

Seeing and Understanding in 4 Ezra¹

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In the proceedings of a conference held in Berlin in May 2011, which are in press, I dealt with the question of esotericism in Jewish literature between the Persian period and the end of the first century CE.² In that paper I argued for the need to distinguish two types of esoteric material in Second Temple Judaism. First are the books and traditions that were esoteric in the sense that they were transmitted in limited circles or only to certain persons who were initiates. I proposed secrecy and social function as criteria of this type of esotericism. The second category is books that, though they claim to be esoteric, actually circulated quite widely, or even very widely.³ I said that “Jewish apocalypses⁴ and certain pseudepigraphical testaments claim in many places to have been received from antiquity by secret transmission, though usually the actual chain of transmission is only set forth in part. Yet these apocalypses seem to have circulated widely.”⁵ In other terms, somewhat analogous to “magic” in modern

1 This paper is dedicated to Christopher Rowland whose work opened paths in understanding ancient Jewish religious experience.

2 “Esoterica Judaica Antiqua: Some Reflections,” forthcoming in F.B. Geller (ed.), *Knowledge to Die For* (Leiden: Brill). Since the present paper is exploratory, I do not aspire to discuss the history of scholarship of the issues exhaustively.

3 D.S. Russell describes these claims in *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 108–118. He does not distinguish, however, as I do, “esoteric” from “pseudo-esoteric” writings.

4 Wisdom of Solomon too may belong somewhere in this category for purposes of the present discussion, though it is formally a wisdom book. In chs. 7 and 9 it relates incidents of revelation of secret knowledge.

5 Cited from the above-mentioned paper (note 2). Against the possible claim that such works were esoteric in Jewish usage and exoteric in Christian usage, two remarks should be made. First, they originate over a considerable range of time, were composed in at least three languages, and were written both in the Land of Israel and the Diaspora. Second, virtually none of the Jewish literature of the Second Temple period except for ben Sira survived in Hebrew or Aramaic in the main Jewish tradition: see M.E. Stone, *Ancient Judaism: New Visions and Views* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2011), 173–174. The reason for this is not that the literature was esoteric, but that attitudes and genres changed between Judaism of the Second Temple age and subsequent Rabbinic Judaism.

discussions, it is the social situation and function together with the inherent power relationships that they imply that determine the meaning of “esoteric”.⁶

I went on to argue that, despite what we might call the “pseudo-esoteric” character of the apocalypses, they do contain hints pointing to the existence of esoteric traditions and knowledge that they do not proclaim and that are not explicit in their content. To this idea I related the “Lists of Revealed Things” that I had studied many years ago,⁷ having already noted there in 1976 the disjunction between the subjects enumerated in the lists of things revealed to seers at the climaxes of visionary experiences and those that the apocalypses actually specified in detail as the subjects of angelic or cosmological revelations.

Later I also introduced into this discussion the passage from *4 Ezra* 10:55–57 which, I argued, draws on an esoteric understanding of the heavenly Jerusalem as a metaphor for the presence of God.⁸ The passage says that Ezra should, “. . . go in and see the splendour and vastness of the building, as far as it is possible for your eyes to see it, and afterward you will hear as much as your ears can hear” (10:56). I proposed that this formulation, “as far as . . .” suggested heavenly or mystical secrets, which Ezra could not fully comprehend. As will emerge below, this characterization, interesting as it may be, does not exhaust the implications of the passage.

In the present paper, I wish to pursue this overall line of argument a little further. Basically, I intend to document the idea that what Ezra can see at any given stage of the revelatory experience depends on the state in which he is considered to be. Andrei Orlov has argued convincingly that *2 Enoch* 22 is the story of the transformation of Enoch into a heavenly being.⁹ I would compare this with the earlier transformation of Joshua the High Priest in *Zech* 3:3–6.¹⁰

6 See Yuval Harari, “A Different Spirituality or ‘Other’ Agents? On the Study of Magic in Rabbinic Literature,” in D.V. Arbel and A.A. Orlov, eds., *With Letters of Light אור באורות של אור: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Early Jewish Apocalypticism, Magic, and Mysticism in Honor of Rachel Elijor* (Berlin & New York: de Gruyter, 2011), 169–197.

7 M.E. Stone, “Lists of Revealed Things in the Apocalyptic Literature,” in F.M. Cross, W. Lemke and P.D. Miller, eds., *Magnalia Dei, The Mighty Acts of God. Essays on the Bible and Archeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright* (New York: Doubleday, 1976) 414–454.

8 M.E. Stone, “The City in 4th Ezra,” *JBL* 126 (2007) 402–407. In addition, in M.E. Stone, “The Interpretation of Song of Songs in *4 Ezra*,” *JSJ* 38 (2007) 226–233, I argued that evidence can be found for 4 Ezra’s familiarity with an esoteric eschatological exegesis of the Song of Songs.

9 I raised this point earlier, see M.E. Stone, “The Fall of Satan and Adam’s Penance: Three Notes on The Books of Adam and Eve,” in G. Anderson, M. Stone, and J. Tromp, (eds.) *Literature on Adam and Eve: Collected Essays* (SVTP 15; Leiden: Brill, 2000) 43–56.

10 In other terms, this may be compared with prophetic commission stories, such as Isaiah 6. Purification is symbolized by the change of garments or by the cleansing the mouth

3:3 Now Joshua was dressed with filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. 4 The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." And to him he said, "See, I have taken your guilt away from you, and I will clothe you with festal apparel." 5 And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with the apparel; and the angel of the LORD was standing by.

It is my contention that in 4 Ezra the apparent contradiction between the denial of knowledge to Ezra, comprehensive in Vision 1 and less so in Visions 2–3, and the differing kinds of revelations to Ezra in Visions 4, then 5–6 and finally 7 may be placed on a scale which demonstrates the conjunction of two axes, which are: one, the status of the seer and the other, the location/circumstances of the revelation. I will argue this from within 4 Ezra's text, by examining statements in which knowledge or seeing is denied, those in which its diffusion or access to it is limited, and the eschatological or ascent contexts in which full revelation is granted.¹¹

In his article on the "I" in 4 Ezra Lorenzo DiTommaso has anticipated my point to some extent. He points out that the conflict between the position

with fire; compare the cleansing of garments in Isa 61:10, Rev 7:14. An interesting discussion of change of garments as part of baptismal rebirth is by J.Z. Smith, "The Garments of Shame," in *Map is not Territory* (SJLA 23; Leiden: Brill, 1978) 1–23, especially pp. 13–14. Compare the views of Franz Cumont, *Astrology and Religion Among the Greeks and Romans* (New York: Dover, 1960), 108; and for the change of garment in the soul's ascent, see F. Cumont, *The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* (New York: Dover, 1956) 269 n. 54. The theme is common in Gnostic texts; see B. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures: a New Translation with Annotations and Introductions* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1987) Index, s.v. "garments". On p. 17 he points to the common Platonist idea of body as a garment. An analogous matter arises in Andrei Orlov's discussion of the garments of Azazel in *Apocalypse of Abraham*: see A.A. Orlov, "The Likeness of Heaven: The Kavod of Azazel in the Apocalypse of Abraham," in Arbel and Orlov, eds., *With Letters of Light*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2011) 232–253 and A.A. Orlov, *Dark Mirrors: Azazel and Satanael in Early Jewish Demonology* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2011).

¹¹ A somewhat analogous position, *mutatis mutandis*, is forwarded by A.D. DeConink "The Dynamics of Early Christian Mysticism," in Arbel and Orlov, *Letters of Light*, 299–324. Note pp. 303–04 and 309, which are most relevant to us. Her statement on p. 303 resembles our point, but she develops the matter differently. She says, "The idea that the 'mystery' is 'revealed' to Christians while simultaneously kept from unbelievers appears to have been a very old and prominent Christian teaching. . . . Only the believer is able to behold face-to-face the Glory of the Lord, and be gradually transformed into that Glory by degree, while the unbeliever stares absently at a veil that conceals the splendor of the Glory."

taken by the angel Uriel in Visions 1–3 and that taken in the revelations of 4–6 is apparent and not real. Both Ezra and the revealing angel are “I”s or the “I” of the book. He highlights the different “realities” that the two parts of the book represent, and maintains that the problem is epistemological.¹²

My argument, developed before reading DiTommaso’s interesting paper, has a somewhat different focus. My hypothesis is the following. “Seeing” and similar words, such as “understanding” and “comprehending” (and the last two appear to be substantially synonymous), have both freighted and non-freighted meanings. When we discount the non-freighted instances, then what the seer can see is related to his location (“earthly” // “heavenly” or “in a pure place where no building is” // “an inhabited area”), which in turn is a correlative of his status. The location and the change of location reflect differences in or changes of seer’s status.¹³ In addition to location, there are other indicators of changed status such as food, length of fast, and more. Depending on the visionary’s position on the scale of human and “angelic” being, certain sorts of knowledge are available and others are not. What can be seen, understood or comprehended is therefore a function of the seer’s status, not of the nature of what is perceived.¹⁴ The difference is, if you will, experiential and not ontological.¹⁵

This analysis of the ability to see, though new, is in itself only somewhat interesting. It needs to be laid out systematically and in detail, and this should be done eventually for all the verbal roots denoting perception, certain of which occur regularly in parallelism (see below). Furthermore, I seek to show that the seer on earth is stretching the boundaries of earthly being,

12 [Lorenzo DiTommaso, “Who is the ‘I’ of 4 Ezra?” *Milan Enoch Seminar*, forthcoming \(kindly made available by Dr. DiTommaso\).](#)

13 J.A. Moo, *Creation, Nature and Hope in 4 Ezra* (FRLANT Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012) 237; 145–46 rightly highlights 4 Ezra’s “interest in place” as does Vincente Dobroruka, “Chemically-Induced Visions in the Fourth Book of Ezra in Light of Comparative Persian Material,” *JSQ* 12 (2005) 1–26, especially p. 4. Hindy Najman, “Between Heaven and Earth: Liminal Visions in 4Ezra,” in T. Niklas, et al., eds., *Other Worlds and Their Relation to This World (JS/Suppl* 134; Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2010) 151–167, especially 159–164, deals with the liminality of the place where Ezra receives his vision. She does not, however, deal with the gradation of the liminal space within 4 Ezra, or with liminality of his temporal “place” as well as of his spatial place.

14 Compare already D.S. Russell’s remarks touching on the “reality” of vision experiences: see *Method and Message*, 163–164. Yet he does not discuss the gradation that affects what *can* be seen.

15 In the context of Zoroastrianism, Shaul Shaked discusses two different levels of being, not implying a spirit-matter dualism: see S. Shaked, “The Notions of *mēnōg* and *gētīg* in the Pahlavi Texts and their Relations to Eschatology,” *Acta Orientalia*, 33 (1971) 59–107.

and that his knowledge strains at the limits of what the earthly can learn or perceive. Likewise, even if the seer has been transformed beyond the earthly state, he also strains at the limits of that non-earthly state. Thus knowing is graded, differing in different contexts and in the seer's different states of being. Sometimes the seer almost transcends the limits of whatever state he is in and sometimes he is transformed into a new state. In the new state, he is able to perceive things he could not see before.¹⁶

The main stages of Ezra's revelatory progress are three: his life as a pious individual, his life as a visionary in this world, and his life after assumption and transformation. These triple states form a nice parallel to the three concentric social circles described in some texts: the people in general, the disciples—here the “elders of the people” or “the wise of the people,” and the seer who experiences trance and/or ascent. Ezra is set over against the people in 12:40–49, in which passage the people recognize Ezra to be a prophet. Preceding that, reference is made to “the wise among your people” (12:38). Similarly, an inner circle, standing between the visionary and the people, the five scribes, also comes to the fore in 14:19–22 and 37–48.¹⁷ That is in the context of the revelation; in the context of the transmission we find (1) the people (14:13), (2) the wise (14:26); and (3) Ezra himself (14:45–46). What is revealed in any given instance is related to the seer's level of “initiation” or, formulated differently, to his status. The site of revelation is equally graded,¹⁸ and apparently the types of knowledge may also be evaluated on a similar scale.¹⁹

Again, this can be discerned further in alimentation (ch. 14). The people whom Ezra addresses have no food regime; the five scribes are inspired to write during the day and eat at night; Ezra speaks divine words day and night and fasts for forty days and nights. Location is similarly graduate: the people are in the city, Ezra and the five men are in a place where nothing has been built, and Ezra is assumed to heaven.²⁰

Having formulated this general hypothesis, I shall carry out a couple of test probes in 4 Ezra, while noting that the same distinctions occur in other

16 See n. 11 above.

17 Compare *Ascen. Isa.* 6.

18 On the field and flowers, see Moo, *Creation*, 146 and see further below here.

19 Observe *b. Meg.* 3a, which distinguishes between what prophets can see and what Daniel could see (Dan 10:7) on the basis of their different status. The verse in Daniel draws a similar distinction and the Talmud is commenting on this.

20 On the types of regimen and the contexts of visions, see, Anders Hultgård, “*Ecstasy and Vision*,” in N.G. Holm (ed.), *Religious Ecstasy* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1982) 218–225.

works though not always in as structured a way.²¹ In the course of this I shall re-examine some well known passages from this perspective, but shall not give a history of their exegesis here, except as it touches directly on my argument.

Who Can Be a Recipient of Revelation?

At the start of chapter 4 the angel poses riddles to Ezra and says to him that if he can solve one of the riddles, “I will show you the way you desire to see” (4:4), the “way” being how God conducts the world and “why the heart is evil.”²² The angel responds in verses 4:8–11, and concludes his response in 4:10, “You cannot understand the things with which you have grown up; 4:11 how then can your vessel comprehend the way of the Most High? For the way of the Most High is created immensurable. And how can one who is corrupt in the corrupt world²³ understand the way of the incorruptible?” In 1990 I claimed, I still think correctly, that “vessel” means body, which is called “corruptible vessel” in 7:88²⁴ and that the word “corrupt” means not morally corrupt, but subject to corruption, in other words, *death*.²⁵ What was not stressed in 1990 was the phrase “in a corrupt world”. Yes, the mortal in a corrupt world (i.e., a world subject to change) cannot comprehend the way of the Most High (4:11). This point is highlighted by the choice of the riddle questions, which speak of aspects of this world unknowable to Ezra or other mortals, surely lesser secrets than “the way of the Most High.” The same stress on Ezra as an inhabitant of this world and so unable to have more than limited knowledge is repeated in 4:21: “so also those who dwell upon the earth can understand only what is on the earth,

21 Here I use the translation in M.E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra. A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990). Since no original text of 4 Ezra survives and we only have secondary translations, that English reflects my critical judgement about the versional variants.

22 Compare 3:31, at the end of Ezra’s plaint: “and hast not shown to any one how thy way may be comprehended.” See further 5:34.

23 Versional variants: Ethiopic and Georgian omit “in a corrupt world”.

24 See Stone, *4 Ezra*, 85 and n. 32 there for further examples. See further *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Sinoes §14.

25 Stone, *4 Ezra*. Note also 1QH 10:2–5 which says that man, being mortal and of dust, cannot be enlightened with God’s wonders or have the secret of God’s truth revealed to him. Moo, *Creation*, 86 stresses the link between corruptibility and human transgression. See further, Moo, *Creation*, 87–90.

and he who is²⁶ above the heavens can understand what is above the height of the heavens.”²⁷

In ch. 5 there is another group of riddles, this time also about aspects of this world that are unknowable to Ezra. He responds, therefore, “And I said, ‘O sovereign Lord, who is able to know these things except he whose dwelling is not with men?’” (5:38). That is, inhabitants of this world cannot know all sorts of things that an inhabitant of another world can know. There has been some movement here, for in Vision 1 it is the angel who tells Ezra that the information is not available to inhabitants of this world, while in Vision 2, without the debate found in Vision 1, Ezra draws the necessary conclusion, that where the seer is determines what he can see or not see.

Another factor can also affect what the seer may see, and that is eschatological time, rather than heavenly space.²⁸ In fact, these two are different faces of the same state of being outside this world or time, or in a special place or time. 4 Ezra 13:52 reads, “He said to me, ‘Just as no one can explore or know²⁹ what is in the depths of the sea, so no one on earth can see my servant³⁰ or those who are with him, *except in the time of his day.*’” In Vision 1 knowledge is denied Ezra because of his earthly geography, but it will be granted in the eschaton. When the resurrection comes, according to 4:43, in the eschatological time, “[t]he things that you desire to see will be disclosed to you.” Vision 3 says that, at the time of the coming of the signs, i.e., in the last days, “the city which now is not seen shall appear, and the land which now is hidden shall be disclosed (7:26).”³¹

26 Versional variants are: “they who are” Georgian, Arabic², Armenian; not God according to either reading.

27 The role of “geography” in revelation is also implied by Wis 9:16–17 which denies knowledge of the heavenly “unless thou hast given wisdom and sent thy holy spirit from on high.”

28 K.M. Hogan, *Theologies in Conflict in 4 Ezra: Wisdom Debate and Apocalyptic Solution*, (*JSJSuppl* 130; Leiden: Brill, 2008) 120–122, in a section on epistemology, notes that Uriel reveals predominantly temporal “transcendent reality” rather than spatial. This does not really address the issue here being discussed, for it relates to the character of the revealer rather than of the seer.

29 Versional variants are: “investigate and find or to know” Syriac, Arabic¹; “to know” Ethiopic; “investigate” Arabic²; “see or investigate or know” Armenian.

30 Versional variants are: Arabic¹, Arabic²; “son” Latin, Syriac, Ethiopic; “the son of man” Ethiopic mss; “the mysteries of the Most High” Armenian.

31 An intriguing, apparently inverse face of this idea is to be observed in Ezra’s lament over those who do not survive in the last generation, following the dream of Vision 6. They will lament, “13:18 because they understand what is reserved for the last days, but cannot attain it.” Their eschatological vantage point is different from that of chap. 7. The unseen city is discussed in Stone, *Song of Songs*.

The mention of the now unseen city is strikingly reversed in Vision 4, where Ezra sees the unseen city³² while he is in a special location, intermediate between the earthly and the heavenly and in the course of a waking vision in the present time. He is commanded to enter it (10:55–56) and can only see and hear to a limited extent. All of the events in Vision 4 take place in a special location, not fully supra-worldly but not just earthly.³³

This special place where no human building had been built is required for the revelation of the heavenly or future Jerusalem,³⁴ and is presumably intermediate between the earthly and the heavenly states. The city that will be seen eschatologically according to 7:26 will be seen in the specially designated and named field in 10:53. So Ezra sees what ordinary humans in the ordinary world cannot see. Yet, when he enters this city, he cannot apprehend it fully in the vision experience, but only *as far as his eyes can see* (10:55). He is vouchsafed this vision because of his special qualities, he is “more blessed than many” and he has “been named³⁵ before the Most High, as but few have been.”³⁶

32 We assume that the cities referred to in 7:26 and in Vision 4 are the same. Moo, *Creation*, 131, mentions the “premature” appearance of the city and land, which “can elsewhere be associated with the *saeculum*.” Because he is considering 7:26–44, a chronological framework seems to be demanded and so his remark is apposite. Moo seeks the resolution in “the ambiguity that exists in the relationship between the messianic age and *saeculum* to come,” while I would posit that in Vision 4 the distinct place and time enable Ezra to see the city. I would seek, therefore, to introduce an experiential axis as well as a temporal one, and thus a lesser rigidity of the temporal framework.

33 Interestingly, 4 Ezra does not mention the city’s measurements, walls, and portals, which are so central in, say, Ezek 40–48, the New Jerusalem text from Qumran, and Rev 21.

34 The article by Mark Verman, “Earthly and Heavenly Jerusalem in Philo and Paul: A Tale of Two Cities,” in Arbel and Orlov, *With Letters of Light*, 133–58 seems to me to attempt to view the categories “earthly” and “heavenly” in too rigid a way. Perhaps they should be called “this worldly” and “other worldly”, which may imply both temporal and spatial differentiation. It seems clear that the differences implied by such categories used in visions are most often not simple assertions about different types of being, but about different abilities of the see-er or the visionary in different states.

35 Versional variants are: “have been called” (Latin); “are pleasing” (Armenian). “Named” evokes 3:36, which in the Latin, reads: *per nomina*.

36 Moo, *Creation*, 128 suggests that the purpose of the special field and the already built city is to stress that “the author apparently considers futile any human attempt to rebuild Jerusalem and jump-start the messianic age.” This may or may not be the case, but it under-stresses the nuancing of the experiential dimension of the narrative, cf. p. 129. Moo relates this city to the mountain “cut out without hands” from a place that Ezra cannot see (13:6–7). That is an intriguing association, but difficult to tie down more tightly because the mountain is part of a symbolic vision.

This topic could be developed much further from within 4 Ezra and explored in other works, but the strictures of space compel us to leave that discussion for a future occasion.

The Locations and Conditions of Revelation in the Framework Stories

The framework stories of the visions reveal the circumstances in which Ezra received them. These circumstances are graded so as to correlate with the type and content of the vision experiences, which are connected with what Ezra can perceive at any given point. This is in turn a function of Ezra's status.

The book opens with Ezra on his bed in Babylon (3:1), his spirit is agitated and he commences speaking his plaint. Nothing else is said about him or his state. Although it is not made explicit here, apparently he had already fasted for a week because 6:35 speaks of the conclusion of three weeks' fast, yet up to that verse only two weeks have been mentioned explicitly. Vision 2 is similar to Vision 1. Ezra is on his bed and has fasted for seven days. Vision 3 records the same features (6:35).

After Vision 3 there is a shift. The major transition point in the book between Visions 3 and 4 was noted years ago.³⁷ In 9:23–28 the location is changed from Ezra's bed to the field called Ardat (9:26), where no house had been built (9:24–26).³⁸ He sat there and ate no meat and no wine, but only the plants of the field (9:26), which are also called specifically "flowers of the field" (9:23)

37 The shift of venue was briefly noted by Coggins and Knibb, *2 Esdras*, 218, to indicate a shift in the content of Ezra's vision. Scholars like Egon Brandenburger have noted the shift in Vision 4 but regard it conceptually and theologically and so set it in the middle of the vision. See E. Brandenburger, *Die Verborgenheit Gottes im Weltgeschehen* (ATANT 68; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1981) 72–79. My own view is developed in Stone, *4 Ezra*, 302–305. On this subject note particularly Earl Breech, "These Fragments I Have Shored Against My Ruins: The Form and Function of 4 Ezra," *JBL* 92 (1973) 267–274, especially p. 272. Hogan discusses the turning point of the book in *Theologies*, 166–168. She also has some observations about the results of Ezra's transformation in the following pages, though not much on the psychological and physical event or on the change of type of experience. A most interesting observation of hers is that after the transformation, Uriel's function also changes. He is no longer an independent character, only a mouthpiece for God (pp. 167–168).

38 J.M. Myers *1 and 2 Esdras*, (Anchor Bible, 42; Garden City N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974) 74 does not even remark on this or its significance. The name of the field has been the subject of numerous speculations, none decisive.

and they satisfied him. He prayed continually (9:25). This regimen continues for seven days and on the seventh day, as he is lying on the grass (not in or near a human structure) he is moved to speak, just as happened in the first three visions.³⁹ His discourse (9:28–37) is not unlike those complaints with which the three preceding visions have opened but after that, the whole development of the vision changes. The theme of the field where no work of human building existed is taken up again later, after Ezra's vision of the transformed Jerusalem, when the angel says:

10:50 For now the Most High, seeing that you are sincerely grieved and profoundly distressed for her, has shown you the brilliance of her glory, and the loveliness of her beauty. 10:51 Therefore I told you to remain in the field where no house had been built, 10:52 for I knew that the Most High would reveal all these things to you. 10:53 Therefore I told you to go into the place where there was no foundation of any building, 10:54 for no work of man's building could endure in a place where the city of the Most High was to be revealed.

Ezra is not in heaven or in a heavenly state. He has, however, moved to a site that is unique and pure, where “there was no foundation of any building.” His food regime has shifted from deliberate fasting to eating flowers (perhaps a reminiscence of Edenic food) and being sated by them, so that he no longer feels bodily hunger.⁴⁰ He no longer weeps, but is commanded to praise God. In this situation he receives a revelation of a reality beyond the here and now.

39 Russell discusses the context and situation of seers before visions in more general and undifferentiated terms in *Method and Message*, 169–173.

40 Moo, *Creation*, 147 suggests that the “flowers” might refer to the juice of opium poppies. In a detailed discussion of which hallucinogens are possibly referred to here, Dobroruka opines that it might have been henbane, a plant native to West Asia among other areas (see Dobroruka, “Visions”). He also discusses its possible connections with the Iranian use of *haoma*, which is also thought to have been a hallucinogenic, and also the relationship between the “flowers” eaten in connection with Visions 4–6 and the cup of inspiration in Vision 7. These last two points remain in the realm of speculation. I am doubtful about the claim that the flowers and goblets were hallucinogens because of role of the flowers in the gradation of alimentation that I discuss here. As a refinement of that gradation, I suggest that a further shift may be implied by the change from plants and flowers in Vision 4, to just flowers in Visions 5–6 subsequently. Anyway, the argument from the uniqueness of this description cuts both ways. One might take its isolated appearance in *4 Ezra* either to witness its structural function or else to reflect, because of its very uniqueness, something that is rooted in real practice. One wonders, since the use of hallucinogens,

The intermediate character of this revelation is signalled by the fact that, on the one hand he is instructed to enter the revealed city, and yet, on the other, he cannot see and hear everything that is in it (10:55–56), but only part.⁴¹ Elsewhere I compared this statement with that cited by Paul in 1 Cor 2:9 referring to an eschatological revelation: “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him,” which is, apparently, a quotation from a Jewish Elijah apocryphon.⁴² The same ambiguity comes to the fore in Ezra’s prayer for enlightenment after the vision. He says, “Behold! I saw, and still see, what I am unable to explain” (10:32). This visionary state terrifies him and he says, “10:34 . . . ‘Speak, my lord; only do not forsake me, lest I die before my time. 10:35 For I have seen what I did not know, and I have heard what I do not understand. 10:36 Or is my mind deceived, and my soul dreaming?’”

The revelations in the first three visions are auditory. In addition to the knowledge transmitted in the course of the predictive dialogues, the seer *hears* the signs of the end from the angel, and in 7:26–44 the angel tells him of the day of judgement, and later on, of the stages of reward and punishment of the soul and other specific subjects.⁴³ In Vision 4 the revelation is a waking vision with an angelic interpretation. The following visions, often dubbed misleadingly “dream visions,” are apparently considered of a similar category to this waking vision if the criteria set forth above are indicative.⁴⁴ Ezra stays in the same place in Visions 5 and 6 and follows the same regimen prescribed at the end of Vision 4. Observe that the dream visions have two chief parts, the symbolic dream and the angelic revelation of its meaning. After the dream vision Ezra awakes in fear and perplexity (12:7–9). In Vision 5 he prays, opening

were it present, requires a tradition of accumulated knowledge and experience, as well as of practice and one might well expect it to have left traces in other Jewish apocalypses. As for the Iranian connection, the argument still waxes hot.

41 W.O.E. Oesterley, *2 Esdras (The Ezra Apocalypse)* (Westminster Commentaries, London: Methuen, 1933), 113–114 regards Vision 4 as an allegory to be treated like Visions 5 and 6. So also M.A. Knibb and R.J. Coggins, *The First and Second Books of Esdras* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 226. On p. 235 they note that 10:56 has “been taken as an indication that the narrative is based on actual visionary experience.” They do not either reject or endorse this view. On the problem of the nature of apocalyptic visions, see Stone, *Ancient Judaism*, 90–121.

42 See M.E. Stone, “The City in 4th Ezra,” *JBL* 126 (2007) 402–407. On the Elijah quotation, see M.E. Stone and J. Strugnell, *The Books of Elijah, Parts 1 and 2* (Texts and Translations Pseudepigrapha Series, 5; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979).

43 There are visionary parables in 4:48–49.

44 Dobroruka, “Visions,” 6 makes the same distinction as we do.

his address with the words, “O sovereign Lord”, apparently directed to God. In response, the meaning of the vision is communicated. The angel is Ezra’s interlocutor, as becomes evident from 12:39, where the angel speaks *of* God in the third person though elsewhere Ezra speaks *to* “the Lord.” In 4 Ezra, the rhetorical confounding of the angel and God is common, and it is not reasonable to demand consistency.⁴⁵

Ezra’s fifth vision is composed both of a dream and of a waking experience, the dream communicating the symbolic structure and the waking experience its explanation. A further point of interest, showing how what the seer can know is appropriate to his status, emerges when he says, praying to be instructed in the meaning of the vision, “12:9 For thou hast judged me worthy to be shown the end of the times and the last events of the times.” In other words, the fact that he received the revelations of Visions 1–4 proves that he is worthy and able now to receive the interpretation of his dream in Vision 5. The angel confirms Ezra’s estimation of his own worth at the end of the revelation, for he says, “And you alone were worthy to learn this secret of the Most High” (12:36).⁴⁶

The term “secret” occurs five times in 4 Ezra. Twice it refers to extra-biblical revelations to Abraham (3:10) and to Moses (14:4). In both cases the text specifies its content as “the end of times.” In the instance in 14:26 it designates the hidden books revealed to Ezra, which, like the secrets revealed to Moses in 14:5 and 14:6, are to be kept concealed. In the present verse (12:36), “secrets” refers to things uncovered to Ezra previously, without them being specified, while in 12:37–28 the wise among the people, to whom Ezra teaches the content of the vision, are said to be capable both of understanding and of keeping the secrets.⁴⁷

The transition to the sixth vision is even more laconic than that at the start of the fifth vision. According to 12:39 and 12:51 Ezra remains in the field and eats flowers for seven days. He is not instructed to eat the flowers and no prayer is mentioned, nor is his physical stance specified. Ezra’s location, position, food regimen, and role are accepted as *soi-disant*. Again a dream ensues. Ezra awakens from it afraid, and he beseechs the Most High for the meaning, using the same argument as in Vision 5, i.e., that previous revelations to him show

45 See Stone, 1990, Index, s.v. “angel and God, confusions between.”

46 Compare Hogan, *Theologies*, 169, somewhat differently.

47 Moo, *Creation*, 154, with some justification, asks “why the content of the visions should not be shared with all the people,” but the text explicitly links what can be revealed to the capability of the hearer to understand. It is not self-evident to me as it is to Moo that “4 Ezra is among those books to be read only by the wise” (14:45–46).

that he is worthy of receiving the explanation. Here, unlike in the previous instances, he ventures his own guess at the meaning of the dream (13:13b–20). The interpretation is given by an undefined “he,” and subsequently the speaker refers to the Most High in the third person (13:56), just as in Vision 5.

Intriguingly, in the last part of this explanation, Ezra is praised for his pursuit of knowledge using both the term “law” and a number of wisdom tags. A typical example of the latter occurs in verse 13:55, “for you have devoted your life to wisdom, and called understanding your mother.” Indeed, the pair “wisdom/understanding” is fixed and in 4 Ezra usually refers to secret or special knowledge.⁴⁸ Then he is promised heavenly reward (13:56). Next, Ezra arose, walked in the field praising God for his wonders and his governance of the times. No command that he do this is given and, likewise, nothing at all is said about food. After the vision, just three days are mentioned following which more will be revealed.

In general terms, then, we may observe a number of shifts at the end of Vision 6. There is spontaneous praise i.e., recognition of God; there is no sleeping, no initial lying down, and no weeping. Ezra has graduated from his bed to the field; from weeping and fasting for seven days to sitting in the field and eating flowers; and then to lying down with a troubled heart but not weeping. Finally he is in the field, he eats the flowers, walks around and praises God as Him who governs the times. This is parallel to a shift from dialogic vision to waking vision followed by dialogue, next to dream vision followed by dialogue, and then to a direct, self-explanatory waking vision which includes an experience of revelation, followed by Ezra’s assumption.

Chapter 14, the seventh vision, differs from all the preceding. It contains a number of distinct vision experiences. The first is a call to Ezra (14:3–12), which is followed directly by instructions to prepare for the end of his mortality and a warning that the end of the age is approaching. Ezra responds by saying that he will do two things: (1) he will instruct the people; and (2) he will write down

48 The passage in 8:4–6 uses similar terminology, but from a different view point: Ezra prays for “wisdom” and “understanding.” In 5:38 Ezra, who is convinced that his earthly condition precludes knowing “the way,” says that he is “without wisdom and miserable.” In the course of the signs, according to 5:9, wisdom shall hide itself and understanding will withdraw. In 8:4 he calls on his soul to drink wisdom and understanding. In 8:53 in the eschatological state, the pre-created wisdom is evoked. This terminology with parallelism of understanding, wisdom, and knowledge, also characterizes the secret books (14:47). On such a reapplication of wisdom terminology, see G.W.E. Nickelsburg and M.E. Stone, *Early Judaism Texts and Documents on Faith and Piety* (rev. ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 222–224.

everything that has happened in the course of cosmic history so as to guide the last generation. In response, within the same experience, God instructs him how to write all the exoteric and esoteric books.

Evoking Moses again, Ezra then proceeds to take his leave of the people (14:27–36). This is the fulfilment of his first resolve. Then, in response to his second resolve, he gathers the five men and goes to a field (14:37) where he receives his second waking experience. He is summoned and given a cup of inspiration to drink (14:38–39)⁴⁹ and has a sudden access of wisdom, memory,⁵⁰ and speech. He speaks and the five men, also inspired, write “in characters they did not know” (14:40–42). God commands him to publish twenty-four books and to transmit seventy secretly, “For in them are the springs of understanding, the fountains of wisdom, and the river of knowledge” (14:47). After writing these things, Ezra is assumed to heaven and he is called “the Scribe of the Knowledge of the Most High forever” (14:50).

Here three main events are presented: first, Ezra’s commissioning, a waking experience; second, Ezra’s carrying out his commission, the second part of which is also a waking experience shared by him and the five men and third, his assumption, which is narrated briefly.⁵¹

The commissioning happens while he is in the field, walking and giving glory to God as revealer of the times. On the third day after the preceding vision he is sitting under an oak and hears the divine summons from a bush opposite (13:56–14:2). At this point nothing is said about his food, and the location is the same as Visions 4–6. Above we have noted the special character of

49 On drunkenness as a metaphor for inspiration, see Stone, *4Ezra*, 438–440. See the earlier, but still valuable discussion of this in Box, *The Ezra-Apocalypse*, 318 and references there. Box regards the goblet of inspiration merely as a narrative element and not as reflecting anything more. J. Myers, *I and II Esdras*, 325 cites parallels, but since he does not relate the drinking of the goblet to the events of the vision, his parallels serve only as background. The whole matter of drunkenness and inspiration is discussed excellently by H. Lewy, *Sobria Ebrietas: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Antiken Mystik* (BZNW 9; Gießen: Töpelmann, 1929), and see especially pp. 94–99 on the present passage. He adduced Hellenistic parallels and compared with early Christian sources.

50 Box, *Ezra-Apocalypse* 305 thinks that here the description reflects the fact that “experiences in an ecstatic state cannot always be remembered.” This statement is dependent on Hermann Gunkel, “Das vierte Buch Esra,” in Emil Kautzsch, ed., *Die Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen des alten Testaments* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1900) 2:400.

51 Although Najman, “Between Heaven and Earth,” 164–166 deals with the process of Ezra’s transformation in the book, she does not say anything particular about his assumption.

his conduct in the field. Next we find him sitting under an oak tree,⁵² opposite a bush. In the preceding visions, in instances where Ezra's position is specified, he is lying down. Here he is sitting and, on the summons, he stands up, as he does elsewhere in the book when he receives a particularly solemn revelation.⁵³

In the second part of the waking experience,⁵⁴ which he shared with the five men, alimentation becomes very significant. Previously he has drunk a goblet full of the spirit, which inspires him, and his inspiration overflows to the five men.⁵⁵ They are inspired to write "in characters they did not know," and he is inspired to speak the books incessantly. They eat at night only; he does not eat or drink for 40 days.⁵⁶

As at the end of Vision 7, he was commanded to keep secret the seventy revealed books, which contain saving knowledge. This keeping the revelation secret resembled, according to 4 Ezra, the teaching revealed to Abraham and to Moses on Sinai. Nothing more is said about Ezra's state except that, after his assumption "he was called the Scribe of the Knowledge of the Most High forever" (14:50). This implies that he is transformed into a heavenly being full of superhuman knowledge.

4 Ezra distinguishes clearly between earthly revelation and heavenly, superhuman revelation. But the book itself indicates that even in the earthly revelation, there are different levels or situations and it traces Ezra's movement up towards the highest revelation that can be received on earth.

52 See Stone, *4 Ezra*, 410–411 on the modelling of Ezra's revelation on Moses's: cf. 14:3. The significance of the oak tree is discussed on p. 410.

53 See 4:47 and Stone, *4 Ezra*, 100–101.

54 "[H]e caused the Scripture to be written not when he was in a trance, but when he was fully conscious and in complete possession of his faculties," Russell, *Method and Message*, 176.

55 Compare Russell, *Method and Message*, 171–172, who suggests that this is "an attempt to rationalize previous ideas of inspiration" and a view "in which the spirit is thought of . . . in a very material way in the form of water with the colour of fire." See note 40 above.

56 Compare 2 *Enoch* 56:2 J, where Enoch, after his heavenly transformation says, "food has not come into me, and earthly pleasure my soul does not remember": see also A.A. Orlov, *From Apocalypticism to Merkabah Mysticism: Studies on the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha (JSJSuppl 114; Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2007) 257–259*, and earlier, A.A. Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism, 107; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005) 226–227*. On the motif of hunger is typical of Adam and Eve in the fallen state, see Orlov, *Merkabah*, 257–259. The motifs discussed here also appear in one or another form in 2 *Enoch*. On pp. 227–231, cf. 248, of *Enoch-Metatron*, Orlov discussed Enoch's transformation in 2 *Enoch* 22. However, he does not deal there with any change in Enoch's abilities or perceptions.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to set forth the many indicators that the author uses to mark the different stages of Ezra's visionary progress. The book indicates shifts of the seer's status, and with each indication of the elevation of his status, more is revealed to him and in new ways. So he has moved from his bed to the field; from (1) weeping and fasting seven days (2) to sitting and eating flowers (3) and then to lying down, troubled of heart but not weeping, (4) to the field and to eating flowers, (5) and then to walking around praising. In the field he receives, in Vision 7, a direct address and teaching from God (not the angel). Finally, summoned, he drinks a symbolic cup of inspiration, and achieves a state similar to Moses's on Sinai, eating and drinking nothing for 40 days and nights. Nothing more is said except that after his assumption "he was called the Scribe of the Knowledge of the Most High for ever" (14:50). This implies that he is transformed into a heavenly being and one full of supernatural knowledge.

The next stage in this research, reserved for another context, will be to examine other revelatory works to see whether there is a similar correlation between the seer's state, indicated by various markers, and the level of things revealed to him.