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Trauma and Zion: Narrative Healing

Joshua Johnson*
Boston College School of Theology & Ministry

Interfacing the work of Paul Ricoeur on time, narrative, and identity with that of Judith Herman on trauma, this paper explores the ways in which the prophetic book of Ezekiel and the pseudepigraphal book 4 Ezra spoke to the needs of ancient Jews in times of crisis by offering a realm in which readers could symbolically play out their trauma, experience catharsis, and reconfigure the greatest hopes of Israel.

* Joshua Johnson is a M.Div. student in the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry. His interests include biblical studies and pastoral care, as well as the Melkite Catholic Church and the Catholic Worker Movement.

Let my eyes stream with tears
Night and day without rest,
Over the great destruction which overwhelms
the virgin daughter of my people,
over her incurable wound
– Jeremiah 14:17

"Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences."
– Breuer and Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*

Introduction

In the words of psychiatrist Judith Herman, traumatic events "shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. They violate the victim's faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis."[1] Ancient Hebrew writers were consummate narrators, deftly working through identity-threatening (and life-threatening) traumas with such efficacy that the texts they produced are still powerful. This paper examines two ancient texts, one well known (Ezekiel, 6th c. BCE), one esoteric (4 Ezra, 1st c. CE). By interfacing the work of Paul Ricoeur on time, narrative, and identity with that of Judith Herman on trauma, I will show how these texts spoke to the needs of ancient Jews in times of crisis by proposing a realm in which readers could symbolically play out their trauma, experience catharsis, and reconfigure the greatest hopes of Israel.

Trauma

Trauma is not extraordinary because of its rarity, but because it overwhelms the most basic elements of our lives.[2] This is made clear by the massive suffering of the 20th century, from the horror of genocide to the plight of undocumented refugees. Trauma severs the bonds of cognition, emotion, and memory, threatening to leave its victims trapped in its paralyzing orbit. If severe enough, the victim will replay the trauma over and over again – this can take the form of a string of shattered relationships, recurrent nightmares, inappropriate behavior, and so on. In fact, that which remains of the trauma in memory can only be deemed "memory" by analogy: it is not integrated into the narrative of life,[3] and exists in a liminal realm too near to escape but too ephemeral to grasp. Further, trauma damages basic relational life – this is not epiphenomenal, but a primary effect, since trauma damages the psychic systems that link an individual to her community and can threaten her most basic understanding of the world.[4]

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[1] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The aftermath of violence – from domestic abuse to political terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 51. The quotation from Jeremiah on the cover page is taken from the New American Bible. That from Freud is taken from Herman, *Trauma*, 12.
[2] Ibid., 33.
[3] Ibid., 37.
[4] Ibid., 51.

We have a bleak picture thus far. Yet trauma does not have to be the whole story; recovery is possible. Key to healing is what the early psychoanalysts called *Trauerarbeit*, that is, "the work of mourning." It is "a process of elaborating and integrating the reality of loss or traumatic shock by remembering and repeating it in symbolically and dialogically mediated doses."[5] It is a refiguration of the trauma, in which the trauma is productively integrated into the life story of the survivor. Whether played out with toys, written in poetry, or talked out, this work moves the traumatized person from fragmentary memories towards integration, and eventually towards facing the future.[6] This healing process is characteristically *narrative*, hence the "talking cure" of psychotherapy.

If "psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless,"[7] apocalyptic literature is the genre of the powerless in the Biblical realm. The foundational function of biblical apocalyptic literature is to offer the reader a world that is different from his or her fractured state. It casts a vision of reality that is fundamentally constituted by hope, in which Yahweh is shown to be in control of history despite all appearances. But how could cosmic journeys and ecstatic visions provide hope in the real world?

Aristotle recorded his "astonishing precept" long ago: narrative should seek to describe not that which is possible yet incredible, but rather that which is *impossible yet probable*![8] The measure of the probable is rooted not in the text but in the world from which the text draws its intelligibility: the world of suffering and action. That is to say, "the probable" is a product of the text *and* the reader's lived reality.[9] But what do texts and life have to do with one another, and how is it that the symbolic can provide deliverance from trauma?

Figuration

Trauma threatens the way the victim experiences time and makes sense of his or her world – which is through *narrative*. Paul Ricoeur's model of narrative addresses both of these areas at once: he joins Augustine's notion of time as *distentio animi*[10] with Aristotle's account of mythos-mimesis (emplotment-imitation; actions/verb participles, not nouns).[11] By combining these two models, Ricoeur affirms that "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of

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[5] Eric Santner, "History Beyond the Pleasure Principle: Some Thoughts on the Representation of Trauma," in *Probing The Limits Of Representation: Nazism And The "Final Solution,"* ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 144.
[6] Herman, *Trauma*, 175-176, 196.
[7] Ibid., 33.
[8] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative vol. 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 49. Hereafter *TN1*. Aristotle spoke specifically about tragedy, but Ricoeur extends this account to narrative as such.
[9] Ibid., 51.
[10] The soul is distended as it embraces past, present, and future (*Confessions* XI). Augustine is ultimately unable to integrate time in the human realm, and locates its unity in the mind of God. Ricoeur does not follow him in this.
[11] See Aristotle's *Poetics*, book I. This allows Ricoeur to solve the problematic matter of Augustine's model addressing only time and not narrative and Aristotle's model addressing only narrative and not time. Each is problematic as it stands since time and narrative are united in lived human experience.

temporal existence."[12] The model binds the text and the real world together, following "the destiny of a prefigured time that becomes a refigured time through the mediation of a configured time."[13] We will now examine the power of narrative: it starts in our everyday lives before any explicit evocation of story, opens up fully in the poetic realm of stories themselves, but truly finds its fulfillment when those stories are integrated into the lives of those who read, hear, and tell them.[14]

Following Aristotle, Ricoeur's model of time and narrative firmly anchors emplotment (his translation of Aristotle's term mimesis) in the "real world," the world of action and suffering. If symbol and action in the form of story are to be at all intelligible to us, Ricoeur reasons, we must already find them in everyday life. He designates this inchoate storytelling mimesis. Our world is potentially narratable: we always already see the world in terms of signs and symbols[15] – even on the simplest level of the most mundane language. Thus the world of any human is *prefigured*: aware of it or not, we are always telling stories about ourselves and our world.[16] Moving into the configurational world of mimesis is as easy as picking up a book.

The configurational world of the text is mimesis "proper": it is the realm of the text. The narrative realm of story "opens the kingdom of the *as-if,*"[17] where we can explore possible worlds. Mimesis mediates between events and story (rendering a plot rather than a list of events) and between agents, goals, and instances; it creates a "synthesis of the heterogeneous."[18] Again, the textual world of the *as-if* is powerful and intelligible only because it is related to our lives in the world, from which we join the text and to which we return after reading. We find in them things that we find or could find in our lives. Time functions differently in this realm than it does in the world: it is moved forward not by the ticking of the clock, but by the question "and then what?" Further, re-reading, and reflection can alter – even reverse – the normal flow of time. We can not only read beginnings in endings, but endings in beginnings.[19]

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[12] Ricoeur, *TN1*, 52.
[13] Ibid., 54.
[14] This paper focuses on textual stories, though there are other forms of narrative that are at least analogous to them, such as dramas and liturgies.
[15] Ibid., 57.
[16] This is not to say that life and story are the same, but they are intertwined. Neither is it to say that the stories that are potentially narratable in life are particularly interesting – only that they are there.
[17] Ibid., 64.
[18] Ricoeur, *TN1*, 65-66.
[19] Ibid., 67-68. Sometimes the narrative *demands* that the reader do exactly this. Movies such as *Memento* force reverse readings down the viewer's throat. But reverse readings can be elicited elegantly and powerfully: consider the original ending of Mark's gospel. When Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, and Salome go to Jesus' tomb, they encounter a young man in a white robe who tells them that that they will see Jesus in Galilee, as Jesus had told them (14:28). The women are terrified and flee, and there the gospel ends. Some early Christians found this so befuddling that they composed endings they thought to be more satisfactory. I submit that Mark got things right the first time: the gospel's rhetorical genius lies in its *refusal* to give the reader resurrection appearances. The original ending generates a great deal of tension, which the *reader* must bring into concordance through re-reading the gospel. It is most truly the *reader* who is invited to seek Jesus in Galilee, which means returning to the place he or she first meets Jesus – he emerges from Galilee at the outset of the gospel (1:9). The reader begins the story anew, now enlightened with the knowledge that *"He has been raised" (*16:6). With that hermeneutical key, the reader is empowered to refigure not only the text, but his or her own life.

Ricoeur is especially interested in the catharsis that takes place in the configurational world. Again he follows Aristotle's *Poetics*: the plot brings about pity and fear, which are aroused precisely to *purge* pity and fear.[20] Their purgation produces pleasure; purged pity becomes compassion, while purged fear becomes serenity, all of which take place in not in the characters of the story, but rather in the *reader*.[21] Think of any good story. What makes it good is that you identify with the characters, you feel for them; you are dismayed when their hopes are dashed and celebrate when they beat the villain, find true love, overcome the odds.

The configurational world of the text finds its second anchor – and its full meaning – in the world of the reader. If the text has been at all effective, the reader's world is refigured. This *refiguration* is the point of telling stories – Ricoeur designates this completion of emplotment mimesis. Texts are not written for their own sakes, but for the sake of the reader. Texts are self-referential, but not solipsistic: the configurational realm performs a "structuration" which "is only completed in the spectator or the reader."[22] Refiguration sees the integration of the text into life, ideally leading to a more virtuous, more sympathetic, more understanding person. This world becomes the new starting point for mimesis$_1$ in a helix that stretches through time.

To put this plainly, I go about my daily life in a world which is already informed by my culture's narratives, the languages I speak, and the inchoate stories I tell myself (mimesis, prefiguration). When I engage a text (including the self-emplotment of journaling), my world is made subject to a re-shaping (mimesis, configuration). Having engaged the text, my world is on some level (however small) changed (mimesis, refiguration), and the process begins anew.

An analogous situation happens in any community, for communities are "constituted by the stories they recount to themselves and to others."[23] These stories lead to re-articulations and new stories. These re-tellings maintain the memory of where the community came from, what its ideals are, what its promises are – in short, they allow the community to be itself, to remain constant and concordant through the distention and discordance of time.

In trauma, the ongoing helix of prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration is damaged. Trauma, Herman writes, "overwhelm[s] the ordinary human adaptations to life."[24] Traumatic memories are "wordless and static," unable to be integrated into the life story of the survivor of trauma.[25] The event "exists" in the person and exerts deep psychic (and perhaps psychosomatic) impact, but its expression – when it can be brought to words – is "prenarrative," repetitive, barely told even as it is spoken.[26] With a significant event unable to enter into the figurative helix of one's life story, the traumatized person is caught in a vicious circle, orbiting around the

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[20] Aristotle, *Poetics* III 12a.

[21] Ricoeur, *TN1*, 50. The same phenomenon occurs in of postmodern literature, in which authors delight in refusing to hand a neatly packaged, concordant tale to the reader. In postmodern literature – prefigured in the Gospel of Mark! – the burden and challenge of turning discordance into concordance is on the reader.

[22] Ibid., 48.

[23] Richard Kearney, "Narrative and the Ethics of Remembrance," in *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary debates in philosophy*, eds. Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley (New York: Routledge, 1999), 26.

[24] Herman, *Trauma*, 33.

[25] Ibid., 175.

[26] Ibid., 175.

traumatic event, unable to experience catharsis, unable to live in humanized time. Trauma is a sort of *anti-figuration*; it resists the organization that is so essential to the mimetic process, remaining outside time even while exerting acute pressure on everything that continues to happen within time.

Identity

Ricoeur offers useful resources for clarifying what exactly it is that we mean by "identity." He distinguishes between *idem* identity, which concerns sameness, constituting a "what," and *ipse* identity, which concerns selfhood, constituting a "who."[27] The two are distinct and should be treated as such, but there is a point of contact between the two: permanence in time.[28] Following the distinction, it is *ipse* identity which is affected by trauma (though obviously *idem* identity is altered by physical trauma). Significant for our purposes is that trauma threatens precisely the meeting point of the two types of identity: time. Though the "what," the physical person or community, continues on through sunrise and sunset, the "who" remains tethered to the trauma. This heightens the fracture of identity: one is left with a "what" joined to a shattered "who" (especially in the case of psychosis, in which case the "who" is so shattered as to approach a horizon of selflessness).

We can further clarify the two models of permanence in time by examining their collision and differentiation. It is at the meeting point of sameness and selfhood that the "what of the who" and the "who of the what" emerge. The former is *character*, a set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized. Character emerges in plot, mediating permanence through changing circumstances.[29] The latter is *fidelity to one's word*, which "expresses a self-constancy which cannot be inscribed, as character was, within the dimension of something in general but solely within the dimension of 'who.'"[30] In the cases of trauma in the Bible, it is both character and fidelity to one's word that are threatened – specifically, *God's* character and fidelity. Yahweh is identified above all as a covenantal God: *what* he is is a *who* with irrevocable promises to Israel. Can fractured character and compromised fidelity be healed? Alas, I lack the perspicacity and acumen to answer such a question – fortunately we have recourse to wise seers of old who could lift the veil from the face of the cosmos.

Apocalyptic and the Work of Mourning

The tragic climax of the long decline of Israel from the glory of the days of David occurred between 597 and 586 BCE with the conquest and exile of the Judean people to

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[27] Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative Identity," trans. David Wood, in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (New York: Routledge, 1991), 188.
[28] Ibid. 192, also Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blarney (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 116.
[29] Ricoeur, "Narrative Identity" 195.
[30] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 123.

Babylon. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had fallen over a century earlier to Assyria. The conquest of the Southern Kingdom ostensibly brought an equally dismal future for the Judean people, spawning texts such as Lamentations and Jeremiah. This crisis likely caused the redaction and compilation of the various materials that make up what we know as the Pentateuch. It also produced the Hieronymus Bosch of the prophets: Ezekiel. So surreal, so fantastic were his visionary flights that ancient rabbis considered excluding the book from the canon.[31] Fortunately for our purposes, the book was preserved, presenting us with an excellent example of a narrative response to trauma.

In chapters two and three, Yahweh commissions Ezekiel to prophesy to the people of Israel. After hearing Yahweh's message, Ezekiel is borne by a spirit to Tel-abib, where he sits stunned for seven days.[32] At Yahweh's behest, he begins his Sign Acts.[33] He takes brick and iron and builds a model of besieged Jerusalem. He lays on his side for over a year, eating barley-cakes cooked over excrement. Finally, he cuts his hair and beard, performing various actions with the hairs.

Chapters eight through ten contain a fascinating sequence. A heavenly being seizes Ezekiel by the hair, lifting him "between earth and heaven" and showing him a vision. God directs his attention to the abominations committed by the house of Israel, and promises visions of still worse things. With this, God directs Ezekiel to dig through the wall of a court; this reveals a door. Ezekiel enters it and beholds shocking sights: "creeping things and loathsome animals, and all the idols of the house of Israel."[34] He also sees the elders of Israel committing offenses, which recall the rebellion against Moses and Aaron recorded in Numbers 16. Yahweh orders the destruction of Jerusalem and those committing abominations in it, and then – worst of all – withdraws his presence from the Temple.

The Jews' captors removed them far from the social environment that reflected and reinforced their identities; they were faced with a loss of memory not only of their land and temple, but *themselves* as they had always been.[35] That is, their narrative worlds were shattered; the ongoing mimetic helix that had made sense of their world could no longer function. The only way for the exilic community to avoid socio-religious amnesia – and repetitive neurosis – was to somehow re-experience the searing pain of their loss. Since their prefigured world had been torn apart, they needed a narrative configuration that could somehow meet them in their brokenness. Engaging such a configuration – mimesis – is "the work of mourning" mentioned above, the narrative re-telling of reality. This in itself is an immense challenge: as we have seen, Ezekiel frequently veers into melancholia, descending into fury and numbness. This is to be expected,

[31] Michael Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 384.
[32] Ezek. 3:15.
[33] Ezek. 4-5.
[34] Ezek 8:10. All citations are from the NRSV.
[35] Derek Daschke, *City of Ruins: Mourning the Destruction of Jerusalem through Jewish Apocalypse* (Boston: Brill, 2010), 4.

since the master symbol of his people, the Temple, was destroyed. Inability to observe festivals and regular sacrifices meant that symbolically, both the *world* and *time itself* were fractured.[36]

The cure for Ezekiel was a journey into the *as-if*. In this realm, he could re-experience the desolation of Zion, engaging it in the light of the configurational symbols of his tradition even as the symbols themselves were reworked. Reliving trauma, even cast in the light of Yahweh's guidance, is deeply painful; it is akin to re-breaking a poorly set bone so that it can properly heal. The way Ezekiel and his exilic comrades made sense of things (that is, their prefigurational world) was destroyed in the Exile and destruction of the Temple. The *as-if* of the fantastic realm of his visions served as a space for the re-figuring of identity, a place where Yahweh could be shown to be the one who is truly controlling history, despite all appearances.

In his strange Sign Acts, we see Ezekiel repeating the fate of Israel on a physical level. He remains confined to his house, dejected from the world; all his activity is inhibited as he is struck mute and lays on the ground, reviling himself. He seems to be a prisoner of melancholia.[37] Nonetheless, he may be doing some of the work of mourning in these actions – Judith Herman notes that even in very young children, traumas that cannot be articulated can be played out with toys,[38] and this may be what is happening with the play siege of Jerusalem with the bricks and plates.

A key point of the book is Ezekiel's vision of the destruction of the Temple. We should note that part of the dream involves a “breakthrough” - he digs through the wall, beholding the heinous and shameless rejection of Yahweh by his people.[39] This vision provides the theological justification for the destruction of Zion: whereas Zion was supposed to be a source of life, it instead became a center of sacrilege and abomination, making it the source of its own downfall.[40] The portrayal of the Temple in the symbolic realm of the vision provides a place for Ezekiel and his exiled community to revisit the trauma of Zion's desolation in a new way. The configurational power of the story touched the world of the exiled hearer exactly at the point of its brokenness in order to put together their fractured lives.

In chapter 24, Yahweh reveals to Ezekiel that he will take “the delight of his eyes” from him. Yahweh tells Ezekiel that he (Ezekiel) will not mourn, and that in this he is to be a model to the exiled community. This prediction-injunction is repeated; it applies to the death of the prophet's wife and then the destruction of the Temple. One way to read this is an indication of melancholia. Another possible way of reading it is as a prohibition against remembering things as they were. The community must face life in exile. They must abandon placing their security in the facade of Temple piety and re-imagine their identity if they are to survive on a cultural-religious level. That is, they need the configurational power of narrative to create an identity adequate to the reality of their experience. Notably, it is at this point in the text that Yahweh's

[36] Ibid., 14.
[37] Daschke, *City of Ruins*, 79-80.
[38] Herman, *Trauma*, 38.
[39] Daschke, *City of Ruins*, 83.
[40] Ibid., 82.

wrath is turned against various nations of the world.[41] Thereafter, Ezekiel begins to receive revelations from Yahweh concerning the restoration of the Jewish people, deliverance from exile.

These prophecies were fulfilled. Fifty years later, Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylon and gave the captive Jews permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their Temple. This produced some of the most beautiful of all biblical poetry, recorded in Second Isaiah. Yet Israel's future would not be as straightforwardly blessed as some sections of the classical prophets indicated. The Jews were violently oppressed in the 2nd century BCE by the Seleucids; mere generations after their successful rebellion under Judas Maccabeus, they found themselves under Roman rule. Various insurgencies were staged under the Romans; these tensions are reflected in the Christian Scriptures, with Jesus being executed as a perceived insurrectionist leader. When the Jews did revolt in 66 CE, they were crushed. Rome laid siege to Jerusalem, conquering it in 70 CE and destroying the Temple. Countless inhabitants died of starvation during the siege; those who survived were crucified or enslaved.[42] This traumatic event produced a number of texts;[43] we now turn to one of the most fascinating of them.

Fourth Ezra is a wild ride.[44] The searing pain of the destruction of Zion had hardly subsided in the thirty years between the event and the text's composition. The destruction slashed open the jagged scars of a painful paradigm in Israel's memory. The book is theologically rich, engaging the problem of suffering with a boldness unmatched in surviving Jewish texts. The seer-protagonist, Ezra, rebels against the account of suffering he has inherited from his ancestors. Yet, as Ricoeur states, a culture's deepest dreams are inexhaustible: "there is more to the past than what happened."[45] To construct a world which will offer an adequate configurational world to address the ancient readers' disrupted narrative understanding of reality, the author delves into the past, searching out "the future of the past," its "unfulfilled potential."[46] To seek that potential, our ancient author's narrative retreats half a millenia, back into the wake of the fall of Zion which so disturbed Ezekiel. We will listen to Ezra's complaint and view one of his visions to understand how this text addresses the book's traumatic history.

Our tale begins with Ezra cogitating on his acutely felt cognitive dissonance: he visualizes the ruination of Zion and the affluence of Babylon (throughout, Babylon is a cipher for Rome). Reclining on his bed, he voices his complaint to God. Ezra launches into an account of what would usually be a story of salvation history. He begins with creation, gives an overview of the Noahic flood, the giving of the Law, and the rule of David. Ezra's account of history is far

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[41] Thus following the program laid out in the Song of Moses, found in Deuteronomy 32, as do other texts that respond to trauma, such as 2 Maccabees 7.

[42] See Josephus, *Jewish War*.

[43] Including texts from the Jews who regarded Jesus as the Messiah. The shocks of this crisis are felt in e.g. the gospel of Mark, where Jesus' only extended speech deals with the destruction of the Temple (ch 13), the gospel of Matthew and Hebrews, which fill the gap left by the Temple with Jesus, and the book of Revelation, in which God's wrath is visited on Rome.

[44] In the footnotes, 4 Ezra will be referred to as 2 Esd.

[45] Paul Ricoeur, "Imagination, Testimony, and Trust," in Kearney and Dooley, *Questioning Ethics*, 14.

[46] Ibid., 14.

different from that which one would expect from Jewish literature: rather than focusing on the salvation of humanity, he focuses on human *perdition*. As soon as he names what God has done in history, he delves into how things went wrong. Further, whereas Ezekiel placed the blame squarely on the wicked, Ezra unmistakably implicates *God*. "Lord," he says, "you gave Israel the Law, but you did not remove their inclination to wickedness so that the Law might bear fruit. The weakness and root of evil remained."[47] And besides, those who punish Israel flourish, while Israel languishes, even though those meting out punishment are far worse! Ezra calls Yahweh's justice into question, bearing head on at the divine.

There ensue three lengthy dialogues with an angel, Uriel. In the first, Uriel dismisses Ezra's complaints, saying that Ezra simply does not understand the reality of the situation. Uriel is entirely unsympathetic to Ezra, telling him that he will reveal such secrets when Ezra can weigh a flame or recover a day from the past.[48] Since Ezra cannot even master earthly things, Uriel explains, neither can he have any understanding of heavenly things. Ezra is not satisfied with this response; he protests that he does not seek heavenly knowledge, but rather knowledge of present suffering. If he cannot comprehend such things, what is the use of having perception at all? Moreover, Ezra protests, nonexistence would be better than a life of unexplained suffering. Uriel tells him that the present age is hurtling towards harvest time. He cannot say when the time will come.[49] Ezra is given the first of a number of analogies of the present world to women in labor. There is travail, and when the fullness of time comes, birth is inevitable. When Ezra again asks when this will come, the angel can do no more than indicate the cosmic portents of that great and terrible day, when trees will bleed, stones will cry, and fire will erupt from the earth.[50] The vision ends and Ezra faints. The other two visions proceed similarly, with Ezra protesting the injustices of the world and the angel insisting that Ezra does not understand the true state of things.

The turning point in the book is Ezra's fourth vision. After spending seven days lying in a field, he begins to speak. He recounts the perdition of his people, but this time adds that Yahweh's Law endures, even though the people perish.[51] Ezra then sees a weeping woman. She tells her sad story: after many years of barrenness, she bore a beloved son, but he died on his wedding night. She resolves to fast and mourn until her death. Ezra is first indignant, saying she should concern herself with the grief of "Zion the mother of us all"[52] rather than her personal loss. He turns to an analogy of the earth bearing fruit, and then tells her, "if you acknowledge the decree of God to be just, you will receive your son back in due time, and will be praised among women."[53] Ezra then lists a litany of the woes of Zion: the altar is torn down, songs silenced,

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[47] Paraphrase of Ezek. 3:19-22.
[48] 2 Esd. 4:5; this is ironic: our author *is* recovering the past by placing the seer half a millenia before his time!
[49] Jesus similarly predicted tribulations, demurring as to precisely when they would occur; Paul (see especially 1 Thess 5:3) and Revelation also anticipate an immanent but ultimately unknown eschaton.
[50] 2 Esd. 5:1-13.
[51] 2 Esd. 9:37.
[52] The echoes that this phrase metaleptically evokes must be heard to render the full meaning of this text; see e.g. Psalm 86:5 (LXX), Baruch 4-5, and Second Isaiah, especially 54:1.
[53] 2 Esd. 10:16.

holy things profaned. He counsels the woman, saying, "Shake off your great sadness and lay aside your many sorrows, so that the Mighty One may be merciful to you again."[54] Suddenly, the woman is transformed! Her face flashes like lightning, she screams with a cry that shakes the earth, and she is transformed into a city. Ezra collapses, terror-stricken, crying for Uriel. The woman, Uriel explains, is Zion. Ezra's remaining visions concern the doom of Babylon and the coming of the Messiah. Ezra himself now becomes the mediator of revelation to his people.

Through his detour into the liminal realm of ecstasy, our seer found the apocalyptic cure. The way was not easy, but the realm of the *as-if*, combining the stories of Israel's history and the metaphors of birth and earth, allowed him to give voice to his inner turmoil. The reader can watch Ezra move from his broken prefigurational world of mourning, through the configurational world of visions, story, and metaphor, and finally into the refigured world at the end, when Ezra himself mediates divine revelations of hope to his people. More important is the reader's journey into the configurational realm. The expression of the reader's painful questions and objections in the mouth of Ezra allow for a cathartic effect in which pity and fear can become compassion and serenity. Ezra first pities the woman and then has compassion on her, first fears nearly everything and then experience assurance of God's providence. This happens in fiction, but real movement happens in the reader. The foundation of the text's configurational power lies in the fact that it holds the prefigured world of Israel's Scriptures in common with its readers.[55] Using the language and imagery of that world, 4 Ezra raises and relieves the acutely-felt anxieties of Jews after the devastation of Zion. On a purely cognitive level, the debate is intractable. Narrative accomplishes what philosophical discourse cannot.

The repetition in Ezra's three visions is psychologically significant. The message in each is largely the same, with the angel stressing the discontinuity between the present world order and the one that is to come. There seem to be two functions to the repetition in the segments. Perhaps the angel is not actually engaging in rational argument with Ezra, but rather calming his fears and building trust.[56]

The turning point of the book is when the grieving mother is revealed to be Mother Zion, which occurs as Ezra reverses his role, becoming the one who redirects a disconsolate mourner. One can draw a parallel to the prophet Nathan's parable with David concerning the beloved sheep of a poor shepherd: David does not see his guilt in having his mistress Bathsheeba's husband killed until he condemns the man in the parable who steals the poor shepherd's sheep. The configurational power of the character's dilemma put in an allegorical cast allows for the appropriation of that to which he is otherwise blind.[57]

By turning in concern to the other, Ezra is able to break out of his repetitive melancholia and find his cure. "If you acknowledge the decree of God to be just, you will receive your son

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[54] 2 Esd. 10:24.
[55] Though Ezra's brazen skepticism, surpassing even that of Job, is quite original. John Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 199-201.
[56] Ibid., 202.
[57] Ibid., 202.

back; let yourself be persuaded and be consoled because of the sorrow of Jerusalem."[58] Because Ezra was "sincerely grieved and profoundly distressed" for Zion,[59] Uriel tells him, because he shifted away from accusing God of injustice and instead mourned for Zion, God opened his eyes. He saw that the woman was Zion, and that the death of the woman's son was the recent destruction of Jerusalem. Ultimately, it is not she who gets the son back, but Ezra: he is granted a vision of the heavenly Zion and is again able to trust Yahweh. Again, this was made possible because it took place in the symbolic realm of the vision. He could feel his pain in a new way, with self-pity replaced by compassion. With his own concerns embodied in another, our seer could pull together the spectacular collision of motherhood, time and history, earth and birth, and be apocalyptically cured. He appropriates the work of mourning in himself and refigures his world and deepest hopes, serving as a model for the reader.

Conclusion

In Ezekiel and 4 Ezra, the cures offered by the narrative journey do not represent full-fledged flights from reality. Rather, the narrative detour of heavenly encounters introduces a transitional space in which broken symbols can be recast and re-appropriated and in which the flow of time can be reframed. This happens literally in the world of the text, and figurally in the lived world of the ancient reader. This transitional space exists precisely so that the reader can experience catharsis and begin the work of mourning, thus enabling him or her to deal with the traumatizing reality. In this space, the reader can re-experience trauma under the aspect of re-told beginnings and endings, offering the integration so badly needed but so hard to find in the world of action and suffering itself. The world created in the "poetic lies" of the author can get at a "truer truth" than historical experience mediates.[60]

The view of trauma and its narrative healing presented in this paper has, I hope, helped to do several things. First, it has given us one lens to view the experience of the 6th c. BCE and 1st. c. CE Jews as presented in the texts. We have seen that fractured identity and compromised fidelity can be healed and made whole through the emplotment offered by narrative. At least in the case of Ezekiel, this narrative configuration was effective enough that the community that produced it survived and passed the text on. This presentation of trauma and narrative also provides one way of making sense of our seers' mysterious actions and unspeakable fury, as well as the abiding strangeness of the texts. Perhaps most importantly of all, they provide a way of opening up the sheer dynamism of the texts and the meanings that they generate. This narrative power spans the centuries: they texts helped Israel deal with her traumatic historical experience, and through the ages they have provided readers a place to both find configurations of their own worlds and, ultimately, to encounter God.

[58] 2 Esd. 10:16, 20.
[59] 2 Esd. 10:50.
[60] Richard Kearney, *On Stories* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 26.

Epilogue

There is a great and potentially transformative irony in the texts produced by crises in Jewish history. This stems in part from the quality of narrative figuration, a powerful process of integration that finds its true completion not in the end of the story, but in its living receiver.[61] Books such as Ezekiel were written in response to a specific trauma: the destruction of the place where God was encountered. Similarly, much early Christian literature was produced because of the traumatic experience of the death of Jesus – the death of the person in whom God was encountered. And yet the power of these texts has led to their transmission from one generation to the next. The texts created because of the *destruction* of the place of encounter with God have themselves *become*, for countless souls, the very place of encounter with God. Moses in the desert had his tent of meeting. We perhaps have something better: a *text* of meeting.[62]

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[61] Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative," in Wood, *On Paul Ricoeur*, 26.
[62] A serendipitous pun taken from Sandra Schneiders' *The Revelatory Text.*