

Daniel Jeremy Silver Collection Digitization Project

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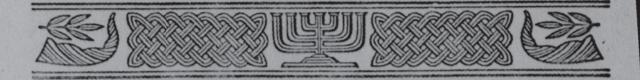
MS-4850: Daniel Jeremy Silver Papers, 1972-1993.

Series IV: Writings and Publications, 1952-1992, undated. Sub-series B: Other Writings, 1952-1992, undated.

Reel	Box	Folder
74	23	1454

Research notes, Esdras, journal article and notes, undated.

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THE APOCALYPSE OF ESDRAS

The following is from the so-called Second Book of Esdras, an apocryphal document of doubtful date but unmistakable meaning. The author—supposedly the ancient law-giver, Ezra—seeks to solve the age-old problem of why Israel, of all nations, is the most afflicted. The answer, given in a series of visions, is twofold: first, God's ways are inscrutable, and Israel must therefore be patient; second, God's justice is sure, and Israel's patience, if sufficient, will be soon and wonderfully rewarded.

I quote here only a short passage from the early part of the book (Chapters 3:33 to 4:26), since the rest consists almost entirely of apocalyptic proofs that the world is about to "end."

"For I have gone all about the nations, and I have seen them abounding in wealth, yet unmindful of your commandments. Now therefore weigh our iniquities and those of the inhabitants of the world on the scales; and which way the movement of the pointer turns will be found out. Or when did the inhabitants of the earth not sin in your sight? Or what nation has kept your commandments so well? You will find names of men who have kept your commandments, but you will not find nations."

And the angel who had been sent to me, whose name was Uriel,

The Apocalypse of Esdras

answered and said to me, "Your mind has utterly failed in this world and do you expect to understand the way of the Most High?"

And I said, "Yes, my lord."

And he answered me and said, "I was sent to show you three ways, and to set three figures before you. If you can solve one of these for me, I will show you the way you want to see and teach you why the heart is wicked."

And I said, "Go on, my lord."

And he said to me, "Come, weigh me the weight of fire, or measure me a measure of wind, or call back for me the day that is past."

And I answered and said, "Who that is born can do that, that you should ask such things of me?"

And he said to me, "If I had asked you, 'How many dwellings are there in the heart of the sea, or how many streams at the source of the deep, or how many ways above the firmament, or what are the ways of leaving Paradise?' perhaps you would have said to me, 'I have never gone down into the deep, nor into Hades, nor have I ever climbed up into the heavens.' But now I have only asked you about fire and wind and the day, through all of which you have passed, and without which you cannot live, and you have given me no answer about them!" And he said to me, "Your own things that grow up with you, you cannot understand; and how can your frame grasp the way of the Most High, or one already worn out by the corrupt world understand incorruption?"

And when I heard this, I fell on my face and said to him, "It would have been better that we should not be here than to come here and live in ungodliness, and suffer, without understanding why."

And he answered me and said, "I went to a forest of trees of the field, and they took counsel and said, 'Come, let us go and make war on the sea, so that it may retire before us, and we may make more forests for ourselves.' In like manner the waves of the sea themselves also took counsel and said, 'Come, let us go up and conquer the forest of the field, so that there also we may win our-

Between the Testaments

selves more territory.' And the thought of the forest was in vain, for the fire came and consumed it; so was the thought of the sea waves, for the sand stood firm and stopped them. Now if you were their judge, which of them would you have undertaken to justify, and which to condemn?"

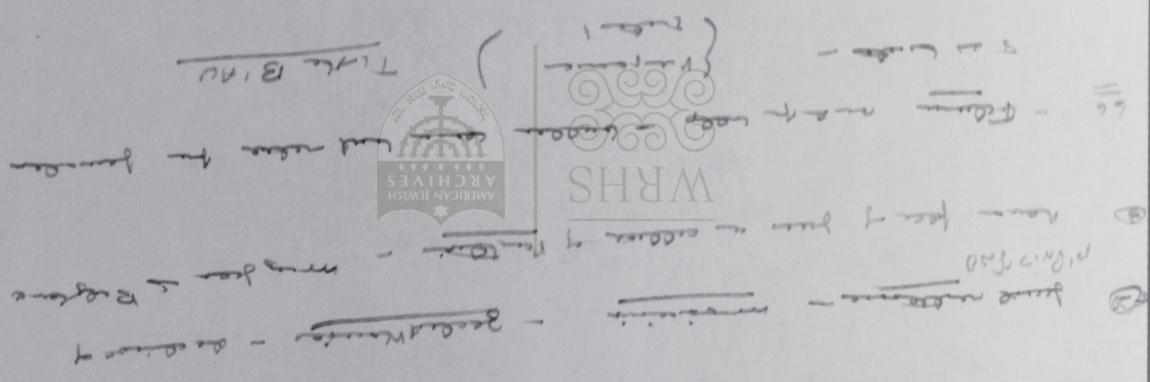
And I answered and said, "It was a foolish plan that both formed, for the land is given to the forest, and the place of the sea is given it to bear its waves."

And he answered me and said, "You have judged rightly; and why have you not judged so in your own case? For just as the land is given to the forest, and the sea to its waves, so those who live on the earth can understand only the things that are on the earth, and those who are above the heavens, the things that are above the height of the heavens."

Then I answered and said, "I beseech you, sir, to what end has the capacity for understanding been given me? For I did not mean to ask about ways above, but about those things which pass by us every day: why Israel is given up to the heathen in disgrace; the people whom you loved are given up to godless tribes; and the law of our forefathers is made of no effect, and the written agreements are no more. And we pass from the world like locusts, and do not deserve to obtain mercy. But what will he do for his name, by which we are called? It is about these things that I have asked."

Then he answered me and said, "If you live, you will see, and if you survive, you will often marvel; for the age is hurrying fast to its end."...

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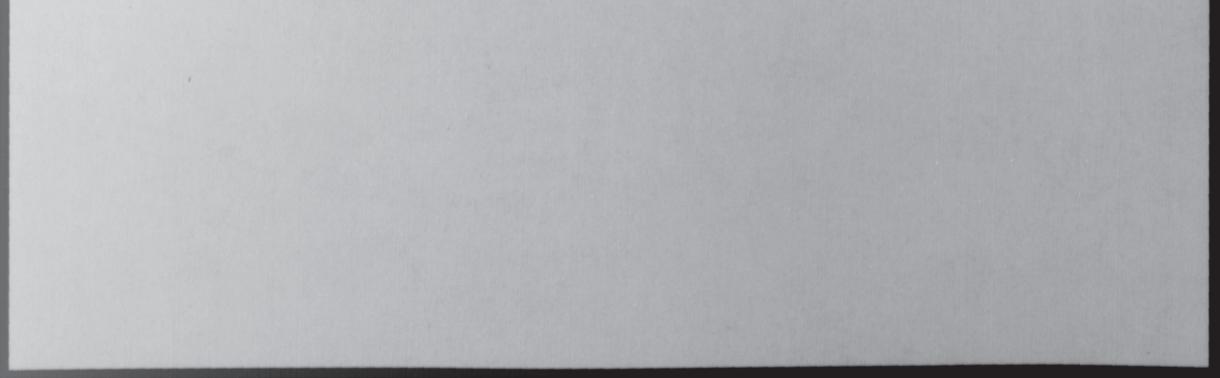
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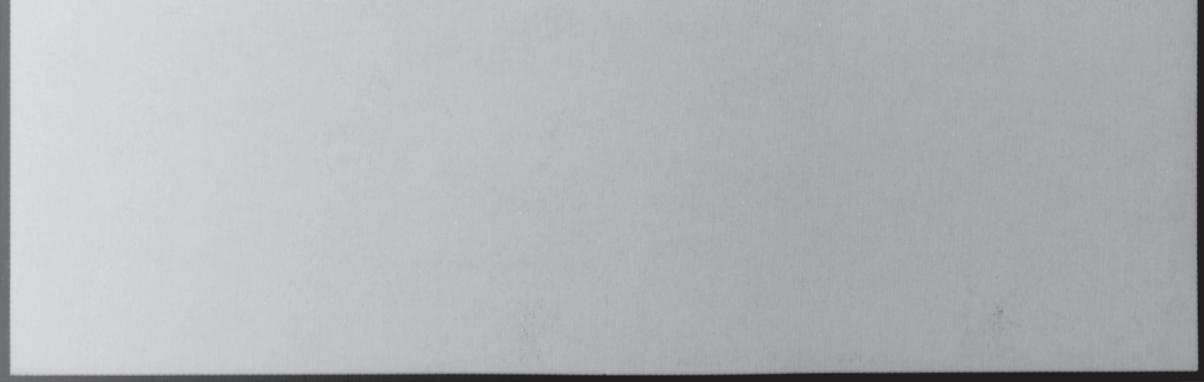
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