Baruch, the famous scribe of Jeremiah. From this narrative point of departure, \textit{2 Baruch} describes how God calls Baruch to gather and protect the remnant that is left of the righteous in Israel and reveals to him the hitherto concealed knowledge that will be crucial for the survival of the community in the imminent end time and subsequent redemption of the righteous (1:1–10:3). God discloses his overall plan for humankind, periods of time (temporal) and the worlds (spatial). God provides Baruch with particular insight into the order of the last events of the present corruptible world; the judgment, resurrection and the transformation of the righteous and the wicked, as well as the hidden reality and the constitution of the other, heavenly and incorruptible world that awaits the righteous.

Like other apocalyptic writings of Late Antiquity, the crucial content of \textit{2 Baruch} is the revelation of hitherto hidden, apocalyptic knowledge.\footnote{Cf. John J. Collins and James H. Charlesworth, eds., \textit{Mysteries and Revelations: Apocalyptic Studies since the Uppsala Colloquium} (JSPsup 9; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 11–12; Bockmuehl, \textit{Revelation and Mystery}, 24–36.} According to 59:4–12, God showed aspects of this apocalyptic knowledge to Moses at Sinai, and the main contents were probably also revealed to Adam and Abraham (4:1–7). The knowledge, however, was not made known to others before Baruch disclosed it to his audiences. Still, \textit{2 Baruch} is generally not assumed to be an esoteric writing. For instance, \textit{2 Baruch} does not present itself as a “secret writing” intended only for the few. Even though the content of the visions that God bestows on Baruch have so far been restricted to some few distinguished individuals in the past, Baruch—the ideal sage, apocalyptic visionary and teacher—instructs his growing audience in public speeches about the contents of God’s plan.\footnote{\textit{2 Bar.} 31–33; 44–46; 52:6–7; 77:1–17. Fredrick J. Murphy has suggested that Baruch’s audience becomes wider and wider (Fredrick. J. Murphy, \textit{The Structure and Meaning of Second Baruch} (SBLDS 78; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 13. Cf., Mark F. Whitters, \textit{The Epistle of Second Baruch: A Study of Form and Message} (LSTS 42; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 49.} He even writes letters to the tribes in captivity in order to spread the word as much as he can.\footnote{One of them, the letter to the nine and a half tribes (also known as the Epistle of \textit{2 Baruch}), is attached to the apocalypse proper (\textit{2 Bar.} 78–87). The other letter is solely mentioned in 77:32 and 19.} Hence, \textit{2 Baruch} does not keep secrets or reserve them for the elect few. It is rather described as an explicit goal in the text that Baruch’s deliberations and pedagogical adjustments of God’s plan should