

# An Intellectual History of Judaism and Christianity

## Week 6: Jewish Apocalypticism

### 4 Ezra [2 Esdras] 13

*[Written in the 90s CE by a Jewish author in Hebrew]*

After seven days I dreamed a dream in the night. 2 And lo, a wind arose from the sea and stirred up[a] all its waves. 3 As I kept looking the wind made something like the figure of a man come up out of the heart of the sea. And I saw[b] that this man flew[c] with the clouds of heaven; and wherever he turned his face to look, everything under his gaze trembled, 4 and whenever his voice issued from his mouth, all who heard his voice melted as wax melts[d] when it feels the fire.

5 After this I looked and saw that an innumerable multitude of people were gathered together from the four winds of heaven to make war against the man who came up out of the sea. 6 And I looked and saw that he carved out for himself a great mountain, and flew up on to it. 7 And I tried to see the region or place from which the mountain was carved, but I could not.

8 After this I looked and saw that all who had gathered together against him, to wage war with him, were filled with fear, and yet they dared to fight. 9 When he saw the onrush of the approaching multitude, he neither lifted his hand nor held a spear or any weapon of war; 10 but I saw only how he sent forth from his mouth something like a stream of fire, and from his lips a flaming breath, and from his tongue he shot forth a storm of sparks.[e] 11 All these were mingled together, the stream of fire and the flaming breath and the great storm, and fell on the onrushing multitude that was prepared to fight, and burned up all of them, so that suddenly nothing was seen of the innumerable multitude but only the dust of ashes and the smell of smoke. When I saw it, I was amazed.

12 After this I saw the same man come down from the mountain and call to himself another multitude that was peaceable. 13 Then many people[f] came to him, some of whom were joyful and some sorrowful; some of them were bound, and some were bringing others as offerings.

## The Interpretation of the Vision

Then I woke up in great terror, and prayed to the Most High, and said, 14 “From the beginning you have shown your servant these wonders, and have deemed me worthy to have my prayer heard by you; 15 now show me the interpretation of this dream also. 16 For as I consider it in my mind, alas for those who will be left in those days! And still more, alas for those who are not left! 17 For those who are not left will be sad 18 because they understand the things that are reserved for the last days, but cannot attain them. 19 But alas for those also who are left, and for that very reason! For they shall see great dangers and much distress, as these dreams show. 20 Yet it is better[g] to come into these things,[h] though incurring peril, than to pass from the world like a cloud, and not to see what will happen in the last days.”

He answered me and said, 21 “I will tell you the interpretation of the vision, and I will also explain to you the things that you have mentioned. 22 As for what you said about those who survive, and concerning those who do not survive,[i] this is the interpretation: 23 The one who brings the peril at that time will protect those who fall into peril, who have works and faith toward the Almighty. 24 Understand therefore that those who are left are more blessed than those who have died.

25 “This is the interpretation of the vision: As for your seeing a man come up from the heart of the sea, 26 this is he whom the Most High has been keeping for many ages, who will himself deliver his creation; and he will direct those who are left. 27 And as for your seeing wind and fire and a storm coming out of his mouth, 28 and as for his not holding a spear or weapon of war, yet destroying the onrushing multitude that came to conquer him, this is the interpretation: 29 The days are coming when the Most High will deliver those who are on the earth. 30 And bewilderment of mind shall come over those who inhabit the earth. 31 They shall plan to make war against one another, city against city, place against place, people against people, and kingdom against kingdom. 32 When these things take place and the signs occur that I showed you before, then my Son will be revealed, whom you saw as a man coming up from the sea. [j]

33 “Then, when all the nations hear his voice, all the nations shall leave their own lands and the warfare that they have against one another; 34 and an innumerable multitude shall be gathered together, as you saw, wishing to come and conquer him. 35 But he shall stand on the top of Mount Zion. 36 And Zion shall come and be made

manifest to all people, prepared and built, as you saw the mountain carved out without hands. 37 Then he, my Son, will reprove the assembled nations for their ungodliness (this was symbolized by the storm), 38 and will reproach them to their face with their evil thoughts and the torments with which they are to be tortured (which were symbolized by the flames), and will destroy them without effort by means of the law[k] (which was symbolized by the fire).

39 “And as for your seeing him gather to himself another multitude that was peaceable, 40 these are the nine[l] tribes that were taken away from their own land into exile in the days of King Hoshea, whom Shalmaneser, king of the Assyrians, made captives; he took them across the river, and they were taken into another land. 41 But they formed this plan for themselves, that they would leave the multitude of the nations and go to a more distant region, where no human beings had ever lived, 42 so that there at least they might keep their statutes that they had not kept in their own land. 43 And they went in by the narrow passages of the Euphrates river. 44 For at that time the Most High performed signs for them, and stopped the channels of the river until they had crossed over. 45 Through that region there was a long way to go, a journey of a year and a half; and that country is called Arzareth.[m]

46 “Then they lived there until the last times; and now, when they are about to come again, 47 the Most High will stop[n] the channels of the river again, so that they may be able to cross over. Therefore you saw the multitude gathered together in peace. 48 But those who are left of your people, who are found within my holy borders, shall be saved.[o] 49 Therefore when he destroys the multitude of the nations that are gathered together, he will defend the people who remain. 50 And then he will show them very many wonders.”

51 I said, “O sovereign Lord, explain this to me: Why did I see the man coming up from the heart of the sea?”

52 He said to me, “Just as no one can explore or know what is in the depths of the sea, so no one on earth can see my Son or those who are with him, except in the time of his day.[p] 53 This is the interpretation of the dream that you saw. And you alone have been enlightened about this, 54 because you have forsaken your own ways and have applied yourself to mine, and have searched out my law; 55 for you have devoted your life to wisdom, and called understanding your mother. 56 Therefore I have shown you these things; for there is a reward laid up with the Most High. For it will be that after

three more days I will tell you other things, and explain weighty and wondrous matters to you.”

57 Then I got up and walked in the field, giving great glory and praise to the Most High for the wonders that he does[q] from time to time, 58 and because he governs the times and whatever things come to pass in their seasons. And I stayed there three days.