

The Second Book of ESDRAS, Good News Translation (GNT)

Introduction

The Second Book of Esdras is primarily an apocalypse (or series of visions and revelations) that was written by an unknown Jewish author in Hebrew or Aramaic. This was translated into Greek, and an introduction and appendix of Christian origin were added. The original and the Greek translation have disappeared, and the text is now preserved primarily in Latin. The main part of the work reports seven revelations that were given to Shealtiel (identified with Ezra) and answers questions about the problem of evil, suffering, persecution, the end of the world, judgment, and the new world.

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This is the second book of the prophet Ezra. He was the son of Seraiah, the grandson of Azariah, and a descendant of Hilkiah, Shallum, Zadok, Ahitub, Ahijah, Phinehas, Eli, Amariah, Azariah, Meraith, Arna, Uzzi, Borith, Abishua, Pinehas, Eleazar, and Aaron, of the tribe of Levi.

Chapter 1

The Rejection of Israel

When I, Ezra, was a captive in Media during the reign of Artaxerzes, king of Persia, the Lord said to me, “Go and remind my people and their children of the sins they have committed against me, and let them tell their grandchildren. My people have sinned even more than their ancestors, for they have forgotten me and offered sacrifices to foreign gods. I rescued them from Egypt, where they were slaves, but they have done things that made me angry and have refused to listen to my warnings.

8. “Ezra, tear your hair in grief and call down on these people all the disasters they deserve. They are rebellious and refuse to obey my Law. How much longer can I tolerate these people for whom I have done so much? For their sake I overthrew many kings and crushed the king of Egypt together with his officials and all his army. I destroyed all the nations that opposed them, and in the east I scattered the people of the provinces of Tyre and Sidon and killed all the enemies of Israel.

12. “Ezra, tell them that the Lord says: ‘I brought you across the Red Sea and made safe roads for you where there were none. I made Moses your leader and gave you Aaron as your priest. I provided you

with light from a pillar of fire and performed great miracles among you, but you have forgotten me. I, the Lord, have spoken.'

15. The Lord Almighty says: 'I sent you quails as a sign of my care for you. I provided you with camps where you could be safe, but all you did there was complain. Even when I destroyed your enemies, you did not appreciate what I had done. You have never done anything but complain. Have you forgotten the blessings I gave you? There in the desert when you were hungry and thirsty you cried out to me: 'Why have you brought us out of this desert to kill us? Being slaves to the Egyptians was better than coming here to die.' I was moved by your bitter groans and gave you manna, the bread of angels. When you were thirsty, I split the rock and all the water you needed flowed out. To protect you from the heat, I provided you with shade trees. I divided fertile lands among you and drove out the Canaanites, the Perizzites, and the Philistines who opposed your advance. What more could I have done for you?'

22. The Lord Almighty says: 'There in the desert by the river of bitter water when you were thirsty and cursed me, in spite of your insults I did not send fire upon you. Instead, I made the water fit to drink by throwing wood into the river. *People of Israel, what can I do with you? People of Judah, you refuse to obey me. So I will turn to other nations and make them my people. They will keep my laws. Because you have abandoned me, I will abandon you. You will beg me for mercy, but I will show you none. When you pray to me, I will not hear you. You never hesitate to commit murder; your hands are stained with the blood of those you have killed. It is not me that you have betrayed; you have betrayed yourselves.*'

Israel is to be replaced

28. The Lord Almighty says; 'I have pleaded with you as a father pleads with his sons, as a mother pleads with her daughters, or as a nursemaid pleads with her small children. I begged you to be my people so that I could be your God, to be my children so that I could be your father. I gathered you together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. But now what can I do with you? I will banish you from my sight; and even when you offer sacrifices to me, I will turn away from you. Your religious festivals, your New Moon celebrations, or your circumcision ceremonies mean nothing to me. I sent to you my servants, the prophets, but you killed them and mutilated their corpses. I will make you pay for murdering them.'

33. The Lord Almighty says: 'Your Temple is abandoned. I will scatter you like straw blown away by the wind. Your children will have no descendants because they rejected my commandments and did what I hated, just as you did. *I will give your home to a people that is about to appear.* They will believe me, even though they have not yet heard of me. They will do what I command, even though I never performed any miracles for them. They have not seen the prophets, but they will live by their ancient teachings. I give my solemn promise that I will bless those people, and their little children will laugh and shout for joy. Those people have never seen me, but deep within them they will believe my words.

38. Now, Father Ezra, look with pride at the people you see coming from the east. Look at the leaders I have given them: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.'

Chapter 2.

“The Lord says: ‘I led my people out of slavery in Egypt; I gave them commandments through my servants, the prophets, but they refused to listen and ignored my teachings. Jerusalem, the mother who brought them into the world, says to them, ‘Go your own way, my children; I am now a widow left completely alone. I took great delight in bringing you up, but you sinned against the Lord God and did what I knew was wrong, so I mourned in deep grief when I lost you. What can I do for you, now that I am a widow and left completely alone? Go, my children, and ask the Lord for mercy.’”

5. Father Ezra, I call on you to testify against these people as their mother has done, because they have refused to keep my covenant. Now bring confusion on them and ruin on their mother, so that they will have no descendants. They will be scattered among the nations, and no one on earth will remember them any longer, for they have despised my covenant.

8. “How terrible will be your punishment, Assyria. You have let wicked people hide within your borders. Remember, sinful nation, what I did to Sodom and Gomorrah. Their land now lies covered with lumps of tar and heaps of ashes. That is what I do to people who do not obey me.

10. “The Lord says to Ezra: Announce to my new people that I will give them the kingdom of Jerusalem, which I had planned to give to Israel. I will take the dazzling light of my presence away from Israel and will give to my new people the eternal Temple that I had prepared for Israel. The tree of life will fill the air around them with its fragrance. They will never have to work; they will never grow tired. Ask, and you will receive. Pray that the number of the day you have to wait will be reduced. Even now the kingdom has been prepared for you, so stay alert. Call heaven and earth to witness that I, the living God, have abolished evil and created good.

15. “Mother Jerusalem, take your children in your arms. Guide their steps in safe paths; raise them with the same delight that a dove has in raising her young. I, the Lord, have chosen you. I will raise your dead from their graves because I recognize them as my people. Jerusalem, mother of these people, do not be afraid; I, the Lord, have chosen you.

18. “I will send my servants Isaiah and Jeremiah to help you. At their request I have consecrated and prepared for you twelve trees, heavy with different kinds of fruit, twelve fountains flowing with milk and honey, and seven high mountains covered with roses and lilies. I will make your children very happy there. Now, Jerusalem, come to the defense of widows, take the side of the fatherless, give to the poor, protect orphans, give clothing to those who have none, take care of those who are broken and weak, do not make fun of those who are crippled, protect the disabled, and help the blind to catch a vision of my dazzling splendor. Keep both the old and the young safe within your walls. Whenever you find a dead body, bury it and mark the grave, and I will give you a place of honor when I raise the dead.

24. “Be calm, my people; your time to rest will come. Take care of your children like a faithful nursemaid and guide their steps in safe paths, so that none of them will be lost. When the time comes, I will hold you responsible for them. Don’t worry; when the day of trouble and distress comes, others will cry and mourn, but you will be happy and rich. The other nations will be jealous of you, but they will not be able to harm you.

29. “I will protect you with my power and save your children from hell. Be happy, Jerusalem, you and your children, because I, the Lord, will rescue you. Remember your children who are asleep in their graves; I, the Lord Almighty, am merciful, and I will bring them out from the place where they lie hidden in the earth. Until I come, hold your children close and tell them about my grace and mercy, which are like a spring that never runs dry.”

Ezra on Mount Sinai

33. I, Ezra, was on Mount Sinai when the Lord ordered me to go to the people of Israel. But when I went to them they rejected me and refused to listen to what the Lord commanded. That is why *I am speaking to you Gentiles*. You are ready to listen and understand: **“Wait for your shepherd who is coming very soon, at the end of the age, to give you eternal rest.** Be ready to receive the blessings of the kingdom for eternal light will shine on you forever. Flee from the darkness of this present age and accept the joyful splendor prepared for you. I testify publicly for my savior. The Lord has appointed him, so accept him and be happy. Give thanks to God, who has called you into his heavenly kingdom. Stand up and see the number of those who have received the Lord’s mark and who share in his banquet. They have left the darkness of this age and have received shining white robes from the Lord. So now, Jerusalem, welcome these people who have kept the Law of the Lord, and this will complete the list of those whom God has assigned to you. The children you longed for have returned; their number is now complete. So pray that the Lord’s kingdom may come and that your people, whom God chose before he created the world, may become holy.”

Ezra on Mount Zion

42. I, Ezra, saw an enormous crowd on Mount Zion, too many people to count. They were all singing and praising the Lord. Standing in the middle of this crowd was a very tall young man, taller than any of the others. He was placing a crown on the head of each person, but he towered above them all. I was spellbound by the sight, and I asked the angel, “Who are these people, sir?”

45. He replied: “These are people who have taken off their mortal robes and have put on immortal ones. They have confessed their faith in God, and now they are being given crowns and palm branches as symbols of their victory.” Then I asked the angel, “Who is the young man who is putting the crowns of their heads and giving them the palms?”

47. “He is the Son of God,” the angel replied, “and all these people confessed their faith in him while they lived on earth.” Then I began to praise those who had stood for the Lord so bravely. And the angel said to me, “Go and tell my people what you have seen, the many marvelous wonders of the Lord.”

THE FIRST VISION

Ezra’s Prayer of Complaint

Chapter 3

Thirty years after the fall of Jerusalem, I, Shealtiel (also known as Ezra), was in Babylon. I was lying on my bed, troubled and disturbed, as I thought about the ruins of Jerusalem and the prosperity of those who lived in Babylon. I was deeply disturbed and began to express my fears to God Most High. “O

Lord and Master,” I said, “you, and you alone, spoke the word at the beginning of creation and formed the world. At your command the dust produced the lifeless body of Adam. Then with your hands you shaped it, you breathed into it the breath of life, and he began to live. You brought him into the Garden of Eden, which you yourself had planted before the earth was made. You gave him just one commandment, but he disobeyed it, and you immediately made him and his descendants subject to death.

“From Adam were born more nations, tribes, clans and families than can be counted. All the nations did whatever they wished; they sinned against you and rejected your commands. But you did nothing to stop them. Then again, after a while, you brought on the flood and destroyed the world’s population. They all suffered the same fate: as death had come to Adam, so now death came to a whole generation in the flood. But you spared one man, Noah, with his family and all his righteous descendants.

12. “The number of people living on earth began to increase, and the number of families, tribes, and nations grew. They too fell into sin and were worse than the generations before them. But then you chose Abraham. You loved him, and to him alone in the dead of night, you secretly disclosed how the world would end. You made an everlasting covenant with him and promised him that you would never abandon his descendants. You gave him Isaac, and to Isaac you gave Jacob and Esau. You chose Jacob, and his descendants became a great nation, but you rejected Esau.

17. “You rescued the descendants of Jacob from Egypt and led them to Mount Sinai. There you bent down the skies, shook the earth, moved the world, made the waters beneath the earth tremble, and brought disorder to the universe. The dazzling light of your presence passed through the four gates of fire, earthquake, wind and frost, in order to give the Law and its commandments to Jacob’s descendants, the people of Israel. Yet you did not remove their evil impulse, but let your Law guide their lives. The first man, Adam, weighed down with an evil impulse, sinned and was defeated, and the same was true of all of his descendants. So the disease became permanent, and although the Law was in the hearts of the people, so also was the root of evil! That is why what was good passed away, while what was evil continued.

23. “Many years later you sent your servant David and told him to build a city which would bear your name and in which sacrifices would be offered to you. This was done for many years, but then the inhabitants of the city disobeyed you and sinned just like Adam and all his descendants, because they had the same evil impulse. So you handed over your own city to your enemies.

28. “I said to myself, ‘Perhaps Babylon has been allowed to conquer Jerusalem because the people who live there are better than we are.’ But when I got to Babylon, I saw more sins than I could count, and now for thirty years I have seen many sinners here. So I was perplexed when I saw how you tolerate sinners and do not punish them, how you protect your enemies and yet destroy your own people. You haven’t given the faintest hint as to how these ways of yours can be changed. Surely Babylon is no better than Jerusalem. No other nation, except Israel, has ever known you or accepted your covenants. But Israel was never rewarded, and never profited from its labor. I have traveled widely in the other nations, and I have seen how prosperous they are, although they don’t keep your commands. Now then, Lord, if you would just weigh our sins on the scales against those of the rest of the world, it would be perfectly clear that their sins are heavier. There has never been a time when the people of the world did not sin against you; but has any other nation kept your commands as well as Israel has? You may find individuals who have, but you won’t find a nation that has done so.”

The Human Mind Cannot Understand God's Ways

Chapter 4

The Angel Uriel, who had been sent to me, replied, "You can't even understand what happens in the world. Do you think you can understand the ways of God Most High?"

3. "Yes, sir, I do!" I answered.

The angel continued, "I have been sent to ask you to solve three riddles about what happens in this world. If you can explain even one of them to me, I will answer your questions about God's ways and teach you why the human race has an evil impulse."

"I agree, sir," I said.

Then he said to me, "Good! How do you weigh a pound of fire? How do you measure a bushel of wind? How do you bring back a day that has passed?"

6. I answered, "Why do you ask me such questions? No human being could answer them."

Then he said, "What if I had asked you how many dwelling places there are at the bottom of the sea? How many rivers flow into the waters beneath the earth? How many rivers are there above the dome of the sky? Where are the exits from the world of the dead? Where are the entrances to Paradise? If I had asked you these questions, you might have answered, 'I have never gone down into the water beneath the earth, and I have not yet entered the world of the dead. I have never gone up to heaven.' But all I have asked you about is fire, wind, and the day that has just passed – things that you have experienced. Yet you have given me no answer. You can't even understand things that you have been familiar with since you were a child. How then can your little mind understand the ways of God Most High? Can someone already worn down by this corrupt world understand the ways of the incorruptible God?"

When I heard this, I fell face downward on the ground and said to him, "It would have been better if we had never been born than to have to live in a world of sin and suffering without understanding why things happen as they do."

The angel Uriel answered, "I once went into the woods and heard the trees plotting together. They were saying, 'Let's go to war against the sea and push it back, so that we may have more room. But the waves of the sea also plotted together and said, 'Let's conquer the woods and extend our territory.' But all the plotting of the trees was useless because fire came and destroyed them. And the plotting of the sea was just as useless because the sand stood firm and blocked its advance. Now, if you were the judge and had to decide between them, which would you pronounce right?"

19. I replied, "They were both wrong, because trees belong on the land, and waves belong in the sea."

20. "You have given the right answer," he said. "So why can't you see the answer to your own problems? For just as trees have their place on land, and waves have their place in the sea, so the people of this world can understand only what goes on in this world, and only heavenly beings can understand what goes on in heaven."

The End of the Age

23. “Please tell me, sir,” I asked, “why then was I given the ability to understand anything? I am not interested in asking questions about what goes on in the heavens; I am only concerned about things that go on around us. Why has God allowed Israel to be disgraced by foreign nations? Why has he let the nation he loves be handed over to the power of godless nation? Why do the Law and the covenant that were given to you ancestors mean nothing any more? Why is our life shorter than a breath? Why does God think us unworthy of his mercy? Why doesn’t God do something to help his own people? These are the questions that I want to ask.”

26. Uriel answered, “If you live long enough, you will be surprised at what you will see, because this age is rapidly passing away. This age is so full of misery and imperfection that it cannot hold all the blessings that God has promised the righteous in the time to come. The evil about which you have asked me has already been planted, but the time for its harvesting has not yet arrived. ***This evil must be harvested, and this world where it was planted must be removed, before the new age where the good is to be planted can appear.*** At the beginning of time one grain of evil seed was sown in the heart of Adam. See how much wickedness it has already produced! Think of how much more it will produce before it is cut down and threshed out at Judgment Day. You can see for yourself what a big crop this one evil seed has produced. How terrible will be the harvest on Judgment Day when these countless heads of grain are threshed out!”

33. Then I asked, “How long do we have to wait before this happens? Why are our lives so short and so full of misery?”

34. Uriel answered, “Don’t be in a greater hurry than God Most High! You are thinking only of yourself, but God has to be concerned about everybody. Your questions are the same ones asked by the souls of the righteous dead in the places where God is keeping them waiting: ‘How long must we wait here? When will the Day of Judgment come, when will we get our reward?’ The archangel Jeremiel answers them, ‘It will happen as soon as the complete number of those who have suffered as you have are here. For God has weighed this age, measured the years, and numbered the days. Nothing will be changed until time has run its predetermined course.’”

38. “But, sir,” I replied, “All of us here on earth are such wicked sinners. Is it possible that because of our sin the righteous dead are having to wait for their reward?”

40. His answer was, “Can a pregnant woman keep her child from being born after her nine months are up?”

41. “No, sir, she cannot,” I answered. And he continued, “In the world of the dead, the place where God has stored the souls is like a womb. It is as eager to return the souls entrusted to it from the beginning of the world as a woman is to end her labour pains. When that happens, you will have the answer to all your questions.”

44. “Please, sir,” I asked, “If you think I am able to understand it, can you tell me one more thing? Is the time that is still to come longer than the past that has already gone by? I know how long the past has been, but I don’t know the future.”

47. "Come here and stand at my right," he commanded, "and I will show you a vision and explain its meaning." So I stood by him and looked, and I saw a blazing fire pass by in front of me, and when it was gone, I saw that smoke was still there. Then a rain cloud passed by in front of me, bringing a heavy downpour of rain; and when the downpour was over, there was still a light rain. "Think about this," said Uriel. "Just as the downpour was greater than the light rain that followed it and the fire was greater than the smoke left behind, in the same way the time that has passed is much longer than the time to come. The time that is left is like the light rain and the smoke."

The Signs of the End

51. "Please tell me," I asked, "do you think I will live until that time? If not, who will be alive when it happens?"

52. He answered, "I can tell you some of the signs of the end, if that is what you are asking about; but I am not here to tell you how long you will live, and in any case, I don't know."

Chapter 5

"But these are the signs: The time will come when all people on earth will be in the grip of great confusion. The way of truth will be hidden, and no faith will be left in the land. Wickedness will increase until it has become worse than you have ever known it to be. The country that you now see ruling the world will lie in ruins, with no inhabitant or traveler there. After that, if God Most High lets you live long enough, you will see that country in confusion. The sun will suddenly start shining at night, and the moon in the daytime. Blood will drip from trees; stones will speak; nations will be in confusion; the movement of the stars will be changed. A king unwanted by anyone will begin to rule, and the birds will fly away. Fish will be washed up on the shores of the Dead Sea. The voice of one whom many do not know will be heard at night; everyone will hear it. The earth will break open in many places and begin spouting out flames. Wild animals will leave the fields and forests. At their monthly periods women will bear monsters. Fresh water will become salty. Friends everywhere will attack one another. Then understanding will disappear, and reason will go into hiding, and they will not be found even though many may look for them. Everywhere on earth wickedness and violence will increase. One country will ask a neighboring country if justice or anyone who does right has come that way, but the answer will always be 'No.' At that time people will hope for much, but will get nothing; they will work hard, but will never succeed at anything. These are the signs of the end that I am permitted to show you. But if you begin to pray again and continue to weep and fast for seven more days, you will hear even greater things."

14. Then I woke up, and I was trembling violently. I was so disturbed that I was about to faint, but the angel that had come to talk with me took hold of me, strengthened me, and set me on my feet.

16. The next night, Phaltiel, who was a leader of the people, came to me and asked, "Where have you been? And why do you look so sad? Don't you know that the people of Israel in the land of their exile have been put in your care? So get up and eat. Do not abandon us like a shepherd leaving his flock to the attacks of savage wolves."

19. "Leave me alone," I answered, "do not come near me for the next seven days. Then come back." So he left.

THE SECOND VISION

Ezra's Prayer and Uriel's Answer

20. Then, crying and mourning, I fasted seven days, as the angel Uriel had commanded me to do. At the end of the seven days, I was again deeply troubled but I recovered my ability to think, and again I began to speak with God Most High. "Lord and Master," I said, "from all the forests and plants on earth you have chosen this one vine. From all the countries of the world you have chosen this one small land. From all the flowers in the world, you have chosen this one lily. From all the water in the deep oceans, you have filled up this one river. From all the cities that have ever been built, you have set apart this one city, Jerusalem, as your own. From all the birds that were created, you chose this one dove. From all the animals that were made, you chose this one lamb. From all the nations of the world, you chose this one nation to be your own, and you gave its people your Law, which is honored by people everywhere.

28. "And now, Lord, since all of this is true, why have you dishonored this one people more than all others by handing them over to many nations? Why have you scattered your own people, who believed in your covenants? Why have you let them be trampled by people who rejected your promises? If you are so angry with your own people, you yourself ought to punish them."

31. When I had finished speaking, the angel who had come to me on a previous night was sent to me again. He said: "Listen carefully to me, and I will teach you more."

33. "Please go on, sir," I said. So he continued, "Are you worried about the people of Israel? Do you think you love them more than God, who made them?"

34. "No, sir," I replied. "I spoke as I did because I was so confused and upset. I am always troubled whenever I try to think about the ways of God Most High or to understand even a small part of what he does."

35. "You cannot understand!" he answered. And I asked, "Why not, sir? In that case, why was I born? Why didn't I die before I was born? Then I wouldn't have seen the sufferings and troubles of the people of Israel."

36. The angel said to me, "I will answer you if you can do the following things: Tell me how many people are yet to be born; collect scattered raindrops for me; make dead flowers bloom again; open the rooms where the winds are locked up and make them blow for me; show me the picture of a sound. If you can do these things, I will answer your questions about the sufferings of the people of Israel."

38. I answered, "Lord and master, no one can do these things, except God, who is not confined to this world. How can I give you any kind of answer? What do I know?"

40. He continued, "You could not do even one of the things that I asked you to do. How can you expect to understand God's judgments or why God has promised his love to his people?"

Descending Generations

41. Then I said, “But, Lord God, your concern is with the people who will be alive at the end of the world. What will happen to those who live before that time? What about us? What about those who came before us, and those who will live after us?”

42. He answered me, “The final judgment can be compared to a circle, and just as a circle has no beginning or end, those who come early will not be too early, and those who come late will not be too late.”

43. I replied, “But couldn’t you have created all human being, those of the past, the present, and the future, so that they would all live at the same time? In that way, you could have had your final judgment sooner.”

44. He answered, “The creation cannot move faster than the Creator. And besides, the world wouldn’t have been able to hold all the people if everyone had been created at the same time.”

45. “Why, then,” I asked, “did you just now tell me that one day you would bring back to life at the same time every creature that ever lived? If the world can hold them all then, it can hold them now.”

46. He answered, “That would be like asking a woman who has given birth to ten children why she didn’t have them all at once, instead of one at a time.”

47. “That would be impossible,” I answered. “She can’t have them all at once.”

48. “In the same way,” he continued, “I have made the world like a womb so that it produces human beings at regular intervals. The rule that neither a young child nor an old woman can give birth to a baby also applies to the world that I have created.”

50. Then I said, “Since you have brought up the subject, may I ask if the world you have been talking about is still young or is it approaching old age?”

51. He replied, “You can learn the answer from any woman who has given birth to several children. Ask her why her younger children do not grow as tall as her older children. She will tell you that those born while she was young and healthy are much stronger than those born when she was getting old and becoming weak. You will notice that you are smaller than people of earlier generations; those who come later will be smaller still. This shows you that creation is already getting old and losing the strength of her youth.”

God will Bring the End of the World

56. “If you please, Lord,” I asked, “will you show me the one through whom you will bring judgment on your creation?”

Chapter 6

He said to me, “I made this decision before I created the world: before the gates of the world were standing; before the winds were brought together to blow, or the lightning flashed, or the thunder

rolled; before the foundations of Paradise were laid, or the beautiful flowers appeared; before the powers that move the stars were established, or the armies of angels assembled; before the air was piled up high, or the divisions of the heavens given their names; before I chose Mount Zion as my footstool; before the present age was planned, or the scheming of its sinners was rejected, or my seal was placed on those who obeyed the Law and laid up a treasure of faithfulness. Even then, I decided that since I, and I alone, had created the world, I and I alone, would bring it to an end.”

7. Then I asked, “How long a period of time will divide the ages? When will the first age end and the next age begin?”

8. He answered, “The interval will be no longer than that between Abraham and Abraham. He was the grandfather of both Jacob and Esau, and when they were born, Jacob was holding Esau’s heel. Esau represents the end of this age, and Jacob represents the beginning of the new age. So, if Jacob’s hand is the beginning and Esau’s heel is the end, do not try to find a space in between.”

The Signs of the End

11. “Lord and Master,” I said, “please hear my request. On that earlier night you showed me some of the signs of the end; now please show me the rest.”

13. “Stand up,” he said, “and you will hear a very loud voice. If the place where you are standing is violently shaken while the voice is speaking, don’t be afraid. The message will be about the end of the world, and the foundations of the world will understand that the voice is speaking about them. They will tremble and quake because they know that they will undergo a change when the end comes.”

17. When he said this, I stood up and listened. I heard a voice that sounded like a roaring river. It said, “The time is near when I will come to judge the people living on the earth. I will punish those who have hurt others with their injustice. Jerusalem’s humiliation will come to an end, and ***this age which is about to pass away, will have the final seal put on it. Then I will give the following signs: the books will be opened across the sky for all to see.***

21. Children only a year old will speak. Pregnant women will give birth after only three or four months, and their premature babies will live and run about. Planted fields will suddenly become bare, and full barn will suddenly become empty. Then the trumpet will sound, and sudden terror will grip the heart of everyone when they hear it. Friends will fight like enemies, and the earth and its people will be terrified. Rivers will stop flowing and stand still for three hours.

25. “Those who survive all these things that I have predicted will be rescued when I bring to an end this world that I created. They will see those who never died but were taken up alive into heaven. ***The hearts and minds of people on earth will be changed. Evil will be destroyed and deceit eliminated. Faith will grow strong, corruption will be overcome, and truth, which has not produced fruit for so long, will make itself felt again.***”

29. While the voice was speaking, the ground beneath me began to rock back and forth. Then the angel said to me. “These are the things that I have come to show you tonight. Now if will pray and fast for seven more days, I will come back and tell you even greater things because God Most High has heard your prayer; the Mighty God has seen the pure and righteous life that you have lived since your youth. That is why he has sent me to show you all these things and to tell you not to be afraid but to trust him.

Do not be so quick to raise useless questions in the present age; then you will not be so quick to do so in the final age.”

THE THIRD VISION

Why God’s People Suffer

35. After that, I mourned and fasted for seven more days, as I had done before, and so I completed the three weeks of fasting that I had been commanded to observe. On the eighth night I was again deeply troubled, and I began to speak to God Most High. I was very tense and my heart was uneasy, but I said, “O Lord, at the beginning of creation you spoke the word. On the first day you commanded, ‘Let the universe be made,’ and your word carried out that command. At that time the spirit was moving, darkness and silence were everywhere, and no human voice was yet heard. Then you commanded that a ray of light shine out of the room where it was stored, so that your works could be seen. On the second day you created the angel of the sky and commanded him to separate the water, so that part of it would move up above the dome of the sky and part remain below. On the third day you commanded the water that covered the earth to come together in one place and over one seventh of the earth’s surface. Then you dried out the rest of the earth’s surface to make dry land, so that it might be cultivated and planted and used in your service. Your word went out and completed the work immediately. In an instant all kinds of fruits and vegetables appeared, enough kinds to satisfy every taste. There were flowers of indescribable fragrances and of the most magnificent colors. These things were made on the third day. On the fourth day the bright-shining sun, the light of the moon, and the arrangements of the stars were created by your command. You commanded them to serve the human race, which would soon be created. On the fifth day you commanded the part of the earth covered by water to produce birds and fish; and it was done. At your command, the still and lifeless water brought forth living creature, so that the nations might proclaim your wonderful works. Then you singled out two of the living creatures; you named one of them Behemoth and the other Leviathan. You separated them from each other because the sea wasn’t big enough to hold them both. You let Behemoth live on a part of the land that you dried up on the third day of creation; it is a land of a thousand mountains. You let Leviathan live in the sea. You kept them both live, so that your chosen people may feast on them at the time you choose. On the sixth day you commanded the earth to produce the animals, domestic and wild, large and small. More important than all of these, you created Adam and put him in charge of everything that you had made. And all of us, the people you have chosen, are descendant from him.

55. “O Lord, I have told you all this because you said that you created this first world for the sake of your people. You said that, in spite of their great numbers, all the other nations which descended from Adam are nothing, worth no more than a drop of water, no more than spit. But now, Lord those nations that are considered as nothing are ruling over us and destroying us. We are your people, and you have called us your first-born, your only child, your witness, your loved one, but we have been handed over to the power of these other nations. If this world was really created for the sake of your people, why don’t we have possession of it? How much longer must we wait?”

Chapter Seven

When I had finished speaking, the same angel that had been sent to me on the earlier nights appeared again. He said, “Stand up, Ezra, and listen to what I have come to tell you.”

3. “Go ahead, sir,” I said.

He continued, “Picture in your mind a broad, immense sea spreading over a vast area, but with an entrance no wider than a river. No one who wishes to enter that sea, whether to visit it or control it can reach its broad expanse of water without passing through the narrow entrance. Or take another example: Picture a city built on a plain. The city is full of all kinds of good things, but the entrance to it is narrow and steep, with fire on one side and deep water on the other. The one path between the fire and the water is so narrow that only one person at a time may walk on it. If anyone inherits this city, he cannot take possession of his inheritance without passing through the dangerous entrance.”

10. “That is right, sir,” I said.

“That is how it is with the people of Israel,” he added. “I made this world for their sake, but when Adam broke my commands, the world came under my judgment. Then the entrances into this world were made narrow and difficult to travel. They were rough, dangerous, and few in number. But the entrances to the great world to come are wide and safe and lead to immortality. Everyone who lives must walk the narrow and meaningless ways of this world in order to receive the blessings stored up in the world to come. So, Ezra, why are you upset and disturbed by the thought that you are mortal and must die? Why don’t you think about the age to come, rather than the present age?”

17. I answered, “Lord and master, in your Law you said that the righteous would receive all these blessings, but that the wicked would perish. The righteous then can endure all the difficulties of this narrow way because they look forward to the broad and open life of the future, but the wicked must pass through the narrow way without any hope of seeing the broad open life.”

19. The angel replied, “Do you think you are a better judge than God? Do you think you are wiser than God Most High? It is better to let many people of the present age perish than to allow them to neglect the Law that God has given them. God has given clear commandments to everyone coming into this world, telling them what they should do to obtain life and to avoid punishment. But the wicked would not listen and refused to obey him. In their foolishness they have made their own wicked and deceitful plans. They denied the existence of God Most High and refused to follow his ways. They have rejected his Law, refused to accept his promises, disobeyed his decrees, and failed to do what he commanded. That’s the reason, Ezra, that there is emptiness for the empty and fullness for the full.

The Messianic Kingdom and the Final Judgment

26. “The time is coming when these signs will take place. The invisible city will appear, and the land that is now hidden will be seen. Everyone who survives the calamities I have predicted will also see the wonderful things I will do. My son the Messiah will be revealed, together with those who come with him. He will bring four hundred years of happiness to all these survivors. At the end of that time, my son the Messiah and all human beings will die. Then the world will return to its original silence, and for seven days it will be like it was at the beginning. No one will be left alive. After seven days this corrupt age will pass out of existence and a new age will be awakened. The ground will give up

the dead who sleep there in silence, and the souls of the dead will be released from the places where they have been kept. God Most High will appear on his judgment seat. Mercy and patience will vanish completely and be replaced by judgment. Truth and faithfulness will once again stand firm. The good and bad that people have done will be fully revealed, and reward and punishment will follow immediately. The pit of torment, the fires of hell, will appear, and opposite them the Paradise of joy and rest.

37. “Then God Most High will say to the nations that have been raised from the dead, ‘Look! I am the one whom you have denied and refused to serve; it is my commands that you have rejected. Look around you; there is joy and peace in one direction, fire and torment in the other.’ That’s what he will say to them on Judgment Day.

39. “On Judgment Day there will be no sun, moon, or stars; no cloud, thunder, or lightening; no wind, water, or air; no darkness, evening, or morning; no summer, spring, or winter; no heat frost, or cold; no hail, rain or dew; no noon, night, or dawn; no daylight, brightness, or light. The only light will be the dazzling brightness of God Most High, making it possible for everyone to see. The judgment will last seven years. That’s the arrangement I have made for Judgment Day, but I have revealed these things only to you.”

Only a Few Will be Saved

48. Then I said, “Lord, I repeat what I said earlier: How fortunate are the people who can live now and obey you commands! But what about those for whom I have been praying? There is no one in the present generation who has not sinned, no one who has not broken your covenant. Now I understand that the world to come will bring joy to only a few, but torment to many. The evil impulse within us has grown and it has led us away from God’s ways, brought us to ruin, put us on the way to death and destruction, and taken us far from life. It has destroyed not only a few, but almost everyone who was ever created.”

49. “Listen to me,” the angel said, “and I will teach you further and correct your thinking. Because only a few will be saved, God created two worlds instead of only one. As you say, only a few people are righteous, but there are large numbers of wicked people. But listen: If you had only a few precious stones, would you add lumps of lead and clay to them in order to have more?”

53. “Surely no one would do that, sir,” I answered.

54. “Take another illustration,” he continued. “The earth itself will give you an answer if you humbly ask it whether it produces more gold, silver, copper, iron, lead or clay. There is more silver than gold, more copper than silver, more iron than copper, more lead than iron, and more clay than lead. So judge for yourself which are more desirable and valuable, common things or rare things.”

58. I answered, “Lord and master, the common things are cheap; it is the rare things that are valuable.”

59. “All right,” he replied, “so draw the logical conclusion: the person who has what is scarce has more reason to be pleased than the person who has what is plentiful. It’s the same with the judgment that I have promised: I will be pleased with the few who will be saved, because they are the ones who now praise and honor me and make my name known. I will not be sad about the large number of people

who will be lost, because even now they last no longer than a vapor; they disappear like fire and smoke; they catch fire, blaze up, and quickly go out.”

62. Then I said to the earth, “Look at what you have done! When you gave birth to the rest of creation you gave birth to reason. It would have been better if you had never been created. Then we humans would never have had the power of reasoning! But as it is now, our reason grows up with us and then torments us, because we realize that we are going to die! Compared to us who must bear this sorrow, the dumb animals must be happy. They are much better off than we are. They do not have to look forward to the judgment, they are not aware of any torment or salvation that is promised to them after death. What good is it to us that we are going to be given life in the future if it is to be a life of terrible torment? Everyone who is born is caught in the web of sin, is full of wickedness and burdened with guilt I think it would be better if after death we did not have to face judgment.”

70. The angel replied, “When God Most High was creating the world, as well as Adam and his descendants, the first thing he did was to get everything ready for the judgment. So you ought to learn from your own words. You said that your reason grows up with you and that’s the point. The people of this world used their reason and sinned; they received God’s commands but did not keep them; they accepted the Law and then disobeyed it. And that’s why they will suffer torment. What excuse can they offer at the judgment? How can they answer at the last day? *God Most High has been very patient with the people of this world for a long time, but it has not been for their sake. He has done it for the sake of the age to come.*”

The Soul after Death

75. Then I said, “Sir, may I ask you, please, to explain to me what happens when we die, when each of us must give back our soul? Will we be kept at rest until the time when you begin to make your new creation, or will our torment begin immediately?”

76. “I will answer that question also,” he replied, “but do not include yourself among those who will be tormented because they have no use for religion. After all, you have a treasure of good works stored up with God Most High, which will not be shown to you until the last days. But to answer your question about death: When God Most High has pronounced the final decree that a person shall die, the soul leaves the body to return to the one who gave it. Immediately it praises the glory of God Most High. Let me explain first about people who had no use for the ways of God Most High and hated those who worshiped him. There is no place where their souls can go for rest; they must wander around forever in torment, grief and sorrow. Their torment will progress in seven stages. First, they ignore the Law of God Most High. Second, they can no longer make a sincere repentance and obtain life. Third, they see the reward stored up for those who put their faith in the covenants of God Most High. Fourth, they think about the torment that has been stored up for them in the last days. Fifth, they see angels guarding the homes of other souls in complete silence. Sixth, they recognize that they must soon be tormented. Seventh, and worst of all, when they see the glory of God Most High, they are sick with remorse and shame. They cringe in fear, because while they were living they sinned against him. And now they are about to come before him to be judged on the last day.

88. “Now let me explain about those who followed the ways of God Most High and what will happen when the time comes for them to leave their mortal bodies. While they lived on earth through constant difficulty and danger, they served God Most High and carefully kept the Law given by the Lawgiver. This is what they will receive: They will rejoice when they see the great glory of God. He will receive

them, and they will enter their rest in seven stages of joy. The first joy is to have struggled hard and won the victory over the evil impulse which was formed in them, but which did not succeed in leading them from life into death. The second is to see the endless wandering of the souls of the wicked and the punishment that is waiting for them. The third is to know what a good report their Maker has given about them, that during their lifetime they kept the Law that was entrusted to them. The fourth is to appreciate the rest that they are to enjoy in the places where they have been brought together, guarded by angels, in complete silence, and with the glory that is waiting for them at the last day. The fifth is to rejoice that they have now escaped the corrupt world and that they will receive the future life as their possession. They can see both the narrow, troubled world from which they have been freed and the spacious world they will receive and enjoy forever. The sixth is to be shown how their faces will shine like the sun and how they are to be like the light of the stars that never die. The seventh joy, and best of all, is when they rush to meet Go face-to-face, with perfect trust and happiness, without any fear or shame. They served him during their lifetime and now they will receive from him their reward in glory. These rewards that I have been telling you about are those that have been prepared for the souls of the righteous. I described to your earlier the torment that the rebellious will suffer.”

100. Then I asked, “When the souls of the righteous are separated from their bodies, will they be given time to see what you have told me about?”

101. “They will be free for seven days,” he answered, “and during that time they will be able to see the things I have told you about. After that they will be brought together with the other souls in their homes.”

The Finality of Judgment and the Salvation of the Few

102. Then I said, “Sir, please tell me whether the righteous will be able to ask God Most High to show mercy on the unrighteous on Judgment Day. Will fathers be able to pray for their children, children for parents, brothers for brothers, relatives for those near to them, and friends for those dear to them?”

104. “I will be happy to tell you,” he replied. “***Judgment Day is final and sets the final seal on truth for all to see.*** You know that in this age a father cannot send his son to be sick for him or sleep or eat or be healed for him. An owner cannot send his slave to do these things for him, nor can a person send his best friend. In the same way, on that day, no one will be able to pray for another person. Each person will receive the punishment or reward for his own sinfulness or righteousness.”

106. “If that is so,” I answered, “How can we explain what we find in the Scriptures? Abraham prayed for the people of Sodom, and Moses for our ancestors who sinned in the desert. Later, Joshua prayed for the people of Israel in the time of Achan, and Samuel prayed for them in the days of Saul. David prayed at the time of the epidemic, and Solomon prayed for those who were going to worship in the Temple. Elijah prayed that the people might have rain and for a dead person to come back to life. Hezekiah prayed for the people during the time of Sennacherib. And there are many other examples. If righteous people prayed for the unrighteous during such times when corruption increased and injustice multiplied, why won’t the same thing happen at the Judgment Day?”

112. “The present age is not the end of everything.” The angel answered. “Even in this age, the glorious presence of God is not always seen. That is why the strong have prayed for the weak during this age. ***But the Judgment Day will be the end of the present age and the beginning of the future age. Then all corruption will end, self-indulgence and disloyalty will be eliminated. Righteousness***

and truth will reach their full maturity. So on Judgment Day, no one will be able to have mercy on those who have been condemned, and no one will be able to harm those who have been acquitted.”

116. I answered, “I made this point before, and I will make it again. It would have been better if the earth had never produced Adam, or when it had done so, if it had made him so that he could not sin. What good is it for any of us to have life in the present age, when it is full of misery and when all we can look forward to after death is punishment? O Adam, what have you done? Your sin was not only your own downfall; it was also the downfall of all of us who are your descendants. What good is it to us that we have the promise of immortal life, when we have committed sins that condemn us to death? What good is the hope of eternity, when we find ourselves in such a completely hopeless situation? What good is it that safe and secure homes have been prepared for us in the future world, when we have lived such wicked lives? What good is the promise that the glorious presence of God Most High will protect those who have lived pure lives, when our own lives have been so full of sin? What good is it that Paradise is shown to us, that its imperishable fruit can heal us and provide all we need? We can never go there because we have lived unacceptable lives. What good is it that the faces of those who practice self-control will shine more brightly than the stars, when our own faces will be blacker than the night? Never in our whole lives, when we sinned, did we think about what we would have to suffer after death.”

127. The angel replied, “Here is the meaning of the conflict that every person on earth must endure: If he is defeated, he must suffer the things you have just told me about, but if he is victorious, he will receive the rewards that I have just mentioned. That is why Moses long ago urged the people to choose life so that they might live. But they did not believe him or the prophets who came after him, and they did not believe me when I spoke to them. So the sadness over their destruction is nothing compared to the great joy over the salvation of those who believe.”

132. I answered, “Sir, I know that God Most High is spoken of as merciful because he shows mercy to those who have not yet entered this world. He is called compassionate because he shows compassion to those who repent and obey his Law. He is thought of as patient because he is patient with his own creatures who have sinned. He is known as generous because he prefers to give rather than to demand. And he is known as very forgiving because he continues to forgive sinners of the past, present, and future. If he did not continue to forgive, there would be no life for this world or the people in it. He is spoken of as pardoning because, if it were not for his goodness in pardoning sinners, not one person in ten thousand would gain life. He is called judge because he pardons and blots out the many sins of those who were created by his word. If he did not, only a handful of the whole human race would be left.”

Chapter 8

The angel replied, “God Most High made this world for many people, but the future world for only a few. Ezra, let me give you an illustration. If you ask the earth, it will tell you that it produces a large amount of clay for pots but only a small amount of gold dust. And that’s the way it is with the present world: many have been created, but only a few will be saved.”

Ezra Prays for His People

I said to myself, “I must search for wisdom and try to understand. I was brought into this world without my consent, and I will leave it against my will. God has given me only a few short years as my span of life.”

6. Then I prayed, “O Lord above, permit me, your humble servant, to offer this prayer: Plant a seed within us, and let it grow until it produces new hearts and minds, so that sinful humanity may have life. For you alone are God, and you created all of us, as the scripture says. You give life and provide arms and legs to the body formed in the womb, where it is kept safe in the elements of fire and water. The body, which you form, is carried in the womb for nine months, and you alone provide safety for the protecting womb and the protected body. Then when the womb delivers what was created in it, your command produces milk from the breasts of the human body. The infant you created is fed in this way for a while, and then you continue to provide your mercy. You raise the person on your righteousness, teach him your Law, and discipline him with your wisdom. You are his Creator and, as you wish, you can take away his life or allow him to live. But if you are so ready to destroy a person that was so carefully created at your command, why was he created in the first place?

15. “Now, Lord, I must say this: You may know what is best in regard to the rest of the human race, but I mourn for your own people – I am disturbed and grieved for your own nation Israel, the descendants of Jacob. So I want to pray for them and for myself, because I can see how all of us who live on this earth have failed, and I know that Judgment will soon come upon us. So please hear me and listen to my prayer.”

The prayer that Ezra prayed before he was taken up into heaven begins here. He prayed, “O Lord, you live forever, and the highest heavens are yours. Your throne is more wonderful than anything we can imagine; your glory surpasses our understanding; the heavenly army of angels stands trembling before you. They are ready to turn themselves into wind or fire at your command. Your word is everlastingly true. Your mighty commands accomplish fearful things. With one look, you dry up the deep oceans, and you can melt the mountains with your anger. Your truth lasts forever. O Lord, you created me, and I am your servant, so listen to my prayer. As long as I have life and understanding, I cannot keep silent.

26. “Do not take account of the sins of your people; rather, consider those who have served you faithfully. Pay no attention to godless people and what they do, but take into account those who have kept your covenant in spite of all their sufferings. Do not think about those who have lived wicked lives, but remember those who have gladly confessed you as God. Do not destroy your people because of those who have lived like animals, but be mindful of those who have taught your Law in such a wonderful way. Do not be angry with those you consider worse than animals, but show your love to those who have always trusted in your glorious presence.

31. “It is true that we and our ancestors have lived our lives in ways that bring death, but it is because of us who are sinners that you are called merciful. You will surely be called merciful if you choose to take pity on us – we are sinners without any righteous deeds to our credit. Those who are righteous will receive their reward on the basis of the many good works that they have stored up with you.

34. “What are human beings that you should be angry with them? What is this mortal race that you should be so bitter against it? To speak the truth, no person was ever born who did not sin, there is no

one living who is not guilty. Therefore, Lord, your righteousness and goodness will certainly be made known when you show your mercy to those who have no treasure of good deeds.”

37. The Lord answered me, “Part of what you have said is correct, and things will happen as you have indicated. You can be sure that I will give no thought to those who have sinned or to their creation, death, judgment, or destruction. Instead, I will find my joy in the creation of the righteous, their earthly journey, their salvation, and their final reward. Things will happen just as I have said. The farmer plants many seeds and puts out many plants, but not all of them take root or come up at the right time. That’s the way it is with this world. Not everyone who has been placed in this world will be saved.”

42. Then I said, “Please let me speak. The farmer’s seed may not come up because you did not send rain at the right time, or it may be ruined by too much rain. But people are different. You formed them with your own hand; you created them to be like you; and you made everything for their benefit. How can you compare them to a farmer’s seed? It’s impossible, O Lord above! Spare the people who are your own. Have pity on them. Show your mercy to the people you have created.”

46. He answered. “The present is for those who live now, and the future for those who are to come. You are certainly not able to love what I have created more than I do. Never again consider yourself among the unrighteous, as you have done so often. Yet I am very pleased that you have shown proper humility and not boasted by thinking of yourself as righteous. The people of this world who have lived their lives in pride and arrogance will suffer many things in the last days. *But, Ezra, you should be thinking about the glory that is waiting for you and those like you. For all of you, Paradise has been opened, the tree of life has been planted, the world to come has been made ready, all your needs have been provided, the heavenly city has been built, full rest from labors has been offered, goodness and wisdom have been perfected. The source of evil has been sealed off, so that it cannot reach you; all sickness has been removed, death has been taken away, hell is gone, and corruption has disappeared. All suffering has been taken away, and the treasure of immortality is at last revealed.*

55. “So don’t ask any more questions about the large number of people who are lost. For when they had the opportunity to choose, they despised God Most High, had contempt for his Law, and refused to follow his ways. In addition, they mistreated the righteous servants of God. They even said to themselves that there was no God, although they knew that they must die. So the joys I have described are waiting for you, while thirst and torment are in store for them. But God Most High did not want anyone to perish. He created everyone, and prepared life for everyone, but those he created dishonored the name of their Creator and were ungrateful to the one who offered them life. That is why the day on which I will judge them is near. I have made this known to you and a few others like you, but not to everyone.”

The Signs of the End

I answered, “Sir, you have shown me many signs which you will perform in the last days, but you have not told me how I can know when this will happen.”

Chapter 9

He answered, “Consider all these things very carefully. *When you see that some of the signs I have told you about have appeared, you will know that the time has come when God Most High will bring judgment on the world he has created. There will be earthquakes, national rebellions, international*

intrigues, unstable leaders, and confused rulers. When you see these things happening, you will know that they are what God Most High has spoken about since the beginning of creation. The beginning and the end of everything that happens in this world are clear. The same is true in the world above: wonders and miracles show the beginning of events, and mighty signs show when they end.

7. “Some people will escape destruction and be saved by their good works or by their faith. *All of them will survive the dangers I have described and will enjoy the salvation provided in the land that I have set apart from eternity as my own. Then those who have ignored my ways and held them in contempt will be surprised when they find themselves in continual torment.* This will include all those who ignored me while they were alive, even though they accepted the blessings I gave them. It will include all those who scorned my Law during the time they were free to do so and all those who refused to repent when they still has the chance. The torment they will have to suffer after death will force them to recognize the truth. Therefore, Ezra, you should stop asking questions about how the wicked will be punished. Instead, be concerned about how and when the righteous will be saved. ***The world was created for them and belongs to them.***”

14. I said, “I must repeat what I said before. The lost far outnumber those who are saved – it is like a wave compared with a drop of water.”

17. He answered, “The seed to be planted depends on the soil; the color of the flower depends on the kind of flower; the quality of a product depends on the skill of the worker; and the size of the harvest depends on how hard the farmer has worked. Before I created this world or the people who would live in it, no one opposed me, because no one existed. When I had created the world, I supplied it with an abundance of food and a Law of profound wisdom, but the people I created lived corrupt lives. I looked at my world and saw that it was ruined. I saw that my earth was in danger of being destroyed by the wicked plans of the people who had come into it. When I saw this, I found it very difficult to spare them, but I saved a few for myself, one grape out of a bunch and one tree out of a great forest. So let them perish – all those people who were born only to be lost. But let my chosen people be kept safe – those for whom I worked so hard to bring to perfection.

23. “And now, Ezra, you must wait seven more days, but do not fast this time. Go to a field of wild flowers where no one has ever lived and eat nothing but the flowers – do not eat any meat or drink any wine. Pray the whole time to God Most High. Then I will come and talk with you again.”

THE FOURTH VISION

The Law Remains

26. I obeyed the angel’s command and went to a field called Ardat. I sat there among the flowers and ate the wild plants, and that was enough food for me. After seven days I was lying on the grass, and once again my thoughts began to trouble me. Then I began to speak and said to God Most High,

29. “O Lord, you revealed yourself to our ancestors when they were traveling through the trackless, barren desert after they had left Egypt. You said to them, ‘Listen to me, people of Israel; I am giving you my Law. It will be like a seed planted among you that produces fruit, and it will be your crowning glory forever.’ Our ancestors received the Law, but they disobeyed its commands. Yet the fruit of the Law was not destroyed – it could not be destroyed because it was yours. Those who had received the Law were destroyed because they did not guard the good seed that was sown in them. The usual thing

is that the container remains after its contents have been destroyed, for example, seed in the ground, a ship on the sea, or food in a bowl. But this is not the case with us sinners. The Law was placed in our hearts, and we are the ones who will be destroyed because we have sinned. The Law will not be destroyed; it will remain in all its glory.”

The Vision of the Weeping Woman

38. While I was saying these things to myself, I looked around and saw a woman on my right. She was weeping and wailing, terribly upset, her clothes were torn, and there were ashes on her head. I immediately put my own troubles out of my mind, turned to the woman, and asked, “Why are you crying? Why are you so upset?”

41. “Please, sir,” she answered, “leave me alone and let me go on crying and mourning; I am bitter and depressed.”

42. “Tell me what’s wrong,” I said.

43. She answered, “Sir, I was married for thirty years, but I was never able to have a child. During those thirty years I prayed every day and every hour, day and night, to God Most High for a child. After thirty years God answered my prayer; he saw my suffering, took away my distress, and gave me a son. What great joy this brought to my husband and me and to all our neighbors! We sang the praises of the Almighty. I brought our son up with the greatest care, and when he was grown, I chose a wife for him and prepared for the wedding.

Chapter 10

“On the wedding night when my son entered the bedroom, he dropped dead. So we put out all the wedding lamps, and all my neighbors came to comfort me. I remained in control of myself until the evening of the second day, when they all left. That night I got up and came out to this field, as you see. I have decided never to return to that town. I am going to stay here in constant mourning, neither eating nor drinking anything until I die.”

5. When she told me this, I put aside my own thoughts and spoke sharply to her: “You are the most foolish woman I ever met. Don’t you see what our people are suffering? Don’t you know all that has happened to us? Jerusalem, the mother of us all, is overcome with grief and shame. You ought to be mourning for her and sharing the grief and sorrow of all of us. But you are mourning for that one son of yours. Ask the earth; let her tell you that she is the one who ought to be mourning for the vast multitudes of people that she has brought to birth. All of us who are living came originally from her, and there are more to come. Almost all of us go straight to destruction – the vast multitude of earth’s children is lost. So who has more right to mourn, you for your one son, or the earth, which has lost so many? I know what you are thinking; you think that your sorrow is worse than the earth’s. You think that it is only natural for earth’s multitudes to live and then die, but you have lost your own flesh and blood, which you brought to birth with such trouble and pain. But let me tell you that from the time God created the earth she has suffered as much in producing human beings for God as you did in childbirth. So keep your tears to yourself, and be brave about that has happened to you. If you will accept God’s decision as just, you will get your son back at the right time, and you will receive the praise due a mother. Go back to the city and to your husband.”

18. “No,” she answered, “I will never go back; I am going to stay here and die.”

19-20. “Don’t do that,” I continued. “Consider the misfortunes and sorrows of Jerusalem, and you won’t feel so sorry for yourself. You can see that our place of worship is in ruins, our altar has been torn down, our Temple has been destroyed, our musical instruments lie quiet, our hymns have been silenced, our joy has ended, the light of the sacred lamp has been put out, our Covenant Box has been carried off, our sacred utensils have been desecrated, our leaders have been dishonored, our priests have been burned to death, our Levites have been taken captive, our virgins have been raped, our wives have been violated, our devout men have been carried off, our children have been abandoned, our young people have been made slaves, and our strong soldiers have been made helpless. Worst of all, Jerusalem, once marked as God’s own city, has lost its glory and has been handed over to our enemies. So put aside all your sorrow and grief. May God Most High, the Almighty, be merciful to you and give you peace. May he give you rest from your troubles.”

25. While I was speaking to the woman, her face suddenly began to shine with a light that flashed like lightning. I was afraid to stand near her and wondered what all this meant. Suddenly she let out a loud and terrifying cry that shook the earth. When I looked up, I could no longer see the woman, but there was a city built on huge foundations. I was afraid and shouted: “Where is the angel Uriel, who came to me earlier? It is his fault that I am so confused. My prayer is useless, and I have nothing to hope for but death.”

Uriel’s Interpretation of the Vision

29. I was still speaking when the angel Uriel appeared again. He saw me lying there unconscious like a corpse, so he took hold of my right hand, gave me strength, and stood me on my feet. Then he asked, “What’s the matter? Why are you so disturbed and confused?”

32. I answered, “You abandoned me completely! I did as you told me and came out to this field, but I cannot explain what I am seeing.”

33. “Stand up straight,” he answered, “and I will explain it to you.”

34. “Sir, I answered, “please explain it to me. I will die in my frustration if you leave me, for I cannot understand what I have seen and heard. Or is my mind playing tricks on me, and is this just a bad dream? I beg you, sir, tell me what this vision means.”

38. The angel said, “Now listen closely, and I will explain the meaning of these things that you fear. God Most High has revealed many secrets to you because he has seen that you have lived a righteous life and have always grieved and mourned for your people and for Jerusalem. This is what the vision means. A woman appeared to you a little while ago, and when you saw that she was mourning, you tried to console her. The woman told you about the death of her son. Then she vanished from your sight, and a whole city appeared. This is the meaning: The woman you saw is Jerusalem, which you now see as a completed city. When she told you that for thirty years she had had no children, it meant that for three thousand years no offerings had yet been made there. Then Solomon built the city, and sacrifices began to be offered there. At that time the childless woman gave birth to her son. When she told you that she took great care in bringing the son up, that referred to the period when Jerusalem was inhabited. When she told you of the death of her son on his wedding day, that meant the destruction of Jerusalem. So in the vision you saw how she mourned for her son, and you tried to console her for

what had happened – this is what was to be revealed to you. When God Most High saw that you were grieving for the woman with all your heart and soul, he showed you all her glory and majestic beauty. That is why I told you to go and stay in the field where no one had ever lived, for I knew that God Most High was going to show you these things. I told you to go to the field where no foundation had ever been built, because nothing built by human hands could stand in the place where the city of God Most High was about to be revealed.

55. “So don’t be afraid. Go into the city and look at its beautiful and majestic buildings. See as much as you can. After that, you will hear as much as you can. You are more fortunate than most people, and only a few have the reputation with God Most High that you have. Remain here until tomorrow night, and he will show you in dreams and visions what he plans to do for those who will be living on the earth in the last days.” So I slept there that night and the next, as I had been told.

THE FIFTH VISION

The Vision of an Eagle

Chapter 11

The second night I had a dream. I saw an eagle coming up out of the sea. It had twelve wings and three heads. As I looked, it spread out its wings over the whole world. Winds blew on it from every direction, and clouds gathered over it. Then from its wings I saw rival wings begin to grow, but they were small and insignificant. All three heads of the eagle were asleep, even the middle one, which was larger than the others. While I was watching, the eagle flew up in the air and became ruler of the whole earth and all its people. I saw how everything on earth was brought under the eagle’s control – no one on earth was able to oppose it. Then I saw the eagle stand up on its claws and say to its wings, “Not all of you are to wake up at the same time; you must sleep where you are and wake up when your turn comes, and the heads must wake up last.” I looked again and saw that the voice was not coming from any of the eagle’s heads but from the middle of its body. I counted its rival wings and there were eight of them.

12. I saw one of the wings on the right side rise up and govern the whole world. After its rule came to an end, it vanished to completely that it left no trace. Then the next wing rose up and governed for a long time. When its rule was coming to an end and it was about to vanish like the first wing, a voice said to it, “Listen, you have ruled the world for a long time, and I want you to hear this message before you disappear. No one after you will rule as long as you did – not even half as long.” The third wing rose up and governed as the earlier ones had done, then it also vanished. The same thing happened to all the other wings: one after the other they rose to power and then vanished.

20. I kept looking, and after a while the other small wings on the right side rose up to seize power. Some of them governed briefly and quickly disappeared, while others rose up but were never able to govern. Then I noticed that the twelve large wings and two of the small wings had disappeared. Nothing was left on the eagle’s body except the three sleeping heads and the six small wings. I kept watching, and suddenly two of the six small wings left the others and moved under the head on the right side, while the other four remained there they were. Then I saw that these four small wings were plotting to rise up and seize power. One of them rose up, but it quickly disappeared. The second one also rose up, but it disappeared even more quickly than the first. I saw that the two remaining small wings were also plotting to seize control for themselves.

29. While they were making their plans, one of the sleeping heads suddenly awoke. It was the one in the middle, the one that was larger than the other two. Then I saw that it was joined by the other heads, and when it turned to eat up the two little wings that were planning to seize power, the other two heads helped it. This head gained power over the whole world, established an oppressive rule over people everywhere, and exercised more power over the world than any of the other wings had done before. Then, as I watched, the middle head disappeared just as suddenly as the wings had done. Two heads were left, and they also gained power over the earth and its people; but while I was still watching, the head on the right ate up the head on the left.

36. Then I heard a voice, which said, “Ezra, look straight ahead and think about what you see.”

37. I looked and saw what appeared to be an angry lion come roaring out of the forest. I heard it speak in human language to the eagle and say, ***“Listen, Eagle, to what I have to say to you; it is the message of God Most High: You are the only one left of the four animals that I appointed to govern my world and to bring the ages of this world to an end. You are the fourth animal and you have conquered all the animals that came before you. As long as you have been in this world, you have ruled it through terror, oppression, and deceit, with a total disregard for truth. You have viciously attacked harmless people who were living in peace; you have hated those who spoke the truth, and you have loved liars. You have destroyed the homes of those who were prosperous and have torn down the walls of those who did you no harm. God Most High knows how proud and arrogant you are. The Almighty One has looked back over the world he established. The end has come; the final age is over. So, Eagle, the time has come for you to vanish, along with your big, terrible wings, your small, wicked wings, your evil heads, your awful claws, and your whole worthless body. The entire world will be set free from your violence and renewed as it sets its hope on the judgment and mercy of God, who created it.”***

Chapter 12

While the lion was speaking in this way to the eagle, I looked and saw that the last head of the eagle was gone. Then the two small wings that had moved over to that head rose up to govern, but their rule was short and full of trouble. They disappeared before my eyes, and the whole body of the eagle burst into flames, and the world was terrified.

The Interpretation of the Vision

I was so disturbed and so afraid that I woke up. I said, “I have brought this on myself, because I have tried to study the ways of God Most High. I am mentally exhausted and completely worn out. The terrible fears I have experienced this night have taken my last bit of strength. All I can do now is pray to God Most High to give me strength until the end.” Then I prayed, “Master and Lord, if it is true that you consider me more righteous than many others and if you hear my prayers, then I beg you, give me strength. Show me, O Lord, the full meaning of this terrifying vision, and set my mind at ease. After all, you did consider me worthy to be shown the end of this age.”

10. God’s angel said to me, “Here is the interpretation of the vision you saw. The eagle you saw coming up out of the sea represents the fourth kingdom in the vision that your brother Daniel saw. But he was not given the same interpretation of it that I am giving you. The time is coming when an empire will be established on earth that is more terrible than any before it. Twelve kings will rule over it, one

after the other. The second king will rule longer than any of the others. That is the meaning of the twelve wings that you saw.

17. “You heard the voice speaking from the middle of the eagle’s body, instead of from its heads. *That means that after the rule of the second king, a great struggle for power will take place, and the empire will be in danger of breaking up. But that will not happen, and the empire will regain its earlier power.*

19. “You saw the eight small wings growing out of the eagle’s big wings. That means that eight kings will rise up in the empire, but their rule will be brief and unimportant. Two of them will appear briefly near the middle of the period, four of them will not appear until near the end, and two will be left until the very end.

22. “You saw the three heads that were asleep. That means that in the last days of the empire, God Most High will raise up three kings; they will restore much of the empire and rule over the world and its people with more harshness than any before them. The reason they are called the eagle’s heads is that these three kings will bring to a head and complete the godless work of the eagle. You saw the largest head disappear. This means that one of the kings will die in his bed, in great agony. The other two will die in battle. One of them will kill the other; then he also will be killed in battle at the end of time.

29. “You saw the two small wings moving under the head on the right side. That means that God Most High has kept them until the end, but their rule was short and full of trouble, as you saw.

31. “You saw the angry lion come roaring out of the forest, and you heard it speak to the eagle and rebuke it for the evil that it had done and for all that it had said. The lion represents the Messiah, whom God Most High has held back until the end. He will be a descendant of David and will come and speak to the rulers. He will rebuke them for their wickedness, their sinfulness, and their contempt for God’s ways. While they are still living, he will bring them to judgment, condemn them for their sin, and destroy them.

34. “But he will have mercy on the rest of my people, those who are left in my land; he will set them free and make them happy until the end comes, the Judgment Day, about which I told you at the beginning.

35. “That is the dream you had, and that is its interpretation. But you are the only one that God Most High has considered worthy to reveal this secret to. So write in a book everything you saw, and put it in a safe hiding place. Then teach these secrets to those who are wise among your people, those who will be able to understand them and keep them secret. But you must stay here seven more days, so that God Most High may reveal to you whatever he wishes.” Then the angel left me.

The People Come to Ezra

40. When the seven days had passed and all the people heard that I had not yet returned to the city, all of them, rich and poor, came and asked me, “What wrong have we done to you? How have we mistreated you? Why have you abandoned us and settled down in this place? You are the only one of all our prophets who is left. You are like the last bunch of grapes in a vineyard, like a lantern in a dark place, like a safe harbor for a ship in a storm. Haven’t we suffered enough already? If you abandon us,

it would have been better if we had died like the others in the fire that destroyed Jerusalem. We are no better than those who died.” Then they all started crying loudly.

I answered, “Be brave, Israel, put away your sorrow. God Most High will keep you in mind; the Almighty One has not forgotten you in all your troubles. And I haven’t left you or abandoned you. I came here to pray for Jerusalem in her time of trouble and to ask mercy for her and for your Temple, now in disgrace. Please return to your homes, all of you. I will come back to you in a few days.” So they left me and went back to the city.

THE SIXTH VISION

The Vision

51. I stayed in the field for seven days, as the angel had commanded me. I ate nothing but wild flowers; I was a vegetarian in those days.

Chapter 13

The seven days passed, and the following night I had a dream. In my dream *I saw a wind coming up out of the sea and stirring up great waves. As I watched, the wind brought with it out of the sea what looked like a man, and he was flying on the clouds. When he turned his face everything he looked at began to tremble, and when he spoke, everyone who heard his voice melted like wax in a fire.*

5. I looked again and saw a crowd too large to count. They were people gathered together from all parts of the world to fight against the man who had come up out of the sea. Then I watched the man carve out a high mountain and fly up on it. I tried to see the place or the region from which the mountain was carved, but I couldn’t. Then I saw that all the people who had come together to make war against him were terrified, but they still prepared to fight him. When the man saw the great crowd advancing to attack him, he did not take up any weapons. The only thing I saw was what looked like a stream of fire coming out of his mouth. He sent a flaming wind from his lips and a storm of sparks from his tongue. The stream of fire, the flaming wind, and the great storm combined and swept down on the crowd that was coming to attack him, and burned them all up. In a single moment, that crowd too large to count vanished, and there was nothing left but powdery ashes and the smell of smoke. I was shocked when I saw what had happened.

12. Then I saw the man come down from the mountain and call another large crowd to come to him – this was a peace-living crowd. All sorts of people came: some were happy, some were sad, some had their hands and feet tied, and some brought others as a gift to the Lord.

The Interpretation of the Vision

I was so frightened that I woke up. I prayed to God Most High and said, “Lord, you have been showing me all these marvelous things. You have considered me worthy and have heard my prayers. Now please show me the meaning of this dream also. I have been thinking how terrible it will be for the people who will be living in those days, but how much worse for those who do not survive. They will be in great sorrow because they will not enjoy any of the pleasures reserved for the last days. But how terrible also for those who do survive; they will have to face great dangers and many troubles, as these

dreams have shown. Nevertheless, it is better to pass through these dangers and reach the end than to disappear like a cloud from this world and never see what takes place in the last days.”

He answered, *“I will explain to you the meaning of the vision and answer the questions you have asked. You have raised question about those who will survive until the end. The answer is that the one who brings the dangers in those days will also protect from danger the people who have stored up good works and faithfulness with God the Almighty One. You may be certain that those who survive are far more fortunate than those who die.”*

25. **“This is the meaning of the vision. The man you saw coming up out of the sea represents the one whom God Most High has kept ready for many ages. He will free the world he created and establish the new order for those who survive. You saw the wind, fire, and storm going out of the man’s mouth, and you saw that without the use of a spear or any other weapon he destroyed the great crowd that was advancing to attack him. This means that the time is near when God Most High will begin to free the people on earth. At that time everyone will be close to panic. They will begin to make war against one another, city against city, region against region, nation against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. When that happens, the signs I told you about earlier will take place, and then I will reveal my son, whom you saw as a man coming out of the sea. When they hear his voice, all the nations will leave their own territory, forget their wars with one another, and come together in one great crowd too large to count, as you saw in your dream. The nations will unite with the single purpose of making war on my son. He will take his stand on the top of Mount Zion, and the New Jerusalem will be seen by everyone. It will be completed and fully built, just as in your dream you saw the mountain carved out, but not by human hands. Then my son will condemn the assembled nations for their godlessness. That is what the storm meant. He will confront them with the wicked plans they have made and also with the torments they must endure, that is what the flames meant. Then he will easily destroy them by means of the Law. That is what the fire meant.**

39. *“You saw him gather another great crowd of peace-loving people. These are the ten tribes of Israel who were taken away into captivity in the time of King Hoshea. King Shalmaneser of Assyria captured them and deported them to a foreign land east of the Euphrates River. But the ten tribes decided not to stay in that land among the many Gentiles; so they moved farther east to a country where no human beings had ever lived before. There they hoped to keep their laws, which they had failed to keep in their own country. When they had to make the difficult passage across the Euphrates, God Most High performed miracles for them and blocked the channels of the river until they had crossed over. Their long journey through that region, which is named Arzareth, took a year and a half, and they have lived there ever since. Now in these last days they are coming back home, and once again God Most High will block the channels of the river, so that they may cross over. That is the meaning of the great crowd of peace-loving people you saw. But they will also have with them all of your own people who are left and who are found within the borders of my holy land. When the time comes for my son to destroy the crowd that has gathered from every nation, he will protect his people who are left and perform many great miracles for them.”*

51. Then I said, “ Lord and Master, please tell me why the man came up out of the sea.”

52. He answered, “No one can explore the bottom of the sea to find out what is there. In the same way, no human being can see my son or those who come with him until the day that has been fixed. That is the meaning of your dream. *You alone have been given this information, because you have given up your own interests to devote yourself to mine and to the study of my Law. You have dedicated your life*

to wisdom, and understanding has been like a mother to you. That is why God Most High has rewarded you by showing you these things. After three days I will come back and tell you about other profound wonders.”

THE SEVENTH VISION

The Voice from the Bush

57. I went for a walk in the field, worshiping and praising God Most High for the miracles he performs in his own good time. For he controls the ages and what happens in them. I remained there for three days.

Chapter 14

On the third day, while I was sitting under an oak tree, suddenly a voice came out of a bush near me and called, “Ezra! Ezra!”

I stood up and answered, “Here I am, Lord.”

3. The voice continued, “I revealed myself from a bush and spoke to Moses when my people were slaves in Egypt. I sent him to lead them out of Egypt, and I brought them to Mount Sinai. *I kept Moses with me there on the mountain for a long time, while I told him the secrets about the ages and the end of time. I told him what to make public and what to keep secret.* Now I command you to memorize the signs, visions, and interpretations that I have given you. You will be taken out of this world into the heavenly world where you and others like you will live with my son until the end of time. The world is no longer young; it is rapidly approaching old age. The whole history of the world is divided into twelve periods, and the tenth period has already arrived and it is half over; only two and a half parts remain. So set your house in order, warn your people, comfort those who are humble, and teach those who are wise. Then say goodbye to this mortal life. Put earthly cares away from you, throw down your human burdens, and lay aside your weak human nature. Put all your anxieties aside, and get ready to leave this world quickly. You have seen many evil things already, but far worse things are about to happen. As the world grows older and weaker, the evils that will come upon its people will multiply. Truth will depart and falsehood will draw ever nearer. The eagle you saw in your vision is just about to arrive.”

Ezra Reproduces the Sacred Writings

19. I replied, “Let me speak in your presence, Lord. I am ready to depart as you have commanded, and I will warn the present generation; but who will warn the people who have not yet been born? This world is a dark place, and its people have no light. Your Law has been destroyed by fire, so no one can know what you have done in the past or what you are planning to do in the future. Please send your holy spirit to me, so that I can write down everything that has been done in this world from the beginning, everything that was written in your Law. Then in these last days, people will be able to find the right way and obtain life if they want to.”

He answered, “Go and call the people together and tell them not to look for you for forty days. Prepare a large number of writing tablets, and take with you these five men who can write fast: Seraijah, Dabriah, Shelemiah, Ethan, and Asiel. Then come here, and I will light the lamp of understanding in

your heart, and it will not go out until you have finished what you are supposed to write. When you have finished your work, you will make some of it public, and you will give the rest to some wise people, who will keep it secret. Tomorrow at this time you will begin to write.”

27. I did as I was commanded and called all the people together. I said, “Listen to what I have to say, people of Israel. At first your ancestors lived as foreigners in Egypt, but then they were set free and received from God the life-giving Law. But they did not keep it, and when your turn came, you did not keep it either. God gave you the holy land as your own possession, but you were as sinful as your ancestors and did not follow the ways that God Most High had commanded. God is a just judge, so after a while he took away what he had given you. Now you are in exile here, but you are closer to Jerusalem than some of your own people. But if you will discipline your thoughts and be willing to learn, you will be kept safe in this life and will be granted mercy after death, for Judgment Day comes after death. We will be brought back to life, and the righteous people will be made known, while what the godless have done will be exposed. But now for forty days, no one is to come near me or try to find me.”

37. As I had been commanded, I took the five men, and we went to the field and stayed there. On the next day I suddenly heard a voice saying, “Ezra, open your mouth and drink what I am giving you.” So I opened my mouth, and I was handed a cup full of a fiery-colored liquid, which I took and drank. When I had drunk it, my mind overflowed with understanding, and wisdom increased within me as my memory became perfect. I began to speak and went on talking without stopping. God Most High also gave wisdom to the five men with me, and they took turns writing down what I said. They used an alphabet that they had not known before, and worked for forty days, writing in the daytime and eating at night. I spoke all day long, and I was not silent even at night. During the forty days, ninety-four books were written.

45. At the end of the forty days, God Most High said to me, “You are now to make public the first twenty-four books that you wrote, so that everyone, whether they are worthy or not, may read them. But the last seventy books that you wrote are to be held back and to be given only to those who are wise among your people, because these books contain a flood of understanding, a fountain of wisdom, and a river of knowledge.” Then I did as I was told.

(“ADDITIONAL PROPHECIES” beginning with Chapter 15 are not being included in this reference, for they appear to not have come from the pen of Ezra himself, but seem to have been added later by other scribes and translators. The use of italics and bolding was done at the discretion of Reni Sentana-Ries. Transcribed from the Good News Bible February 28, 2008.)