THE PROBLEM OF THE MAN FROM THE SEA IN IV EZRA 13 AND ITS RELATION TO THE MESSIANIC CONCEPT IN JOHN'S APOCALYPSE

by

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IV Ezra 13:2-3 presents a strange picture: "there arose a violent wind from the sea, and stirred all its waves. And I beheld, and lo! The wind caused to come up out of the heart of the seas as it were the form of a man. And I beheld, and lo! This man flew with the clouds of heaven." In the following verses of IV Ezra 13 "this man" is portrayed as defeating all earthly opposition to God by slaying them with fire from his mouth.

The odd picture raises at least two problematic questions: (1) how can the "man" come from the sea and yet fly with the clouds? (2) If allusion is being made to Daniel 7, why is the "man" pictured as rising out of the sea instead of the four beasts of Daniel 7:3? These problems have aroused much discussion and various solutions have been offered.

Some have solved the apparent contradictions by seeing no reference to Daniel 7, but to ancient mythological traditions which picture a god ascending from the sea. For example, Gunkel sees no allusion to Daniel 7, but views the reference against the background of an unknown mythological tradition concerning a star god, who emerges from the sea, ascends to a heavenly mountain, scourges the enemy with his burning rays, and establishes his reign of peace.¹ G. H. Box accepts this as a "promising suggestion", but admits "this may have been one form of the myth, though no positive extant evidence can be adduced in support of it."² He favors the idea that two distinct traditions concerning the Cosmic Man—the Urmensch—have been combined: (1) one dealing with a saviour who

² Box, The Ezra-Apocalypse (1912), 282.
would arise out of the sea, after having defeated the sea monster and (2) another saviour who rides the clouds of heaven.  

W. Bousset also thinks two such similar traditions have been combined: "Somit drängt sich die Vermutung auf, dass in der Gestalt des präexistenten Menschensohnes zwei Gestalten miteinander verschmolzen sind: der Jüdische ‘Messias’ und eine präexistente himmlische Wesenheit..." However, like Box, Bousset also admits there is no evidence for a mythological idea of a pre-existing man. Others have, with no better evidence, concurred that the figure of the “man” of IV Ezra 13 has been drawn from a general apocalyptic tradition, whose roots lay ultimately in some A.N.E. mythological idea.

Therefore, a purely mythological influence is unlikely because of its speculative nature, not being based on any existing evidence. Furthermore, among extant mythological traditions there are no convincing parallels to IV Ezra 13. The same judgment must be reached about similar proposals concerning a Gnostic mythological background.

It is possible that the picture of the man from the sea is a result of a combination of Daniel 7 with other traditional apocalyptic material, but the exact content of such “material” is rarely, if ever, described. The idea of such a combination would be more

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3 Ibid., 282-283.
5 Ibid., 406; cf. 307.
8 So Müller, *Messias*, 114-117.
10 See J. Keuler, *Die eschatologische Lehre des vierten Ezrabuches*, *Biblische Studien* 20 (1922), 125, 130, who cites respectively Sib. Or. III, 72 ff. and two later Jewish legends. In Sib. Or. III judgment is seen to originate from the sea and to destroy arrogant men on earth. In the first Jewish legend the Messiah is said to dwell in the