Gabriele Boccaccini and Jason M. Zurawski, ed.


*Interpreting 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch* is the second volume of collected work from the Sixth Enoch Seminar, which took place in Gazzada, Italy on June 26-30 2011. (The first volume was *Fourth Ezra and Second Baruch: Reconstructions after the Fall*, ed. Matthias Henze and Gabriele Boccacini, with the collaboration of Jason M. Zurawski, JSJSup 164, Leiden: Brill, 2013). The volume is split into four parts. In the first article in Part I, “4 Ezra in the Apocalyptic Tradition,” Veronika Bachmann compares the overarching historical narratives present in 4 Ezra and in the Book of the Watchers (BW). While the purposes of these narratives are different, they serve similar functions: in 4 Ezra, placing sin at the beginning of creation with Adam rejects the idea of a return to the “good old days” in order to emphasize that everyone does sin, but each person is also capable of choosing a righteous path which will eventually lead to the new creation. In BW, Bachmann argues that by placing the root of sin with the fallen Watchers, both God and humans are given a pass. Humans may be influenced by the (sinful) knowledge of the watchers, but they have the ability to choose to ignore it. Bachmann understands, rightly, that the varying interpretations reflect the socio-historical context in which each apocalypse was written.

Next Bilhah Nitzan examines the differences between apocalyptic concepts, such as the origin of evil and theodicy, in 4 Ezra and the Qumran writings. Nitzan concludes that the reason 4 Ezra presents different conceptions of some apocalyptic ideas is due to the influence of the crisis brought about by the destruction of the Second Temple. In the last article in this section, Laura Bizzarro examines the Eagle vision in the fifth episode in 4 Ezra and concludes that the author’s use of imagery in the episode “is in agreement with the eschaton of Jewish-Palestinian apocalypticism” (38) and that the author draws on Dan 7, Ezek 38, and the *pesharim* from the Dead Sea Scrolls, with the conclusion that the end of history is imminent. While Bizzarro’s analysis of the fifth episode is thorough, albeit lacking in secondary sources, the assumption that there is one “eschaton of Jewish-Palestinian apocalypticism” and that the author of 4 Ezra just happened to know the same sources we know today is overly simplistic and highly problematic.

Part II, “4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, and Early Christian Literature” begins with an innovative reading of the anointing of Jesus in Mark 14. Andreas Bedenbender interprets the woman who anoints Jesus as a possible allegory for Zion, and the breaking of the alabaster jar as representative of both the breaking of Jesus’s body (cf. Mark 14:22) and the destruction of Jerusalem (43-45). While this
interpretation of Mark 14 is unusual, Bedenbender argues that it is justified through a comparative reading of 4 Ezra 9-10, where a woman who appears to Ezra turns into the transformed Zion. Like the woman in Mark 14, Bedenbender argues, the woman in 4 Ezra 9-10 is both real and also represents Zion.

In the second article, Calum Carmichael provides a comparative reading of the depiction of creation in 4 Ezra 6:38-59 and the Gospel of John 1-5. Carmichael's reading highlights the shared Jewish traditions on creation between the two texts, even while noting their different interpretations. The article is disappointingly light on analysis of 4 Ezra, and in that analysis presumes 4 Ezra's worldview—in line with most "Second Temple Judaism" (60)—as "grim" while suggesting that John transforms this worldview into a spiritual cosmology through the life of Jesus (60). This conclusion does not reveal an awareness of the diversity of Second Temple Jewish thought and instead essentializes Jewish apocalyptic ideas at the same time as it puts them in opposition to emerging writings about Jesus.

Eric F. Mason's thorough article examines the interpretation of Ps 104:4 in Second Temple texts. While the MT and LXX maintain ambiguous syntax (64-66), Mason shows how texts such as Jubilees, 2 Enoch, and 2 Baruch utilize the language from the psalm to talk about the creation of angels from fire and wind, which is also the most standard scholarly understanding of the psalm. However, 4 Ezra and Hebrews in the New Testament both use Ps 104:4 to affirm God's dominion (4 Ezra) or the Son's dominion (Hebrews) over creation, rather than about the origin of angels (71).

Last in this section, Rivka Nir argues that symbolism that was used by early Christians also pervades the Epistle of 2 Baruch (2 Baruch 78-87). As has been shown through numerous other responses to Nir's work, this conclusion does not account for the shared cultural context of early Jewish and Christian texts. (For a more detailed rebuttal of Nir see, for instance, J.R. Davila, The Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha: Jewish Christian, or Other? Leiden: Brill, 2005, 126-37.)

Part III, "Close Readings of 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch" begins with Jason M. Zurawski's analysis of 4 Ezra 7:10-14. Zurawski argues that the traditional understanding of Adam's sin in 4 Ezra is based on the ambiguity of the language. Zurawski offers a new reading, which brings these verses into cohesion with the rest of 4 Ezra's two-world dichotomy. Daniel M. Gurtner analyzes the rewards for the righteous in 2 Baruch, arguing that these rewards will be made available only in the world-to-come. Jared Ludlow examines death and afterlife in 2 Baruch in order to determine what the author considered the purpose of the earthly life. Ludlow determines that 2 Baruch exhorts the reader to good works through the following of Jewish law, and that those who do so will be rewarded in the afterlife. Basil Lourié revisits the implied calendrical systems