

Dr. David deSilva, Apocrypha: Witness Between the Testament, Session 4, A Closer Look

2 Esdras

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of deSilva, Apocrypha, Session 4, 2 Esdras, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. DeSilva's lecture examines the book of 2 Esdras from the Apocrypha. The lecture provides historical context, explaining the book was written after the destruction of the temple in 70 AD and the failure of the first Jewish revolt. **It grapples with theological questions arising from Roman domination, such as God's justice and the suffering of the Israelites.** The text explores the problem of sin, referencing Adam, and considers God's selection of Israel. **The lecture also highlights the book's literary structure as three texts combined into one.** Ultimately, 2 Esdras reaffirms the importance of adhering to the Torah and poses questions about the fate of non-Jews.

2. 18 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. deSilva, Apocrypha, Session 4 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → NT Introduction → Apocrypha).



**deSilva_Apocrypha_
Session04.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: deSilva, Apocrypha, Session 4, 2 Esdras

Okay, here's a briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from Dr. deSilva's lecture on 2 Esdras (also referred to as 4 Ezra).

Briefing Document: 2 Esdras (4 Ezra)

Source: Excerpts from "deSilva_Apocrypha_EN_Lecture04.pdf"

Overview:

This lecture by Dr. David deSilva explores the book of 2 Esdras within the Apocrypha, focusing primarily on its core section (chapters 3-14, often referred to as 4 Ezra), a Jewish apocalypse written around 100 AD. The lecture situates the text within its historical context: the aftermath of the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD by the Romans, a period of significant theological crisis for the Jewish people. The lecture explains that 2 Esdras grapples with questions of divine justice, the meaning of the covenant, and the problem of evil in light of this devastating event.

Key Themes and Ideas:

- **Historical Context: Roman Domination and the Destruction of the Temple:**
 - The lecture establishes the historical backdrop: Roman rule, increasing Jewish resentment, the Jewish revolt of 66 AD, and the subsequent destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. This event created a theological crisis. As deSilva notes, "This leaves Jews with some significant theological problems. And that's where Second Esdras comes in."
 - The author of 2 Esdras uses the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon as a "reframing of modern history, the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome."
- **Theological Crisis and Questions of Justice:**
 - The destruction of the Temple raised fundamental questions about God's justice and the validity of the covenant with Israel. The author of 2 Esdras wrestles with why God allowed the Romans (seen as "Babylon") to destroy the Temple and oppress the Jewish people, especially when the Jewish people, despite their failings, still adhered to the covenant to some degree. "If there is justice, God, in your ordering of things, how can you punish us who at least, you know, from time to time care about your covenant and fail to punish those who have never given you or your covenant a second thought?"

- The book explores the apparent contradiction between Israel's chosen status and their continued suffering under foreign rule.
- **Literary Structure and Authorship:**
- DeSilva emphasizes that 2 Esdras is a composite text: a Jewish core (chapters 3-14), with a Christian preface (chapters 1-2) and conclusion (chapters 15-16) added later. The lecture focuses on the Jewish core.
- The core section is an apocalypse, a genre that seeks to provide a "bigger picture" perspective on present crises by revealing God's ultimate plan and future judgment. The apocalypse seeks to answer present day problems by looking back at similar situations in Jewish history and looking forward to eschatological reward and punishment.
- **The Problem of Sin and the Role of Adam:**
- 2 Esdras explores the origin of sin and human inclination toward evil. The author attributes this to Adam's disobedience, which introduced a "permanent disease" into humanity.
- This perspective contrasts with earlier Jewish views that attributed evil primarily to the story of the Watchers (fallen angels) in Genesis 6. "Prior to this time, Jewish authors looked to the story of the Watchers in Genesis 6:1-4, to explain the origin of evil in the world...but the real problem happened when angels in heaven decided that the daughters of human beings on earth looked really fine."
- The angel's answer isn't satisfactory to Ezra but says obedience to the Torah matters most.
- **Election vs. Torah Observance:**
- The book questions the meaning of election in the face of Israel's suffering. The angel's answers emphasize that Torah observance is more important than simply being part of the elect. "In essence, election isn't nearly as important as Torah observance. There's no free ride to God's blessings. Only those among Israel who keep the Torah and honor God by honoring God's law will enjoy the covenant blessings."
- Only those Jews who diligently obey the Torah will be considered part of God's limited and righteous portion of Israel.

- **Apocalyptic Pessimism and the Two Ages:**
- 2 Esdras expresses a strong sense of "apocalyptic pessimism," giving up on the present world as irredeemably corrupted by sin.
- The solution lies in the future age, when God will bring justice and restore Israel. "The Most High has made not one world but two. And it's only in the second one that the covenant blessings will come to the righteous portion within Israel."
- **Visions of Judgment and Restoration:**
- The lecture discusses the visions in 2 Esdras, including the transformation of the mourning woman into a glorious city (representing Zion's future) and the vision of the eagle (representing Rome) being judged by the Messiah. "And so we read in 2nd Esdras 11, the messiah comes and says to Rome, you have ruled over the world with much terror and over the whole world with harsh oppression...Therefore, eagle, you must utterly vanish."
- These visions offer hope that God will ultimately intervene and bring justice to Israel.
- **Limited View of Gentiles:**
- 2 Esdras exhibits a narrow view of salvation, with no indication that Gentiles can be part of God's chosen people. The author expresses resentment that the Gentiles, considered "nothing," rule over Israel.
- This stands in contrast to the early Christian movement, which embraced Gentiles and faced criticism for doing so. "It's difficult not to read texts like this without hearing Paul's burning question. Is God the God of the Jews only? Is God not also the God of the Gentiles?"
- **Reaffirmation of the Torah:**
- The book concludes with a reaffirmation of the Torah as the path to life. Ezra, who initially questioned God's justice, ultimately urges the people to keep the law.
- The final chapters describe the reconstitution of the scriptures after their supposed loss, emphasizing the importance of preserving and obeying the Torah. "Ezra the doubter, Ezra the questioner, has become Ezra the promoter of the Deuteronomistic view of history and its promises once again."

Significance:

2 Esdras provides valuable insight into the theological struggles and apocalyptic worldview of Jewish people in the aftermath of the destruction of the Second Temple. It reveals a grappling with fundamental questions of faith, justice, and the meaning of the covenant in the face of immense suffering. The book ultimately points toward a renewed emphasis on Torah observance and hope for future restoration, reflecting the direction that rabbinic Judaism would take.

4. Study Guide: deSilva, Apocrypha, Session 4, 2 Esdras

Second Esdras: A Study Guide

I. Quiz

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. What historical event serves as the backdrop for the writing of 2 Esdras, and why was it so theologically challenging for Jews of that time?
2. According to Dr. DeSilva, what are the three main literary layers that comprise the book of 2 Esdras as it exists today, and what are their approximate dates and origins?
3. What is the common strategy that most apocalypses use?
4. According to the author of 4th Ezra, who is to blame for why humans struggle to obey the Torah?
5. How does the angel Uriel respond to Ezra's concerns about the difficulty of obeying the Torah and achieving salvation?
6. What is the Deuteronomistic view of history?
7. What disturbing view does Ezra have regarding the Gentiles?
8. In the visions found in chapters 11 and 12 of 2 Esdras, what does the eagle represent, and what is the significance of its destruction?
9. What is reconstituted in the last chapter of 4 Ezra?
10. What does Ezra promote in the last chapter of 2 Esdras?

II. Answer Key

1. The destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 AD is the backdrop. This event was theologically challenging because it raised questions about God's covenant with Israel, the efficacy of the sacrificial system, and why God allowed a "worse" nation to destroy His holy place.
2. The three layers are: (1) a Christian preface (5th Ezra) added in the 2nd century AD, (2) the core Jewish apocalypse (4th Ezra) written around 100 AD, and (3) a Christian conclusion added in the 3rd century AD. The core Jewish apocalypse is the primary focus of the lecture.

3. The common strategy that apocalypses use is getting the big picture, which puts the pieces of the immediate picture back in place. This helps put current questions into perspective.
4. The author of 4th Ezra looks to Adam and his original sin as the root cause for humans struggling to obey the Torah. He argues that Adam's sin created a permanent disease, an inclination towards evil, within humanity, making obedience inherently difficult.
5. The angel Uriel acknowledges the difficulty but insists that obedience is feasible and crucial. He emphasizes the great reward for those who overcome their evil inclination and uphold God's honor through adherence to the Torah.
6. The Deuteronomic view of history is a theological framework found in the Book of Deuteronomy that posits that Israel's fortunes are directly tied to their obedience to God's law. Obedience brings blessings, while disobedience brings curses and exile.
7. Ezra doesn't give a hint that any Gentile is going to do the law and become part of God's people. His reductionistic view of the elect includes only those within Israel who struggle against the evil inclination and keep the law.
8. In the visions, the eagle represents the Roman Empire. Its destruction symbolizes God's judgment against Rome for its oppression and injustice, offering hope for the restoration of Israel.
9. In the last chapter of 4 Ezra, the scriptures are reconstituted. Ezra gathers scribes who rewrite the scriptures and additional inspired books, signifying the restoration of divine guidance and the importance of sacred texts.
10. In the last chapter of 2 Esdras, Ezra promotes the Deuteronomic view of history. All of his complaints are gone and all of his questions about the covenant are gone.

III. Essay Questions

1. Discuss the theological challenges posed by the destruction of the Second Temple and how 2 Esdras attempts to address these challenges.
2. Analyze the literary structure of 2 Esdras, focusing on the different layers of the text and how they contribute to its overall message.
3. Compare and contrast the views on the origin of evil presented in 2 Esdras with those found in earlier Jewish literature, such as the Book of Genesis.
4. Explore the role of apocalyptic literature, using 2 Esdras as an example, in providing hope and meaning to communities facing oppression and suffering.
5. Examine the concept of election in 2 Esdras, considering its implications for both Jews and Gentiles, and how this concept relates to the themes of justice and salvation.

IV. Glossary of Key Terms

- **Apocrypha:** Books written during the intertestamental period (between the Old and New Testaments) that are included in the Septuagint and Vulgate but not considered canonical in Jewish or Protestant Bibles.
- **2 Esdras (4 Ezra, 5 Ezra):** An apocalyptic book within the Apocrypha that explores theological questions arising from the destruction of the Second Temple. The core chapters are known as 4 Ezra and the Christian preface as 5 Ezra.
- **Apocalypse:** A genre of literature that reveals hidden or future realities, often through visions, symbols, and angelic intermediaries. Apocalypses provide perspective on confusing worldly matters.
- **Hasmonean Dynasty:** A Jewish dynasty that ruled Judea from 164 to 63 BC, following the Maccabean Revolt against the Seleucid Empire.
- **Deuteronomistic View of History:** A theological framework that emphasizes the direct correlation between Israel's obedience to God's law and their national prosperity or suffering.
- **Election:** The concept of God choosing Israel as His special people, a theme frequently questioned and redefined in 2 Esdras.
- **Torah:** The first five books of the Hebrew Bible, also known as the Pentateuch or the Law of Moses. It represents the foundation of Jewish law and tradition.
- **Messiah:** A future king or leader expected by the Jews to restore Israel and usher in an era of peace and justice.
- **Evil Inclination:** The inherent tendency towards sin or wrongdoing that, according to 2 Esdras, afflicts humanity due to Adam's sin.
- **Roman Empire:** The empire that dominated Judea during the time of 2 Esdras, responsible for the destruction of the Second Temple and the oppression of the Jewish people.

5. FAQs on deSilva, Apocrypha, Session 4, 2 Esdras, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: 2 Esdras

- **What is the historical context of 2 Esdras (4 Ezra)?**
- 2 Esdras, specifically its core Jewish apocalyptic section (chapters 3-14, often referred to as 4 Ezra), was written around 100 AD, in the wake of the devastating First Jewish Revolt (66-70 AD) and the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans. This event caused a significant theological crisis for Jews as it challenged core beliefs about God's protection of Israel, the covenant, and the meaning of Torah observance. The author grapples with the implications of this catastrophe under Roman rule.
- **What are the main theological problems that 2 Esdras addresses?**
- The book wrestles with several key theological challenges arising from the destruction of the Temple: the apparent failure of God to protect his chosen people; the suffering of the righteous while the wicked (Rome) prosper; the justice of God in light of Israel's sins and the greater sins of the nations; the meaning of God's election of Israel when they are dominated by other nations; and the problem of inherent human inclination towards evil, tracing it back to Adam.
- **What is the literary structure of 2 Esdras, and how was it formed?**
- The 2 Esdras found in the Apocrypha is a composite text. Its core (chapters 3-14, also called 4 Ezra) is a Jewish apocalypse written around 100 AD. Chapters 1-2 (5 Ezra) are a Christian preface added in the 2nd century AD, and chapters 15-16 are a Christian conclusion added in the 3rd century AD. These additions reflect Christian perspectives on the transfer of God's favor from Israel to the Church and address persecution faced by Christians.

- **What is the apocalyptic perspective presented in 2 Esdras, and how does it address the current crisis?**
- The author uses the apocalyptic genre to provide a broader perspective on the present crisis. This includes looking back to past instances of suffering, such as the Babylonian exile, to find parallels and hope; envisioning future judgment of oppressors like Rome; depicting post-mortem rewards and punishments; and anticipating the restoration of Jerusalem under a Messiah. This larger picture is meant to reaffirm God's justice, promises, and the continued relevance of Torah observance, despite the present suffering.
- **How does 2 Esdras explain the origin and persistence of evil?**
- The author attributes the inherent inclination toward evil to Adam's sin, which introduced a "permanent disease" into the human race. This inclination makes it difficult for humans to consistently obey the Torah. This contrasts with the earlier Jewish view which attributed the origin of evil to the Watchers (angels) in Genesis 6, who introduced forbidden knowledge and corrupted humanity.
- **What is the angel Uriel's response to Ezra's complaints and questions?**
- The angel Uriel emphasizes the importance of Torah observance as the means to honor God and attain covenant blessings. While acknowledging the difficulty of the struggle against the evil inclination, Uriel asserts that it is feasible and that the reward for overcoming it is great. He also states that God's honor is paramount, and transgression cannot be overlooked. Regarding election, Uriel clarifies that it is not a guarantee of blessing but is contingent on Torah observance and that ultimate justice and covenant blessings are deferred to the age to come.
- **What is the significance of the visions in 2 Esdras, particularly the vision of the eagle?**
- The visions in 2 Esdras represent a shift in the book, emphasizing the importance of coming to grips with the reality of Jerusalem's destruction, but also providing hope for the future. The vision of the mourning woman transformed into a glorious city symbolizes the future restoration of Zion. The vision of the eagle, a clear symbol of Rome, depicts the history of Roman emperors and predicts God's judgment upon Rome for its oppression and injustice. This judgment will be carried out by the Messiah and will bring about the restoration of the earth.

- **What is the final message of 2 Esdras regarding the Torah and the future of Israel?**
- The final message is a strong affirmation of the Torah as the path to life. All of Ezra's questions are answered through his dialogue with Uriel and visions. The scriptures are reconstituted, and the reconstituted Ezra is now a promoter of Torah observance, which he calls "the law of life". He urges the people to keep the Torah so that after death they may attain mercy. The doing of the Torah is the way to life now and into the age to come.