

A Portrait of the “Evil Heart” in 4 Ezra

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1. Introduction

4 Ezra is one of the significant Second Temple Jewish writings that can helpfully illuminate the New Testament writings. Particularly for Paul’s descriptions of sin, 4 Ezra’s notion of an “evil heart” is often invoked as an illuminative Jewish parallel.¹⁾ However, before claiming that 4 Ezra’s notion of an “evil heart” is a hermeneutically fruitful and exegetically illuminative parallel to Paul’s description of sin, it is important first to explore the notion of an “evil heart” as portrayed in 4 Ezra. No article-length study has been devoted to delineating the conceptual features of the “evil heart” in 4 Ezra.²⁾ The present study seeks to meet this need by observing the ways in which the term “evil heart” is used in the text of 4 Ezra. It will be argued that 4 Ezra describes the “evil heart” as having five

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1) E.g., B. Byrne, *Romans*, Sacra Pagina Series 6 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 175; B. Witherington III, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 147; J. A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed., AB 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 413.

2) Within Korean context, I found no single article on 4 Ezra in any of the Korean journals. I appreciate the reviewer who referred me to Yong-Han Chung, “2 Baruch’s Consolation for the Destruction of the Temple”, *Korea Presbyterian Journal of Theology* 47:3 (2015), 35-57, esp. 23, where some aspects of 4 Ezra are touched on, with little attention to the issues examined in the present article.

characteristics: it (i) originates from Adam’s sin, (ii) possesses the power of overcoming the Law, (iii) has universal scope with near-universal effectiveness, (iv) is responsible for physical and eschatological death, and (v) gives rise to a unique redefinition of the remnant. These are crucial data to consider before comparing 4 Ezra’s notion of the “evil heart” with any supposed New Testament parallel. In what follows, we will first look at the historical and literary context of 4 Ezra briefly and then examine the five characteristics of the “evil heart.”

2. The Issues Surrounding 4 Ezra

4 Ezra was written in Palestine almost at the end of the first century after the destruction of the Second Temple (hereafter, “The Destruction”).³⁾ 4 Ezra is considered as an apocalypse, in which a pseudonymous seer is given revelation through an angelic mediator about the transcendental world to come, which now should function as an interpretative framework for apprehending the present world.⁴⁾ This apocalypse conveys its messages through seven “episodes”: three dialogues involving Ezra, the inquirer, and the angel Uriel, the divine respondent, and three visions received by Ezra, and lastly, Ezra’s teaching to his own community.⁵⁾

Many recent scholars recognize that the author of 4 Ezra draws various

3) This is agreed by most scholars. See M. E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra*, F. M. Cross, ed., Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 9-10; J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed., Biblical Resource Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 196; B. M. Metzger, “The Fourth Book of Ezra (Late First Century A.D.) with the Four Additional Chapters: A New Translation and Introduction”, J. H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Vol. I, Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983), 520; J. M. Myers, ed., *I and II Esdras*, 1st ed., AB 42 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 129; W. O. E. Oosterley, ed., *II Esdras (The Ezra Apocalypse)*, Westminster Commentaries (London: Methuen, 1933), xlv.

4) M. E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 36-37; J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 199.

5) M. E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 50-51 divides these episodes as follows: Dialogue one (3:1-5:20), two (5:21-6:34), and three (6:35-9:25), and vision one (about the mother/Zion, 9:26-10:59), vision two (about the Eagle, 11:1-12:51), and vision three (about the man from the sea, 13:1-58), and Ezra’s teaching (14:1-50). J. J. Collins (*The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 199) rightly points out that while these dialogues are not “visions” per se, they still constitute the means by which revelation takes places, as is the case in Dan 10-12.

traditions together to establish the book's literary unity.⁶⁾ The unity of 4 Ezra's message has often been understood in terms of Ezra representing an unacceptable contemporary view of the Destruction and Uriel providing the author's corrective to that view.⁷⁾ A more convincing recent proposal, however, emphasizes the congruency between the position of Ezra and that of Uriel, understanding their overall interrelationship as follows. Ezra begins with a myopic, this-worldly perspective on the significance of the Destruction but gradually switches to the long-sighted, other-worldly view communicated by Uriel's speech, which is then decisively confirmed by Ezra's visionary experiences.⁸⁾ In this progressive widening of Ezra's interpretative vision, Ezra's

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- 6) E.g., J. A. Moo, *Creation, Nature and Hope in 4 Ezra*, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments Bd. 237 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 30, and E. Breech, "These Fragments I Have Shored against My Ruins: The Form and Function of 4 Ezra", *JBL* 92:2 (1973): 267-274. Cf. H. Najman, "The Exemplary Protagonist: The Case of 4 Ezra", E. J. C. Tigchelaar, ed., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the Scriptures*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium CCLXX (Leuven: Peeters, 2014), 263-287.
- 7) W. Harnisch, *Verhängnis Und Verheissung Der Geschichte: Untersuchungen Zum Zeit- Und Geschichtsverständnis Im 4. Buch Esra Und in Der Syr. Baruchapokalypse* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969) and E. Brandenburger, *Die Verborgenheit Gottes im Weltgeschehen: Das literarische und theologische Problem Des 4. Esrabuches*, Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments Bd. 68 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1981). See the surveys by M. E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 24-28 and K. M. Hogan, *Theologies in Conflict in 4 Ezra: Wisdom Debate and Apocalyptic Solution*, JSJSup 130 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 15-20 of the scholars in this position. K. M. Hogan's recent proposal to read the dialogues between Ezra and Uriel as representing two antithetical wisdom traditions, which are superseded by the author's *third* perspective revealed only later in the visions, is criticized for downplaying the continuities between this supposedly third view and the view of Uriel (J. A. Moo, *Creation, Nature and Hope*, 31-33; J. M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015], 282, n.6) and for operating with an unjustifiably narrow view of apocalyptic theology (L. DiTommaso, "Who Is the 'I' of 4 Ezra?", J. M. Zurawski, G. Boccaccini, and M. Henze, eds., *Fourth Ezra and Second Baruch: Reconstruction After the Fall*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism [Leiden: Brill, 2013], 119-133).
- 8) M. E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 30-33 and J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 199 (both expressing their indebtedness to Gunkel) convincingly explains this interplay between the two views as reflective of the author's own psycho-religious struggle: the author's initial oscillation between the two different ways of interpreting the destruction of the Second Temple settles down as he becomes convinced by (or "converts to") the way of thinking represented by Uriel. These two ways of thinking represented in the author's psychological struggle, however, are not necessarily confined to the author's private mental world (pace M. E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 30-33). The author's inner struggle may reflect the psycho-religious state of his audience as well, and therefore, Ezra's spiritual journey described in the text may be meant to guide those among the audience who are suffering from similar theological puzzlement caused by the destruction of the Second Temple. Those who seem to take this line of interpretation include P.

original emphasis on Israel’s destiny and Torah is maintained yet reoriented towards “the world to come” (7:50; 8:1).

In 4 Ezra, the concept of an “evil heart” is introduced in the context of explaining the cause of the Destruction. Israel represents the true descendants of Adam who succeed to Adam’s glorious status, but because of the “evil heart” that exerts powerful influences on Adam and then on Israel, the Destruction ensued. In the remainder of this article, we will focus on 4 Ezra’s descriptions the “evil heart,” and construe its five characteristics.⁹⁾

3. Five Characteristics of the “Evil Heart”

3.1. Adam’s Sin as the Origin of the Universal Potency of the “Evil Heart”

4 Ezra describes the “evil heart” (*cor malignum* in 3:21, 26; 4:4; or *cor malum* in 7:48) as exerting universal influence, pointing to Adam’s sin as the cause of the universalization of its potency. It is possible, however, to think of the “evil heart” as originating from Adam’s pre-sinning reception of an “evil seed,” rather than Adam’s transgression, based on the passages like 4:30a (“a grain of evil seed was sown in Adam’s heart from the beginning”). In other words, the “evil seed” sown in Adam, was powerful enough from its entrance into Adam, to turn Adam’s heart evil and then corrupt his descendants’ hearts as well. In this picture, the “evil seed,” which presumably produces the “evil heart,” has the capacity for corrupting all humanity even *prior to* Adam’s transgression, and Adam is simply the first human being to be overwhelmed by

F. Esler, “The Social Function of 4 Ezra”, *JSNT* 53 (1994), 109-122, J. A. Moo, *Creation, Nature and Hope*, 33; J. M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 282-283, n.8; L. T. Stuckenbruck, “Ezra’s Vision of the Lady: The Form and Function of a Turning Point”, J. M. Zurawski, G. Boccaccini, and M. Henze, eds., *Fourth Ezra and Second Baruch: Reconstruction After the Fall*, 139, n.5.

9) We only have the translations (Latin, Syriac, Ethiopic, Georgian etc.) of the Greek versions of the Hebrew original, but textual critical studies of 4 Ezra have advanced enough to produce a reliable critical text. For the details, see M. E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 1-9 (cf. A. F. J. Klijn, ed., *Die Esra-Apokalypse (IV. Esra): Nach Dem Lateinischen Text Unter Benutzung Der Anderen Versionen übersetzt*, Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1992], xii–xxx). For citation in this article, we will use the English critical text by M. E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra*.

this evil power.¹⁰⁾ This view, however, does not fit well with 7:118-119, where it is Adam's *actual sinning* rather than Adam's pre-sinning "evil seed" or "evil heart" that accounts for humanity's universal sinfulness and Israel's fall.¹¹⁾

It is possible, however, to reconcile these supposedly conflicting passages by affirming both the presence of the "evil heart" before Adam's sin and the universal influence made by Adam's sin itself.¹²⁾ Consider the following passages.¹³⁾

(4:30a) For a grain of evil seed was sown in Adam's heart from the beginning, and how much ungodliness it has produced until now, and will produce until the time of threshing comes!

(3:21-22, 25b-27) 21 For the first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were all who were descended from him. 22 Thus the disease became permanent; the law was in the people's heart along with the evil root, but what was good departed, and the evil remained ... 25 ... the inhabitants of the city [of David] transgressed, 26 in everything doing as Adam and all his descendants had done, for they also had the evil heart. 27 So you delivered the city into the hands of your enemies

10) E.g., G. Boccaccini, "The Evilness of Human Nature in 1 Enoch Jubilees, Paul and 4 Ezra", J. M. Zurawski, G. Boccaccini, and M. Henze, eds., *Fourth Ezra and Second Baruch: Reconstruction After the Fall*, 72, 74; J. R. Levison, *Portraits of Adam in Early Judaism: From Sirach to 2 Baruch*, Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series 1 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1987), 118. See also the description of this position by A. L. Thomson, *Responsibility for Evil in the Theodicy of IV Ezra: A Study Illustrating the Significance of Form and Structure for the Meaning of the Book* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1982), 336.

11) G. Boccaccini fails to address this tension or mention 4 Ezra 7:118-119.

12) I made a similar point in Janghoon Park, "Paul's Conception of Sin and Death in Romans 5-8 and 1 Corinthians 15", Ph.D. dissertation (University of St Andrews, 2018), 96, following the line of argument made by M. E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 65. See A. L. Thomson, *Responsibility for Evil*, 335-336 and M. T. Brand, *Evil Within and Without: The Source of Sin and Its Nature as Portrayed in Second Temple Literature* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 138-139 for different ways of approaching the issue.

13) These passages (the first passage by Uriel and the rest by Ezra) which affirm the powerful presence of an "evil heart" do not reflect an area of disagreement between Ezra and Uriel. Unlike *2 Baruch*, which emphasizes individual free will over against the positing of the "evil heart" as a universal power, 4 Ezra assumes that the "evil heart" is a basic fact to reckon with, wrestling with the question of how this fact can be reconciled with God's justice and sovereignty. See G. Boccaccini, "The Evilness of Human Nature", 76; M. T. Brand, *Evil Within and Without*, 129.

(7:118-119) 118 O Adam, what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendants. 119 For what good is it to us, if an eternal age has been promised to us, but we have done deeds that bring death?

We can infer from the first passage that the “evil seed,” which was “sown in Adam’s heart,” was what made Adam’s heart evil. And it is clear from the second passage that the “evil heart” caused Adam to transgress (“Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed” 3:21). However, the second and third passages imply that the “evil heart” acquires its universal power to influence humanity even by overcoming Israel’s law, *only through* Adam’s transgression itself.¹⁴ That is to say, it is only after Adam “was overcome” by the “evil heart” that this “disease became permanent” (3:22a) and *took root* in humanity (“evil root”).¹⁵ As a result, “the inhabitants of the city [of David] transgressed, in everything doing as Adam and all his descendants had done,” and God “delivered the city into the hands of [Israel’s] enemies.” (3:25b-27). This is a compressed story of Israel from Adam to the Destruction, with the cause of the Destruction being ultimately identified as Adam’s transgression.¹⁶ In his lament in 4:118, therefore, Ezra stresses Adam’s fall as the event that is causally responsible for the fall of his descendants: “O Adam, what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendants.”¹⁷

This way of locating Adam’s sin as the determinative causal event for humanity’s subjection to the “evil heart” and for Israel’s failure to overcome it, constitutes a sharp contrast to the traditional way of presenting Adam positively

14) A. L. Thomson, *Responsibility for Evil*, 334-335 rightly sees that the “evil heart” is the cause of Adam’s sin, but without noting that only as a result of Adam’s sin did its power become universal enough to cause the sins of Adam’s descendants.

15) M. E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 65. J. R. Levison, *Portraits of Adam*, 117-118 fails to consider 3:22a (“thus, the disease became permanent”) in his interpretation of 3:20-27.

16) So A. L. Thomson, *Responsibility for Evil*, 326-327, followed by Janghoon Park, “Paul’s Conception of Sin”, 97.

17) M. E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 65 and M. T. Brand, *Evil Within and Without*, 138 correctly notes that here humanity inherits from Adam not *the act of transgression itself* (or the guilt of having transgressed) but an “evil inclination” or an “evil heart” that led them to transgress. *Pace* K. M. Hogan, *Theologies in Conflict*, 117, who claims that “the fall” in this passage refers *only* to mortality.

(i.e., “Israel as True Adam”) – as Israel’s prototypical ancestor whose ideal existence in the Garden of Eden is reenacted by Israel.¹⁸⁾ Despite this contrast, however, 4 Ezra does not depart from this tradition. Rather, 4 Ezra clearly assumes this tradition, as evidenced in the following passage.

(6:54-56a, 59a) 54 and over these you placed Adam as ruler over all the works which you had made; and from him we have all come, the people from whom you have chosen. 55 ... O Lord, because you have said that it was for us that you created this world. 56 As for other nations which have descended from Adam, you have said that they are nothing ... 59 If the world has indeed been created for us, why do we not possess our world as an inheritance? ...

This shows that for 4 Ezra, Israel, unlike “other nations” that are “nothing,” is Adam’s special descendants, for whom “[God] created this world,” and who succeed to Adam’s original vocation of “ruling over all the works which [God] had made.”¹⁹⁾ Adam’s vocation, then, is reenacted by Israel. This clear presence of the Adam-Israel tradition in 4 Ezra suggests that when emphasizing Adam’s sin in connection with Israel’s failure, the author is thinking *within* this tradition to understand Israel’s downfall. In other words, given the fact of the Destruction, the traditional way of viewing Israel as inheriting Adam’s privileged vocation (i.e., rulership over God’s creation to be shared with his descendants) would have led the author of 4 Ezra to interpret Israel’s downfall also in terms of Israel inheriting what Adam had, this time *by virtue of Adam’s sin*, namely the “evil heart” made (almost) universally irresistible. This means that while maintaining the genealogical channel from Adam to Israel, 4 Ezra identifies Adam’s

18) E.g., Sir 49:16-50:1; Wis 10:1-14; Jub 2:17-24; 19:24-27. See the section on the fifth characteristic of the “evil heart” below for a more detailed discussion of this point.

19) Pace J. R. Levison, *Portraits of Adam*, 120-121, esp. 224, n.32, who claims that Adam is “the progenitor of humanity” and *not* an Israelite, especially because Adam and humanity represent sinful humanity of this world under the power of “evil heart” whereas Israel represents a group of righteous people who can overcome “evil heart” and inherit “the world to come.” However, as seen in our previous chapters, the fact that Adam is the ancestor of all humanity does not undermine Adam’s special genealogical relationship with Israel (as rightly recognized by M. E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 188, n.48). Further, J. R. Levison fails to note that the righteous people inheriting the “world to come” are Israel *as redefined after the destruction of the Second Temple*, not Israel whose solidarity with Adam under the power of “evil heart” was revealed in this tragic event. See the following section for details.

transgression, rather than Adam’s pre-transgression life in the Garden of Eden, as determining the content of influence that irresistibly flows through this channel. Thus, the traditional Adam-Israel connection now serves in 4 Ezra to highlight the non-realization of God’s creational intentions and the power of the “evil heart” rather than the fulfillment of God’s creational purposes and the power of God himself. Hence Uriel states, “I made the world for [Israel’s] sake, and when Adam transgressed my statutes, what had been made was judged” (7:11b).²⁰ This negative portrayal of Adam-Israel represents a retrospective reading of the Adam story that had not arisen prior to the destruction of the Second Temple. Only after Israel’s downfall is Adam’s transgression brought to the foreground, flipping the traditional Adam-Israel solidarity to the dark side. This analysis will be confirmed by the next feature of the “evil heart,” namely its power to overcome the law.

3.2. The Power of the “Evil Heart” to Produce Sins despite Israel’s Law

In combination with its emphasis on Adam’s sin as the cause of the universalization of the “evil heart,” 4 Ezra attributes to the “evil heart” the power to make Israel sin despite Israel’s possession of the Law. 4 Ezra 3:22, 25b–27 (see above) speak of the power of the “evil heart” to overcome the Law, in the context of discussing the consequences of Adam’s transgression. As was noted above, the “evil heart” became “permanent” and took root in humanity as a result of Adam’s sin (3:22a). This “evil root,” then, dominates in the heart of humanity, with the result that even when “the law was in the people’s heart,” “what was good departed and the evil remained” (3:22b). Because of this dominating presence of the deep-rooted “evil” quality of heart, Israel or “the inhabitants of the city transgressed, in everything doing as Adam and all his descendants had done,” and God “delivered the city into the hands of your enemies” (3:25b-27). Miryam T. Brand observes that this attribution of the Law-overcoming power to the “evil heart” in 4 Ezra sharply contrasts with the view of the Law held in the other earlier Second Temple texts, according to which the Law is effective in combatting the causes of sin.²¹ Even the texts that

20) It is because of the downfall of Adam-Israel, God’s covenant people, that Ezra raises an issue with God’s covenantal faithfulness and God’s justice as the Creator.

21) M. T. Brand, *Evil Within and Without*, 131-132, 280-281, bases this judgment on a wide range of the Second Temple Jewish texts, including the ones dealt with in the present work.

affirm the universality of human corruption and the sinfulness of Israel no less than 4 Ezra do not describe it as capable of overpowering the Law or neutralizing the advantage of having the Law.²²⁾

4 Ezra's distinctive attribution of the Law-overpowering quality to the "evil heart," along with 4 Ezra's stress on Adam's sin, seems to have resulted from the author's reflection on the Destruction. For the author of 4 Ezra, the Destruction signifies not the anticipated downfall of only the corrupt groups of Jews (e.g., the corrupt Jerusalem priests and their followers) but the failure of Israel *as a whole*, comparable to Israel's first national failure that led to the destruction of the First Temple. This second failure of Israel, therefore, must have demonstrated that Israel in the Second Temple period was no different from the pre-exilic Israel in the First Temple period. This would have led the author of 4 Ezra to conclude that Israel, despite her continued privileged possession of the Law both in the First Temple and Second Temple periods, was unable to keep the Law, proving herself to be under the power of the "evil heart" as are all the rest of humanity.

It is important to note that this radicalization of the potency of the "evil heart" does not diminish moral responsibility of Israel in 4 Ezra. As rightly observed by Brand, for the author of 4 Ezra, the very fact that the law was given to Israel presupposes that Israel is endowed with "mind" (7:62-63) and "understanding" (7:72) and is therefore a full moral agent bearing full culpability for breaking the law they received. They also have the freedom of choice (8:56-58; 9:10-12), because of which their transgressions reflect their willful choice of "forsaking" God's laws, amounting to the "deeds that bring death" (7:72; 8:58). Hence Ezra laments that "we who have received the Law and sinned will perish, as well as our heart which received it; the Law, however, does not perish but remains in its glory" (9:36).²³⁾ 4 Ezra's radical portrayal of "evil heart" as conquering the Law, then, is not a way of victimizing Israel and blaming this evil power for Israel's sins, but a way of recognizing Israel's willful disobedience to the law and holding Israel fully culpable for their destruction and death. For the author of 4 Ezra, the overwhelming power of the "evil heart" is compatible with Israel's (and humanity's) possession of free will and their assumption of full moral

22) This is the case e.g., in the Qumran scrolls, where the members of the Qumran community who supposedly possess the true law are largely protected.

23) This is similar to Paul's defense of the Law in Rom 7:13-14.

responsibility for their sins.

To summarize, 4 Ezra’s negative representation of Adam-Israel – consisting of its emphasis on Adam’s transgression combined with its concomitant recognition of the powerlessness of the law against the “evil heart” and Israel’s full culpability for succumbing to “evil heart” and transgressing the Law – reflects an unprecedented diagnosis of the condition of Israel that was not made prior to Israel’s downfall.

3.3. The (near) Universal Scope of the Power of the “Evil Heart”

Many scholars observe that 4 Ezra affirm the universality of the “evil heart” while also speaking of the existence of a small number of people who do not succumb to this evil power. The former is evidenced in the following passages.

(7:46, 68)²⁴ 46 Who among the living is there that has not sinned, or who among men that has not transgressed your covenant? ... 68 For all who have been born are involved in iniquities, and are full of sins and burdened with transgressions

(8:34b-35) 34 ... what is mortal race, that you are so bitter against it? 35 For in truth there is no one among those who have been born who has not acted wickedly, and among those who have existed, there is no one who has not transgressed

Read together, the two passages imply that all “those who have been born” have “acted wickedly” and “transgressed,” being “involved in iniquities.” This affirmation of the universality of the “evil heart” stands in tension with the other statements made by Ezra and Uriel to the effect that there are still “few” “righteous” people,²⁵ including Ezra.²⁶ A better way of explaining this tension than viewing it

24) Cf. 3:35; 4:30.

25) Ezra’s statements include 7:48; 3:11, 14-17; 8:33; 10:22; 14:35. Uriel’s statements include 4:27, 35; 9:13; 12:34, 38. God’s direct statements given in response to Ezra’s prayer include 8:3, 39, 51.

26) While Ezra presents himself as among the sinners (8:31-35), Uriel describes him as a (paradigmatic) example of the righteous (6:32; 7:76-77; 10:39, 57; 8:47-48 are uttered directly by God).

simply as the presence of two incompatible perspectives²⁷⁾ seems to be to understand “evil heart” as universally operative yet overcome by a small number of “the righteous” prepared by God himself.²⁸⁾ In other words, for this “righteous” people, while the “evil heart” exerts influence on them (due to its universal operation),²⁹⁾ it becomes resistible, with divine intervention³⁰⁾ from certain point in their lives, presumably following the period of their subjection to it.³¹⁾

So then, the “evil heart” exerts universal power on humanity including Israel, except for a small number of the righteous remnant empowered by God (7:42-44).

3.4. The “Evil Heart” Resulting in Physical and Eschatological Death

In 4 Ezra, the operation of the “evil heart,” which produces sins, ultimately leads to human mortality. The “evil heart” operative in Adam produced

27) This interpretative approach is typically taken by those who view Ezra and Uriel as representing two conflicting traditions or theological opinions. See n.7 above.

28) Without formulating this way, M. E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 272, simply let the tension exist. J. M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 295, n.35, seems to downplay Ezra’s claims about the universality of sin when understanding them as “always rhetorical exaggerations” which are “not to be taken literally.”

29) “Evil thought” is still “formed with them” (7:92b), but they “strive with great effort to overcome” it (7:92c) and thus managed to “keep the ways of the Most High” (7:88b).

30) They are described as the product of God’s work of preservation (“God saved some with great difficulty,” 9:21a). J. A. Moo, “The Few Who Obtain Mercy: Soteriology in 4 Ezra”, D. M. Gurtner, ed., *This World and the World to Come: Soteriology in Early Judaism*, Library of Second Temple Studies 74 (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 110, 112, also sees this point, correctly observing further that the idea of keeping the law “perfectly” in 7:89 is “the common biblical way” of talking about the sincerity of the righteous (which is often interchangeable with faith or faithfulness, 6:5; 7:77) rather than indicating the requirement of “legalistic perfectionism” unprecedented in the history of Israel. Similarly J. M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 306; R. Bauckham, “Apocalypses”, D. A. Carson, P. T. O’Brien, and M. A. Seifrid, eds., *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, WUNT 2. Reihe 140 (Tübingen; Grand Rapids, MI: Mohr Siebeck; Baker Academic, 2001), 161-175, esp. 173. Pace E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 409, 416 and B. W. Longenecker, *Eschatology and the Covenant: A Comparison of 4 Ezra and Romans 1-11*, JSNTSup 57 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 90-91.

31) In Ezra’s exhortation for his community to become “the righteous remnant,” Ezra describes this people as having transgressed the law just as their father did (14:27-36). This presupposes that one can become part of the remnant group by turning from their previous subjection to “evil heart.” J. M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 306, n.60, similarly notes that repentance is applicable to the remnant. So J. A. Moo, “The Few Who Obtain Mercy”, 110.

Adam’s transgression and thereby brought universal human mortality into the world.

(3:7) And you laid upon [Adam] one commandment of yours; but he transgressed it, and immediately you appointed death for him and for his descendants.

(7:78) Now, concerning death, the teaching is: when the decisive decree has gone forth from the Most High that a man shall die, as the spirit leaves the body to return again to him who gave it ...

The first passage makes it clear that God “appointed death for Adam and his descendants” “immediately” in response to Adam’s violation of God’s commandment. That is to say, God issued “the decisive decree” that “a man shall die” (Gen 3:19) precisely because Adam sinned. Universal mortality is therefore not a natural part of Adamic humanity’s existence but a penal result of Adam’s transgression. As was true with the “evil heart,” human mortality also became universalized as a result of Adam’s sin. This reinforces 4 Ezra’s negative portrayal of Adam’s role of introducing evil to the world.

The “evil heart” not only produced universal mortality (physical death) by acting on Adam but also affects the postmortem destiny of individual descendants of Adam.³²⁾ In other words, Adam’s descendants, except for God-preserved remnants, are under the power of the “evil heart” and therefore commit sins, which then lead to their postmortem existence in pain and suffering away from God (eschatological death). This view is reflected in the following two passages.

(7:79-80, 87b) 79 And if it is one of those who have shown scorn and have not kept the way of the Most High, and who have despised his Law, and who have hated those who fear God – 80 such spirits shall not enter into habitations, but shall immediately wander about in torments, ever grieving and sad, in seven ways ... 87 ... shall wither with fear at seeing the glory of the Most High before whom they sinned while they were alive, and before whom they are to be judged in the last times

32) A similar line of argument was made in Janghoon Park, “Paul’s Conception of Sin”, 98-99.

(7:32-34, 36-38) 32 And the earth shall give up those who are asleep in it and the chambers shall give up the souls which have been committed to them. 33 And the Most High shall be revealed upon the seat of judgment, and compassion shall pass away, and patience shall be withdrawn, 34 but judgment alone shall remain ... 36 Then the pit of torment shall appear, and opposite it shall be the place of rest; the furnace of Hell shall be disclosed, and opposite it the Paradise of delight. 37 Then the Most high will say to the nations that have been raised from the dead, "Look now, and understand whom you have denied, whom you have not served, whose commandments you have despised! 38 Look on this side and on that; here are delight and rest, and there are fire and torments!" Thus he will speak to them on the day of judgment.

According to these passages, the postmortem destiny of the wicked proceeds in two steps: upon physical death, the souls of the unrighteous "wander about" (7:80) in the postmortem "chamber" (4:42; 7:32), in which they await God's final judgment in agony and fear. And then, following the final judgment, they are permanently placed in "the pit of torment," which is "the furnace of Hell" (7:36).

The "evil heart," then, having introduced universal human mortality in the world, continue to operate among Adam's descendants, leading them to face painful postmortem existence followed by eschatological separation from God.

3.5. The "Evil Heart" and a New Adamic People

How does 4 Ezra characterize this small group of "righteous" people to whom the "evil heart" is not effective? Some scholars believe that 4 Ezra conceives this people in individual terms (i.e., as an aggregate of the elect individuals) apart from the category of Israel.³³⁾ M. E. Stone and others more convincingly argue that this people should be understood rather in continuity with the category of Israel – as "the remnant" within Israel to whom God's promises to Israel will be fulfilled.³⁴⁾

33) E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 409, 415-416; B. W. Longenecker, *Eschatology and the Covenant*, 96-97; cf. K. M. Hogan, *Theologies in Conflict*, 38-39, who attributes universalism to Uriel's view but not to the "third" view held by the author of 4 Ezra.

34) M. A. Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel: A Reconsideration of the Theology of Pre-Christian Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 42-43; R. Bauckham, "Apocalypses", 173; J. A.

It is important, however, to note the distinctive way in which 4 Ezra applies the category of Israel to this remnant. There are Second Temple texts that characterize Israel or a group of Israelites by appealing to their special descendancy from Adam.³⁵⁾ The point invariably made is that they inherit and reenact Adam’s ideal existence in the Garden of Eden.³⁶⁾ 4 Ezra, however, draws on this Adam-Israel connection precisely to *deny* the distinctiveness of Adam-Israel from the rest of humanity. That is, Adam-Israel is now standing in solidarity with the rest of humanity, functioning to demonstrate that humanity, all of Adam’s descendants, are under the power of the “evil heart” and under God’s condemnation. 4 Ezra, therefore, when describing the remnant who are immune to the “evil heart” and are apparently Adam’s physical descendants, does not invoke their solidarity with Adam-Israel nor emphasize their special connection with Adam. Rather, 4 Ezra conceives them as a *new Adamic people* created for “the world to come” all the while associating the original Adam-Israel with “this world.” The implication is that the privileged status of the original Adamic people (Adam-Israel) has devolved on this new Adamic people – as a result of Adam’s sin. This is supported by the following passages.

(7:11-12) 11 For I made the world for [Israel’s] sake, and when Adam transgressed my statutes, what had been made was judged. 12 And so the entrances of this world were made narrow and sorrowful and toilsome.

(7:47, 50) 47 And now I see that the world to come will bring delight to few but torments to many ... 50 For this reason the Most High has made *not one world but two*.

Moo, *Creation, Nature, and Hope*, 112; J. M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 299-300. Central to this redefinition of Israel is faithful observance of the law, without which other physical, social, political signs of one’s belonging to the community of Israel are not sufficient. B. W. Longenecker seems to have shifted from his earlier “universalism” to “covenantal redefinition” in his later work. See B. W. Longenecker, *2 Esdras*, Guides to the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 99-100.

35) See note 18 above.

36) M. A. Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel*, does not address Adam-Israel connection in his extensive exploration of the idea of Israel’s remnant in Second Temple Judaism.

(8:1) He answered me and said, “*The Most High made this world for the sake of many, but the world to come for the sake of few.*”

(9:13) Therefore, do not continue to be curious as to how the ungodly will be punished; but inquire how *the righteous will be saved, those to whom the age [to come] belongs and for whose sake the age [to come] was made.*

These passages establish a clear parallel between the original Adamic people for whom “this world” was made but was brought under judgment,³⁷⁾ and the righteous remnant for whom “the world to come” is made and is anticipated.³⁸⁾ It is clear from this parallel that because of Adam’s sin (which is later recapitulated by Israel through the “evil heart”), what was true of the original Adamic people (i.e., the people for whom the world is made and to whom it belongs) is now made applicable to the remnant, a new Adamic people (i.e., the people for whom “the world to come” is made and to whom it belongs).³⁹⁾ It is for this new Adamic people that the Messiah will come (7:28-29; 12:31-35; 13:32-41), Zion will be restored (13:36), and God’s creation will be renewed (13:26).

Furthermore, this new Adamic people, while still subject to physical death, can avoid postmortem pain and eschatological separation from God because they can overcome the power of the “evil heart.” Therefore, the souls of the new Adamic people, upon physical death, are “gathered into their chambers and

37) This includes the universalization of “evil heart” and death, and also “full of dangers” and “great hardships” (7:12), which allude to the curses of Gen 3:16-17. See J. R. Levison, *Portraits of Adam*, 121.

38) This reflects the majority interpretation of 7:10-14, including B. W. Longenecker, *Eschatology and the Covenant*, 78; J. M. Myers, ed., *I and II Esdras*, 252; J. R. Levison, *Portraits of Adam*, 121; S. Burkes, *God, Self, and Death: The Shape of Religious Transformation in the Second Temple Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 196-197; J. M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 288-289; Pace J. M. Zurawski, “The Two Worlds and Adam’s Sin: The Problem of 4 Ezra 7:10-14”, G. Boccaccini and J. M. Zurawski, ed., *Interpreting 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch: International Studies* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 97-106, who thinks the world created for Israel is “the world to come” and not “this world.” See M. E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 194-195 for the difficulties of this line of interpretation.

39) Similarly J. M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 300, n.46, stating that “Ezra’s view that the world was made for Israel is first redefined in terms of the two worlds (7:1-16) and then reframed: in Uriel’s terms, the world /age was made for the sake of the righteous (9:13).”

guarded by angels in profound quiet,” enjoying “rest” in God and anticipating their rewards – “the glory which awaits them in the last days,” “the spacious liberty which they are to receive and enjoy in immortality,” and their appearance “like the light of the stars, being incorruptible from then on,” and their enjoyment of joy with “boldness” and gladness without “fear.”⁴⁰⁾ At the final judgment, “the reward shall be manifested” and “righteous deeds shall awake,” with the result that this new Adamic people enjoy all of what they have anticipated in “the Paradise of delight.”⁴¹⁾

In summary, Israel’s failure as attested by the Destruction led the author of 4 Ezra to diagnose the present condition and future destiny of Adam-Israel in pessimistic terms (by emphasizing Adam’s fall followed by Israel’s fall) while also re-conceptualizing the remnant as a new Adamic people rescued from the sinful Adamic humanity for “the world to come.”⁴²⁾

By managing to resist the “evil heart” and live righteous lives through divine help, this new Adamic people will inherit the world to come.

4. Conclusion

Conscious of the need to study 4 Ezra on its own right before utilizing it to illuminate Paul and other New Testament documents, we explored 4 Ezra with particular reference to the notion of an “evil heart.” Written in the wake of the Destruction, 4 Ezra identifies the “evil heart” as the cause of Israel’s downfall, characterizing it five ways. First, it originates from the time of Adam, being formed in Adam before his fall, and becoming universally powerful in Adam’s descendants as a result of Adam’s transgression. Second, the “evil heart” is powerful enough to produce sins despite of the presence of Israel’s law, as is clear from Israel’s failure to resist the “evil heart” with the law. Third, the “evil heart” has universal potency except for a small number of Israel’s remnants who are helped by God to resist its power. Fourth, the “evil heart” is also responsible for universal human mortality and brings those under its power to miserable

40) See 7:88-99 for more details.

41) See 7:32-44 for more details.

42) In this way, 4 Ezra presents Ezra as a paradigmatic remnant, by emphasizing his faithfulness to the law while not neglecting the fact that he is part of the old Adamic humanity.

postmortem existence and tragic eschatological separation from God. Fifth, the remnant who are immune to the operation of the “evil heart” are considered a new Adamic people to inherit the new world and live in the new age whereas the rest of Adamic humanity remain bound within the present world. Any who attempts to compare 4 Ezra’s notion of the “evil heart” with Paul’s notion of sin or any other supposed New Testament equivalent needs to take into account these findings.

<Keywords>

4 Ezra, evil heart, Israel, Adam, sin.

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<Abstract>

A Portrait of the “Evil Heart” in 4 Ezra

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4 Ezra’s notion of an “evil heart” is often cited as an illuminative Jewish parallel to Paul’s description of sin. However, it is necessary to understand how the evil heart is presented in 4 Ezra before it can be considered exegetically helpful for understanding the notion of sin in Paul’s and in other New Testament writings. To meet this need, the present article observes the ways in which the term evil heart is used in 4 Ezra, and concludes that in 4 Ezra, the evil heart has five distinguishable characteristics. Written in the wake of the Second Temple’s destruction, 4 Ezra seeks to understand the reasons for this tragic event, and identifies the evil heart, which can be characterized by the following five ways, as an evil force responsible for Israel’s downfall. First, it originates from the time of Adam. More specifically, the evil heart was formed in Adam, inclining him to sin, but it acquired universal potency to cause Adam’s descendants to fall, only as a result of Adam’s transgression. Second, its power is not deterred by Israel’s law because the evil heart made Israel fall no less than the rest of Adam’s descendants despite Israel’s possession of the law. Third, while the evil heart has universal potency, its power can be overcome by a small number of Israel’s remnants who are helped by God to resist it. Fourth, the evil heart, through Adam’s fall, brought universal mortality to Adam’s descendants, and also led Adam’s descendants, except for the remnants, to be in miserable postmortem existence and tragic eschatological separation from God. Fifth, the remnants who are immune to the corrupting power of the evil heart are considered a new Adamic people to inherit the new world and live in the new age, whereas the rest of Adamic humanity remain bound within the present world and will perish with it. These five features of the evil heart need to be in view whenever this notion is compared with supposed New Testament parallels.