

Jonathan A. Moo

Creation, Nature and Hope in 4 Ezra

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Jan Christian Gertz, Dietrich-Alex Koch,
Matthias Köckert, Hermut Löhr,
Joachim Schaper und Christopher Tuckett

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Preface

This book is a lightly–revised version of a Ph.D. dissertation submitted and successfully defended in 2008 in the University of Cambridge. The first chapter of the dissertation has been largely rewritten, and chapters 2 and 6 have been reshaped and expanded; elsewhere only relatively minor changes have been made. I am grateful to Prof. Joachim Schaper and the editorial staff at Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht for accepting my manuscript for publication in FRLANT, and for the advice of an anonymous reviewer. It is particularly pleasing to be published in a series begun under the guidance of Hermann Gunkel; the influence of his ground–breaking commentary on *4 Ezra* can still be discerned in the present monograph, 110 years on.

I am grateful to Prof. Annette Yoshiko Reed for her close reading of an earlier draft and insightful comments and suggestions, which have been a great help in revising this study, even if I have been unable to take up all of her advice. In the same vein, many thanks are due to the readers of my dissertation, Dr. Andrew Chester and Prof. Loren Stuckenbruck, both of whom have given much helpful advice and encouragement. I am also thankful to Dr. James Carleton Paget, who oversaw my work for two terms in my first year of doctoral studies. Above all, I am deeply indebted to my supervisor Prof. William Horbury for his ongoing encouragement, advice and support; he is a rare example of a world–class scholar who combines deep learning and keen insight with genuine humility, kindness and patience. In addition to supervising the writing of my dissertation, he has generously continued to read and interact with my work. It has been an immense privilege to learn from him, and both he and his wife Katherine have helped make my time in Cambridge the wonderful experience that it has been.

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in allowing me to spend two additional years of research, writing and teaching in Cambridge prior to joining them in Spokane.

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Above all, I acknowledge and dedicate this work to my wife, Stacey, with whom these years in Cambridge have been a joy and delight. If my reading of *4 Ezra* should seem overly optimistic or world-affirming for a text full at times of such deep despair, I can only plead that I was perhaps prepared to reach such unexpected conclusions by the joy given me in knowing her.

Jonathan Moo
Cambridge, Spring 2010

1. Creation, the ‘Apocalyptic Outlook’ and *4 Ezra*

1.1 Introduction

This study analyses the role that the created order—earth and heaven, the ‘natural’ world and material existence generally—plays in the first-century Jewish apocalypse, *4 Ezra*. This text lacks the sort of cosmological or geographical details that are more common in the ascent apocalypses (wherein seers might describe, for example, their extraordinary tours of heaven and earth), but the author of *4 Ezra* retains a keen interest in creation and has plenty to say about its origins, its present, its future and how it relates to God. By attending closely to this important theme in a way that has not been done before, there is much that can be learnt about the theology, worldview and ideology of the book.

This investigation proceeds thematically, tracing the ways in which *4 Ezra* portrays the origins of the created order, its role and status in the present age and its future within the eschatological salvation and judgement envisioned by the author. The overall aims are to clarify the worldview that is represented in *4 Ezra*, to argue for a reading of the text that takes seriously its unity and coherence, to demonstrate the subtlety of the author’s theological conception and to provide a firmer basis for ongoing attempts to locate *4 Ezra* within the wider context of first-century Judaism. My first and primary purpose, then, is to make a contribution to our understanding of *4 Ezra*.

This study is also intended to make a modest contribution to discussions of the worldview of the apocalypses more generally. *Fourth Ezra* is a late ‘historical apocalypse’ in which many scholars think that apocalypticism’s inclination towards cosmological and especially eschatological dualism has become realised to an almost unparalleled degree. My argument, however, is that *4 Ezra* at least cannot accurately be described as attesting to either the sort of strict cosmological nor eschatological dualism that is sometimes thought to be a hallmark of the ‘apocalyptic outlook’ and of ‘apocalyptic eschatology’ in particular. Careful attention to the ways in which the book portrays the created order and its future reveals a more nuanced and indeed rather more interesting—if sometimes contradictory—picture than is often recognised. This study thus serves to add yet another note of caution against over-generalising attempts to classify apocalypses with reference to a dis-

tinctive ideology, theology or worldview. It stresses once again the importance both of remaining alert to the diversity of traditions that have informed these texts and of attending closely to the potentially unique perspective of any given apocalypse.

In this introduction, I begin with a necessarily brief and selective assessment of some scholarly perspectives on what I call the ‘apocalyptic outlook’ (or the worldview associated with the apocalypses) that I suggest remain in need of re-evaluation. I then focus more closely on the potential for *4 Ezra* to serve as a useful test case for how an apocalypse with a thoroughly eschatological orientation portrays creation. I indicate several studies that have attempted for other apocalypses something analogous to the task taken on here for *4 Ezra* and finally explain very briefly the method adopted in the present study. Discussion of some of the more general challenges with which *4 Ezra* presents the interpreter is deferred to the following chapter.

1.2 Creation, History and Apocalypse

The question for students of the Hebrew Bible interested in ‘creation’ has long been whether the Scriptures so privilege history over creation that the doctrine of creation serves only to prop up Israel’s understanding of its election and formation as a nation, to lend cosmic weight, as it were, to a story of redemption.¹ When it comes to ‘apocalyptic’ literature,² we find ourselves a step removed from this debate. However Israel’s beliefs in history and creation developed and whichever had priority diachronically or theologically, the apocalyptic seer’s orientation towards the heavenly and the eschatological presents readers with the question of whether creation and human history have both become essentially irrelevant.³ What signifi-

¹ This is the thesis set forth most famously by von Rad (1936), and in a somewhat more nuanced form in his influential theology (idem [1960]); it is also essentially the view adopted by Wright (1952); idem (1957). Greater importance, to varying degrees, is assigned to creation belief and creation theology in the Old Testament by, e.g., Westermann (1971); Schmid (1974); Steck (1978); Anderson (1987); idem (1994); and, most recently, Fretheim (2005).

² The confusion engendered by the use of the term ‘apocalyptic’ is well-known and continues to be a source for debate. See, for example, the illuminating exchange between Grabbe and J. J. Collins in their respective essays in Grabbe and Haak (2003: 2–43; 44–52), where—although the focus is specifically on the use of ‘apocalyptic’ as a noun—there persist fundamental disagreements about the definition of ‘apocalypse’ (on which more below). Despite the potential for ambiguity, ‘apocalyptic’ is used here (in its adjectival form) both as a way of talking about the literature most scholars recognise as sharing in the genre ‘apocalypse’ and to refer to the ideas and beliefs that can be said to characterise or emerge most prominently in the apocalypses.

³ As Simkins (1991: 28–42) argues, positing a dichotomy between ‘nature’ and history is often inappropriate in any case; so also Hiebert (1996: 15–19, 76–77 and passim).

cance can there be to the present creation and its history if what really matters is an other-worldly realm and a world yet to come? The spatial and temporal disjuncture that is found in many apocalypses can seem to diminish the sort of interest in and concern for the present world that is more evident in the prophetic literature, to lead even to proto-Gnostic⁴ denigration of material creation itself and to render ethics either irrelevant or lacking in substantive content.

This description represents what has in fact been a traditionally widespread—and is in places a stubbornly persistent—characterisation of the worldview associated with the apocalypses. To cite but one prominent example, Paul D. Hanson (a scholar who helped initiate contemporary attempts to clarify more precisely just what constitutes the apocalyptic genre) continues to maintain that the 'apocalyptic outlook' involves the giving-up of hope for real change in the present world; this serves for him above all to distinguish apocalypses from the prophetic literature from which Hanson, D. S. Russell and many others have thought that apocalypticism emerged.⁵ Meanwhile, those scholars since Gerhard von Rad who have sought the origins of apocalypticism in the wisdom tradition have more often taken seriously the cosmological interests evident in many apocalypses,⁶ but they have nonetheless rarely thought much differently about the overall perspective that these texts represent. von Rad, for example, considers 'apocalyptic' to be 'pessimistic in the extreme' (even if he still can claim that 4 *Ezra*

⁴ As in the case of 'apocalyptic', the use of the terms 'Gnostic' and 'proto-Gnostic' has come under fire in recent years, especially since the appearance of Williams (1996). I nevertheless use 'proto-Gnostic' here as a shorthand way of referring specifically to the negative conception of creation and material existence that emerges in the Nag Hammadi and related literature and which finds its expression or corollary most clearly in the demiurge myth, even if, as Williams argues, this literature should not be defined on the basis of its 'anticosmic' perspective and despite recurring questions concerning when, if ever, a distinctive 'Gnostic' movement can be securely identified. My intention is to highlight the potential for movement in early Jewish and Christian apocalypses towards ways of thinking regularly labelled 'Gnostic', a potential which a handful of scholars (e.g., Harnisch [1969: 49–72]; Lebram [1983: 206–7]; Saylor [1984: 133–34]) have indeed argued is realised to a significant degree in at least portions of 4 *Ezra* (even if—as for Harnisch—this does not necessarily represent the view of the final author).

⁵ See Hanson (1979: 25–27); cf. Russell (1964); idem (1992). A more recent essay reveals that Hanson's views have not changed in this regard (cf. Hanson [2002: 43–66]). Similar assessments of the 'theology' or outlook of apocalypticism prevailed in earlier study (cf., e.g., Moore [1927–1930: esp. i.127–29]; Rowley [1944]; Bultmann [1957: esp. 29–30]; Vielhauer [1965: 581–607]; Noth [1966: 194–214]. Noth accepts that history still has a role to play in the apocalypses as the necessary sphere of human life, but 'taken as a whole the judgment concerning history is a negative one' (p. 214); a very similar perspective emerges in Harnisch's reading of 4 *Ezra* (on which more below).

⁶ J. J. Collins suggests in fact that '[t]he most fruitful effect of von Rad's proposal has been to redirect attention to those aspects of the apocalypses which are cosmological and speculative rather than eschatological' (Collins [1998: 21]).

is ‘one of the finest things ever written’ in Israel),⁷ and John G. Gammie, although critical of the imprecise ways in which the term ‘dualism’ is often applied to the apocalypses, nonetheless finds that these texts share with wisdom literature a strong spatial and ethical dualism, with the main difference being the ‘eschatological’ (as opposed to merely ‘future’) fate of the righteous and wicked portrayed in the apocalypses.⁸

More recent research on apocalypticism and the apocalyptic genre has less often been willing to generalise about the ‘apocalyptic outlook’ and has shown greater interest in treating individual texts on their own terms. Michael E. Stone’s oft-cited essay, ‘Lists of Revealed Things in the Apocalyptic Literature’,⁹ has moreover stimulated much subsequent study on the role of cosmic phenomena and ‘scientific’ interests in the apocalypses, and such research (a few examples of which will be treated below) has helped among other things to broaden our understanding of the apocalypses themselves and of the richly varied relationships between prophecy, wisdom and apocalypticism.¹⁰ Nonetheless, there persists even in some recent work an assumption that apocalypses in general tend to be world-denying, dualistic and generally uninterested in creation for its own sake, an assumption that is perhaps rooted in the prominence still given to eschatology in treatments of apocalypticism and definitions of the apocalyptic genre. A focus on eschatology is understandable and often justified given the centrality of the theme in many apocalypses, but there is a danger that it can obscure the importance of other motifs; and occasionally interpreters are tempted to draw conclusions about what an eschatological orientation necessarily implies about the overall outlook of an apocalypse that may not correspond to

⁷ von Rad (1965: 305); cf. idem [1972: 268–83];

⁸ Gammie (1974: 356–85). In *4 Ezra*, Gammie suggests that the temporal dualism is strongest, although he finds evidence of spatial dualism too (p. 371); and whereas he thinks that the figure Ezra struggles against traditional ‘ethical dualism’, the author in the end ‘vigorously’ reaffirms the doctrine (pp. 382–83).

⁹ Stone (1976: 414–54). A postscript to Stone’s essay anticipates some later concerns with especially Hanson’s focus on ‘apocalyptic eschatology’.

¹⁰ See, e.g., the important collection of essays on the relationships between wisdom and apocalypticism in Wright and Mills (2005), which represents only some of the highlights of a long-running and fruitful SBL consultation on the subject, and cf. the extensive literature review provided by DiTommaso (2007a); idem (2007b). DiTommaso observes that most scholars now recognise ‘the fundamental interconnectedness’ of the prophetic, wisdom (including Babylonian mantic wisdom) and apocalyptic traditions in the post-exilic period (2007b: 381). Such developments have been helped along by greater attention given to the role of wisdom and apocalyptic traditions in Qumran texts (e.g., in *4QInstruction*) and by a renewed focus on the early Enochic literature as the earliest examples of the apocalyptic genre (so already Stone [1978]), even if not many scholars have accepted the definitive and exclusive role given to the Book of Watchers and related traditions by Sacchi (1996); cf. Boccaccini (1991).

the conclusions reached by the ancient author, however logical they seem to us.

Research since the publication of the landmark 1979 *Semeia* volume has undoubtedly benefitted from the distinctions accepted there between the genre of 'apocalypse', 'apocalyptic eschatology' and 'apocalypticism',¹¹ and, of course, from the genre definition proposed by John J. Collins which has become standard:

a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages a eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.¹²

The main reservation that some scholars have voiced about this definition, however, concerns its attempt to specify the content that an apocalypse is expected to disclose: 'a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages a eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world'. As Jean Carmignac tellingly observes already in an article that appeared in the same year, the *Semeia* definition is potentially misleading in its implication that eschatology constitutes a *necessary* component of the genre; Carmignac suggests that it would be better to specify only that apocalypses disclose a 'transcendent reality'.¹³

A similar argument is developed at greater length in Christopher Rowland's important study, *The Open Heaven*, and Rowland would in fact define the genre of apocalypse rather more broadly: 'the revelation of the divine mysteries through visions or some other form of immediate disclosure of heavenly truths...whether as the result of vision, heavenly ascent or verbal revelations'.¹⁴ For Rowland, there is less of a difference between the prophetic and apocalyptic literature than is often assumed, and he points out that the 'cosmic secrets' motif and the descriptions of nature prominent in especially the earlier apocalypses suggest that at least some apocalyptic seers maintain the sort of interest in the created order that is more usually

¹¹ These distinctions had already been urged by Hanson (1976: 27–34); cf. Koch (1972).

¹² J. J. Collins (1979a: 9). A. Y. Collins (1986: 1–11) has successfully argued on the basis of suggestions made by Hellholm (1982) (=idem [1986: 13–64]; cf. Aune [1986: 65–96]) that a statement on the *function* of apocalypses be tacked on; she summarises the function of apocalypses as follows: 'intended to interpret present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behaviour of the audience by means of divine authority' (p. 7).

¹³ Carmignac (1979: 3–33, here 33).

¹⁴ Rowland (1982: 70–71). It should be observed that Rowland seems to have reached these conclusions independently of Carmignac, whose article he does not cite.

associated with the writers of both wisdom and prophetic literature.¹⁵ Above all, Rowland suggests that rather than abandoning the belief that God's promises will be fulfilled in history, the apocalyptic seer cultivates a 'total view of history' which can include eschatology but is not limited to it.¹⁶

This broader understanding of the apocalyptic genre—which is sometimes accused of not distinguishing the apocalypses clearly enough from other forms of revelatory literature—has been most influential in British scholarship. Here, Lorenzo DiTommaso points out, there has generally been greater reluctance to link the apocalypses with a distinctive ideology.¹⁷ The influence of this approach is especially evident in a recent call by Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis for a 'new perspective' on Jewish apocalyptic literature. Highly critical of what he claims is an overemphasis on various dualisms and a particular kind of transcendent eschatology in much apocalyptic research, Fletcher-Louis reiterates Rowland's observation that 'apocalyptic and Jewish eschatology overlap but are really two separate subjects and apocalypses contain no one kind of eschatology'.¹⁸ Fletcher-Louis emphasises that 'it is hard to find any evidence in the apocalypses themselves of an expectation of literal cosmic destruction that is wholly negative....at its core, apocalyptic literature is world affirming with a high view of human life and culture'.¹⁹

¹⁵ Rowland (1982: 124–26, 146–55); see again Stone (1976): 414–54 and cf. Himmelfarb (1993: 72–94), on which see more below.

¹⁶ Rowland (1982: 193–247, quoted from 245–46). Niskanen (2004: 104–25) has argued for a similar conception of history in the book of Daniel, although he explicitly contrasts Daniel in this regard from *4 Ezra* and the book of Revelation, both of which he argues do threaten to relativise history because of their strict determinism and strong dualism (pp. 106–7, n. 9). At least in the case of Revelation, the results of Gilbertson's (2003) engaging theological and exegetical study suggest that Niskanen's assessment may be inaccurate. In a detailed examination of *2 Baruch*, Hobbins (1998: 45–79) finds here too that the 'understanding of history is identical to that found widely in the Jewish and Christian traditions' (p. 71); though there are elements of both discontinuity and continuity in the shape of its future hope, *2 Baruch* is 'not a—historical or anti—historical . . . [but] in accordance with an unbreakable belief in God's providence, the apocalypse expects that history will again be the locus of divine activity' (p. 74).

¹⁷ DiTommaso (2007a: 244), citing Bauckham's (2001: 135) claim that 'apocalyptic is not an ideology but a genre'. Cf. also Sanders (1983: 447–59); Barton (1986: 200–202); and Grabbe (2003: 2–43); and note, in his response to Grabbe, the observation of J. J. Collins (2003: 44–45) along the same lines.

¹⁸ Fletcher-Louis (2010 [forthcoming]). I am grateful to Dr. Fletcher-Louis for providing me with a pre-publication copy of this essay.

¹⁹ Fletcher-Louis (2010 [forthcoming]). On the basis of this observation, and building on his arguments that temple cosmology is crucial to understanding the apocalypses (cf. idem [2002: 117–41]) and that genuine religious experiences lie behind their production (Rowland [1982: 214–47]; cf. Stone [1974: 47–56]; idem [2003: 167–80]), Fletcher-Louis suggests that the apocalypses actually derive from or have their roots in the priestly class. He notes that 'all the revelation and wisdom that is available to one who goes to heaven is also available to the priest who enters the inner sanctuary'; it is thus the high priest's transformative encounter with the presence of God in