



Losing the Temple and Recovering the Future: An Analysis of 4 Ezra

Hindy Najman

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This book explores the Jewish community's response to the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. The focus of attention is 4 Ezra, a text that reboots the past by imaginatively recasting textual and interpretive traditions. Instead of rebuilding the Temple, as Ezra does in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Ezra portrayed in 4 Ezra argues with an angel about the mystery of God's plan and re-gives Israel the Torah. Drawing on Walter Benjamin, the imaginative project of 4 Ezra is analyzed in terms of a constellation composed of elements from pre-destruction traditions. Ezra's struggle and his eventual recommitment to Torah are also understood as providing a model for emulation by ancient Jewish readers. 4 Ezra is thus what Stanley Cavell calls a perfectionist work. Its specific mission is to guide the formation of Jewish subjects capable of resuming covenantal life in the wake of a destruction that inflects but never erases revelation.

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