The Concept of *Theodicy* in the Ancient Near East and in Biblical and Jewish Apocalyptic Sources

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1. Introduction

Long before the philosophical thought of the 18th century AD, when the use of the term *theodicy* was first observed, this question in the sense of God's justification for the creation of evil, had been raised since ancient times in the religious thought of the peoples of the Near East. In fact, A. Loprieno in his article entitled "Theodicy in Ancient Egyptian Texts" refers to four texts of the Middle Kingdom of Egypt (c. 2050-1750 BC) which seeks the answer to the question "Why there is evil in the world?" and to which various answers are given. Also, in a collection of funerary spells known as *Coffin Texts*, and more specifically in the *Book of the Two Ways*, the existence of evil in the world is seen as the result of man's autonomous decision to violate God's command[1].

In a lament derived from a pseudepigraphic text attributed to the wise Ipuwer, it is disputed that man's choice is truly free and it is claimed that the prevalence of evil in the world is due to the negligence of the Creator, thus leaving a suspicion that God is powerless against to the evil caused by man[2].

Moreover, in Sinuhe's fictional autobiography God is again presented as responsible for evil: Sinuhe claims that his sin of leaving Egypt and living close to the Bedouins for fear that the new king will be prejudiced

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1. A. Loprieno, "Theodicy in Ancient Egyptian Texts", in: A. Laato & J. C. de Moor (eds.), *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, E. J. Brill, Leiden 2003, pp. 27-8.

2. A. Loprieno, "Theodicy in Ancient Egyptian Texts", op.cit., p. 28.

against him is not due to his own decision, but to a decision of God, considering himself a scapegoat[3].

Still, a text supposedly addressed to King Merikare emphasizes that God's oversight of mankind worked perfectly until he reduced its size because some people foolishly rebelled against him[4]. In general, this is an optimistic view of God's relationship with his creatures, claiming that evil, wherever it comes from, is punished. Furthermore, man has been given "magic" to repel the dangerous manifestations of evil, implying that he has all the elements needed to remove the disorder caused by the intervention of evil in the world[5].

2. Ancient near Eastern Theodicy

Ancient Egypt, however, presents a peculiarity in relation to other ancient civilizations regarding the issue of Theodicy as its views on the God are between "polytheism" and "monotheism". The Egyptian solution to the dilemma between "polytheism" and "monotheism" lies in the name "cosmotheism", in the recognition of a variety of divine images ("gods"), but with the observation that their theological properties are recognized in homogeneous ways[6].

It is worth emphasizing at this point that Egyptian "cosmotheism" distinguishes the meaning of Theodicy into "mythological" and "philosophical". In "mythological" Theodicy, the dialectic between good and evil works at the level of the gods ("polytheism"); for its part, man must redefine the position of the gods in the world to eliminate evil and restore good; to achieve this purpose, magic can be used. Respectively, in the "philosophical" Theodicy the emphasis is on the responsibility of God (and at the political level of the king) in the perspective that good will prevail[7]. An important role in the issue of Theodicy in ancient Egypt

3. A. Loprieno, op.cit., pp. 28-9.
4. A. Loprieno, op.cit., p. 29.
5. A. Loprieno, op.cit., p. 30.
6. A. Loprieno, op.cit., p. 31.
7. A. Loprieno, op.cit., p. 56.

was also played by a historical trend, from the time of the Ancient Kingdom to the Late Age, for a gradual shift from the cosmic and political aspects of the distinction between good and evil to the issues of the individual experience of evil, but which is limited to the context of right religious behavior[8].

The issue of Theodicy also occupied the literature of the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Van der Toorn in his article "Theodicy in Akkadian Literature"[9] mentions four Akkadian texts in which there are elements of Theodicy. Initially, he mentions a text from the Old Babylonian period (c. 1800-1550 BC) known as "Man and his God", which was formerly interpreted as a poem referring to the "pious who suffers". Recent studies, however, suggest that the text deals with sin, repentance, and atonement, but not in the context of divine government. Van der Toorn then refers to two texts from the Late Cassian period (c. 1200 BC), the so-called *Babylonian Theodicy*, which bears thematic and formal similarities to the Book of *Job* and the *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* ("I will praise the Lord of Wisdom"), a hymn to Marduk, which includes issues related to Theodicy. Finally, reference is made to the so-called *Dialogue of Pessimism*, which dates back to around 700 BC, and takes place between a master and his slave with the central theme of the meaning of life[10].

In Akkadian literature, however, the ideological context in which the issue of Theodicy comes to the fore is the model of retribution (punishment)[11]. According to the traditional theology of Mesopotamian scholars, the teaching of retribution does not require any act of revelation from the gods. The divine retribution can be made known by observation, inference, and conjecture based on the principle of similarity. In other words, teaching retribution is considered experiential knowledge. After all, a common place in the sophistic traditions of the ancient Near East is that retribution belongs to the realm of visible facts and is not a secret to be revealed[12].

8. A. Loprieno, op.cit.
9. K. van der Toorn, "Theodicy in Akkadian Literature", in: A. Laato & J. C. de Moor (eds.), *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, E. J. Brill, Leiden 2003, pp. 57-89.
10. K. van der Toorn, "Theodicy in Akkadian Literature", op.cit., p. 58.
11. K. van der Toorn, op.cit., p. 58.
12. K. van der Toorn, op.cit., p. 61.

Even more, the issue of Theodicy also appears in Hittite texts. Hoffner in the epilogue of his article entitled "Theodicy in Hittite Texts"[13] outlines the meaning of Theodicy in the Hittite literature. Like all peoples of the ancient Near East, the Hittites sought to maintain the belief that most of their gods behaved in ways that were expected to be proportionate to human behavior: God assumed the role of lord and man of role of his slave. Nevertheless, if a person had famines, epidemics, diseases, or other forms of affliction that could not be directly identified as coming from a human source, then they were due to a divine act. This act was caused either by some "evil" deity, which could be neutralized with the help of a personal patron deity, or by the "sin" of a man, or it is an act that displeases one of the "good" gods, or by neglecting a duty expected of that god. However, through the use of oracles, man can find out what the "sin" was, confess it and then perform the neglected duty or make compensatory sacrifices or payments to the offended deity. In addition to all this, prayers to the deity are added with extensive allegations of innocence and a conscious interest in the well-being of the gods and their temples. Also, known sins that have not yet been punished are explained by the teaching of divine patience and the certainty of inevitable punishment. In fact, the Hittites, in many cases, abandoned this belief and considered their personal gods lazy, indifferent or unjust. But such acts are not reflected in the official royal records. Moreover, since the Hittites used a large proportion of human attitudes to explain divine behavior, they could conclude that since humans are often lazy, indifferent, or unrighteous, so can be the gods. After all, such divine errors are found only in Hittite myths and not in other literary genres[14].

Finally, the concept of Theodicy as it is presented in the works of the Ugaritic writer Ilimalku is of particular interest. This author writes during the turbulent period shortly before the fall and destruction of the kingdom of Ugarit in northern Syria. During this period, the kingdom of Ugarit is threatened by enemies from all sides and has been weakened by famine and disease. The city of Ugarit is finally destroyed between 1190-

13. H. A. Hoffner, "Theodicy in Hittite Texts", in: A. Laato & J. C. de Moor (eds.), *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, E. J. Brill, Leiden 2003, pp. 90-107.
14. H. A. Hoffner, "Theodicy in Hittite Texts", op.cit., pp. 106-7.

1185 BC rather from the barbaric peoples of the sea, while its king shortly before the catastrophe is killed or abandoned[15].

In this climate, the Ugaritic dynasty loses hope in Ilu, the leader of the Ugaritic pantheon, and professes allegiance to the increasingly popular young god Ba'lu (Baal = Lord). This turn is made through the mythological works of Ilimalku, who promotes through them the view that the natural course of things results in the alternation of good and bad moments in life. Nevertheless, neither life nor death can be destroyed forever. The blame of the gods for the evil that afflicts them is their limited power. Consequently, their moments of success and superiority are followed by moments of weakness and defeat. For this reason, in fact, the Gods as presented through the works of Ilimalku are almost human in their occasional weaknesses[16].

3. The prophet *Habakkuk* and the issue of Theodicy

3.1 The life of prophet Habakkuk and the historical context of the book

The name of the prophet appears only two times in the Canonical Bible and then it appears again in *Bel and the Dragon*[17], an apocryphal addition to the book of *Daniel*[18]. It is believed that the name of Habakkuk is derived from the Hebrew verb חָבַק meaning "embrace" or from the Akkadian term *hambaququ* for a garden plant[19]. He is the eighth of the Twelve Minor Prophets of the Old Testament[20].

15. J. C. de Moor, "Theodicy in the Texts of Ugarit", in: A. Laato & J. C. de Moor (eds.), *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, E. J. Brill, Leiden 2003, p. 148.
16. J. C. de Moor, "Theodicy in the Texts of Ugarit", op.cit., pp. 148-9.
17. *Bel* v. 1: "*From the prophecy of Habakkuk, son of Jesus, of the tribe of Levi*" [«*Ἐκ προφητείας Ἀμβακοὺμ υἱοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Λευΐ*»].
18. M. N. Papadopoulos, *The canonical pieces of the book of Daniel. Azaria's Prayer, Narrative section, Hymn of the three children – Susanna – Bel and the dragon, Historical, philological, theological examination and problematics with a memoir*, Organization for the publication of textbooks, Athens 1985, pp. 342-62.
19. Veloudia Sideri-Papadopoulou, *The books of the prophets Jonah and Habakkuk. Text - Translation - Comments*, Ennoia Publications, Athens 2014, pp. 266-7.
20. Veloudia Sideri-Papadopoulou, *The books of the prophets Jonah…, op.cit.*, p. 310.

The book of *Habakkuk* does not give us much information about his life, only that he is a prophet[21]. Many scholars conclude that Habakkuk was a Levite, a temple singer, and perhaps even a temple choir conductor, because to sing in the divine service a harp prayer required official approval. Others identified him with the watchman mentioned in *Isa* 21, 6 because the prophet use this image in *Habakkuk* 2, 1: "*I will take my position and be on watch, placing myself on my tower, looking out to see what He will say to me, and what answer He will give to my protest*"[22].

The rest of the information about the prophet's life comes from the apocryphal addition to the book of *Daniel*, *Bel and the Dragon*, and from the rabbinic tradition. The prophet Habakkuk was from the tribe of Simeon, the son of Asaph, from the parts of Judah, and because of his life full of good works he received from God the gift of prophecy. He prophesied about the captivity of Jerusalem, about the desolation of the temple, and about the enslavement of the people. He cried seeing beforehand the evils that were to come upon his people. When Nebuchadnezzar, the king of the Chaldeans, came down with Jerusalem Habakkuk manage to escape into the land of the Ishmaelites, also known as Arabia, and lived into this foreign land until, after the slavery of Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar returned to his own lands, and Habakkuk returned to his country, plowing the land, and serving the harvesters during the harvest[23].

In the apocryphal addition *Bel and the Dragon*, the following miracle is presented: while he was still in the land of the Ishmaelites and was going to the field to bring food to the harvesters, he was taken by an angel to Babylon to the prophet Daniel, who was in the lions' den, hungry and weakened. Thus, the food originally intended for the harvesters quenched the hunger of the prophet Daniel.

The prophet Habakkuk is celebrated by the Orthodox Church on 2nd of December. Both his relics and those of the prophet Micaiah (celebrated on 14th of August) were found during the reign of Emperor Theodosius the Great.

21. *Hab*. 1, 1: "*The word which Habakkuk the prophet saw*"· *Hab*. 3, 1: "*Prayer of the prophet Habakkuk in the rhythm of lamentations*".
22. N. Ciudin, *The study of the Old Testament*, *op.cit*., p. 234.
23. *Ibid*.

The book of *Habakkuk* was written at the time when God was "raising up the Chaldeans"[24], better known as the Babylonians. That moment is, at a point late in the seventh or early in the sixth century BC Assyria had begun a rapid decline around 625 BC, approximately the time that Nabopolassar, the father of Nebuchadnezzar, took the throne of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar became king of Babylon after his father's death and during the events surrounding the battle of Carchemish fought in 604 BC, when the Babylonian armies overwhelmed the city-state remnants of the once great Assyrian Empire and turned their attention to the states of Syria and Palestine. In 598 BC Nebuchadnezzar carried Jehoiachin king of Judah into exile along with much of the royal family and the leading citizens of Jerusalem[25]. The mention of the rise of the Babylonians[26] suggests a date between 625 and 604 BC, whereas the mention of the numerous conquests of the Babylonian armies (*Hab* 2: 5, 8-10) suggests a somewhat later date. Some scholars proposed a date between 605 and 575 BC. Habakkuk was probably a contemporary of Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum, and possibly Joel[27].

3.2 The theological importance and the value of the book of *Habakkuk*

The book of prophet Habakkuk has 3 chapters. Of these, only chapters 1 and 2 have a prophetic content and chapter 3 is a prayer of the prophet to God. According to its oratorical form, the book has two parts.

The first part (chs. 1 and 2) contains a dramatic dialogue between the prophet and God. The dialogue begins with the prophet's cry against the sins of the people, asking for help from God. God answers that he will send a bitter punishment through the Chaldean people. The stormy invasion of the Chaldeans will threaten both the Jews and the surrounding peoples. The prophet, frightened by this answer, asks how God can allow a sinful nation to tear apart another nation more righteous

24. *Hab.* 1, 6.
25. Cf. *2 Kgs* 24, 8-17; *2 Chr.* 36, 9-10.
26. *Hab.* 1, 6.
27. T. Longman III, B. R. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids 2006, pp. 463-6.

than itself. God answers that the sinful and proud will perish and the righteous in faith will be alive. After that, there are five lamentations in which the capital crimes of the people are lamented.

The second part (chapter 3) contains the prayer of the prophet Habakkuk sung from the harp (the word "*Shigionoth*" from the Hebrew language is untranslatable and it is not known exactly what it would have meant, the English version of the Bible uses the same word, but the Romanian translation of the Bible uses the word "*harps*"). This prayer is a wonderful poem, in the form of a psalm, in which the prophet praises the greatness and goodness of God to His people, even if the latter part did not keep his commitment and was evil and disobedient.

The authenticity of the author of the book has always been recognized, especially as in chapter 2 verse 2, Habakkuk confesses himself: "*And the Lord gave me an answer, and said, put the vision in writing and make it clear on stones, so that the reader may go quickly*". Also, both in *Hab.* 1, 1 and in *Hab.* 3, 1 is found the name of the prophet. Thus, the book belongs entirely to Habakkuk.

The timing of the book is somewhat controversial because it is difficult to fix the exact date of Habakkuk's prophecy. The dating proposed by different scholars differs from each other by almost a century. But recently it is said that the prophet Habakkuk wrote his prophecy during the reigns of Jehoahaz and Joachim of the kingdom of Judah, somewhere between 609 and 608 BC, especially since the social status related by Habakkuk is consistent with the social status during of the reign of these kings of Judah[28].

It is worth mentioning that other scholars have questioned whether an earlier edition of the book ended with the psalm in chapter 3. The psalm is introduced with a separate chapter (chapter 3), a fact that suggests it may have had an independent existence apart from the larger composition it now concludes. Furthermore, the commentary on *Habakkuk* found in 1948 in Cave One at Qumran ends with chapter 2 and does not include the psalm. However, this fact may reflect that the Qumran sectarians found the material in chapters 1 and 2 more useful

28. N. Ciudin, *The study of the Old Testament*, *op.cit.*, pp. 234-5.

for their purposes, so that no commentary was written on chapter 3. The psalm is found in all complete manuscripts after that[29].

The divine authority of the book is affirmed in the New Testament. The Holy Apostle Paul, in his speech at the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia, quotes the words of the prophet in *Hab*. 1, 5: "*So take care that these words of the prophets do not come true for you: See, you doubters, have wonder and come to your end for I will do a thing in your days to which you will not give belief, even if it is made clear to you*"[30]. The same Apostle quotes from *Habakkuk* in many of his epistles: *Romans* 1, 17, *Galatians* 3, 11 and *Hebrews* 10, 38[31].

3.3 The issue of Theodicy

Probably the most prominent theme of the book of the prophet Habakkuk is that of theodicy. Habakkuk asks God how He can allow a sinful nation to tear apart another nation more righteous than itself and, implicitly, why He allows the existence of evil and injustice in the world.

As defined by Alvin Plantinga, theodicy is the "answer to the question of why God permits evil". Theodicy is defined as a theological construct that attempts to vindicate God in response to the evidential problem of evil that seems inconsistent with the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent deity. Another definition of theodicy is the vindication of divine goodness and providence in view of the existence of evil. The word theodicy derives from the Greek words *Θεός* (Theos) and *δίκη* (diki). Theos is translated "God" and diki can be translated as either "trial" or "judgement". Thus, theodicy literally means "justifying God"[32].

Habakkuk addressed his book to Judah and Jerusalem during the last act of that kingdom's role on the stage of history. The kingdom was full of internal corruption, and the rising power of Babylon would soon lead to the destruction of the temple and the whole city. Yet in the face of these great evils, God seemed to the prophet to be inactive and

29. T. Longman III, B. R. Dillard, *An Introduction..., op.cit.*, p. 466.
30. *Acts* 13, 40-41.
31. N. Ciudin, *The study of the Old Testament*, *op.cit*., pp. 234-5.
32. See A. Plantinga, *God, freedom and evil*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Michigan [2]2002, pp. 9-11.

unconcerned. Many have compared Habakkuk's complaints about the prospering of evil and the suffering of the righteous to the book of Job. Like Habakkuk, Job questioned God's justice and experienced a vision of God which quells his doubts. The prophet Habakkuk learned, as had Job, that despite all appearances to the contrary, and no matter how difficult conditions might become, he must continue to believe, and he must continue to trust the promises of God and to have confidence that the Lord of all the earth would do right (*Hab.* 3, 16-19). The prophet was learning to live by faith (*Hab.* 2, 4). In the face of calamity, he was learning to sing the praise of his Redeemer and Lord[33].

The main discussion of the issue of theodicy focuses on the inevitability of God's future judgement[34], God's destruction of Israel's enemies[35], a display of divine action[36], the Divine Warrior[37], and the "song of triumph"[38]. Another similar text is the *Ps.* 73, which notes the apparent prosperity of the wicked but resolves the pain by resting in the temple of God. Also, the *Ps.* 77 expresses concern over being abandoned by God but remembers the Exodus for hope.

From God's answer to Habakkuk's questions, we see that the cornerstone of the relationship between God and man is living faith and faithfulness, just as, on the other hand, God remains faithful to man, even if the parts are unequal, God becomes equal to man. The man with a strong faith in God keeps his word and remains steady, faithful, even if sometimes the trials are particularly difficult.

The greatest gift God has given to man is freedom. The freedom to choose how he wants to live his life and to choose whether to follow the divine commandments and walk on the path of good or evil. God always keeps his promise. The infiltration of evil into the world occurred through man's choice not to do good in the world and not to obey God's commandments. In other words, the misunderstood freedom of man

33. T. Longman III; Dillard, *An Introduction..., op.cit.*, p. 468.
34. *Hab.* 2, 3-5.
35. *Hab.* 2, 6-20.
36. *Hab.* 3, 3-7.
37. *Hab.* 3, 8-15.
38. *Hab.* 3, 16-19.

has led to the appearance of evil in the world. God, even if he keeps his promise to give man freedom, is also the Absolute Justice and thus cannot leave evil unpunished.

Despite this, God is longsuffering and merciful. When He punishes, He punishes sinners and spares the righteous. Even so, He does not punish as an oppressor, but as a father who is sorry for the mistakes of his sons and is sorry that he needs to punish them, but who still does it to make them aware of their evil way and to lead them to the path of salvation[39].

As the supreme proof of God's love for humans, He came into the world through the Word of God, Jesus Christ. An important messianic prophecy appears in the book of the prophet Habakkuk, that the Savior will come to earth to bring salvation to the world and to diminish the evil of the world.

The verse "*God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah. The heavens were covered with his glory, and the earth was full of his praise*" (*Hab.* 3, 3) prophesied the location where the Messiah would be born. According to Cyril of Alexandria, Teman is the lowest desert in the country, which also includes the town of Bethlehem. The last part of the verse may suggest the song of the angels from the birth of Christ: "*And suddenly there was with the angel a great band of spirits from heaven, giving praise to God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on the earth peace among men with whom he is well pleased*" (*Luke* 2, 13-14).

Also, the verse "*You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of the one on whom your holy oil was put; wounding the head of the family of the evil doer, uncovering the base even to the neck*" (*Hab.* 3, 13) shows the reason why the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ came into the world. The people of the Lord are the believers. The condition of salvation is not to be or not to be a Jew, but other considerations are decisive. Habakkuk lists them. They are justice (*Hab.* 1, 4), modesty (*Hab.* 1, 7), faith (*Hab.* 2, 4) and especially sincere conversion (*Hab.* 2, 14). The prophet thinks of Israel, but in the general sense, because, according to the special meaning, the people of the Lord are not Israel after the flesh. The destruction of the wicked and the salvation of the

39. N. Ciudin, *The study of the Old Testament*, *op.cit.*, pp. 236-8.

righteous is, of course, a messianic prophecy, one of the most important of the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament[40].

4. Theodicy in Jewish Apocalyptic texts: *4 Ezra*, *2 Baruch*, and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*

4.1 *4 Ezra*

The Jewish work *4 Ezra* consists of chapters 3-14 of the work called *2 Esdras*, which adds a Christian beginning and ending (in chs. 1-2 and 15-16). Although it is currently extant in Latin, Syriac, Ethiopic, and Armenian, many scholars are agreed that it was originally written in either Hebrew or Aramaic towards the end of the first century CE and that it has Palestinian origins[41]. Nonetheless, there is strong internal evidence that *4 Ezra* was written during the reign of Domitian (81-96 CE)[42].

4.1.1 Structure of the book

4 Ezra was probably written by an author, which allows one to talk about one's message, topics, etc. as a whole without having to delve into sources or complex structure[43]. Although there was a debate in the 19th century about whether the text reflects different sources and authors, Hermann Gunkel's view that inconsistencies in the text reflect the use of different materials by a single author was confirmed by subsequent scholarship[44]. The first part of the work consists primarily of dialogues between Ezra and the angel Uriel, while the latter section

40. N. Neaga, *Christ in the Old Testament*, Cluj 2004, pp. 121-5.
41. J. J. Collins, "The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature", in: *The Biblical Resource Series*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids ²1998, p. 156.
42. M. E. Stone, "Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra", in: *Hermeneia: A Critical & Historical Commentary on the Bible* 41, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1990, pp. 10-11.
43. M. E. Stone, "Fourth Ezra: A Commentary…", op.cit., p. 21.
44. M. E. Stone, "Fourth Ezra: A Commentary…", op.cit., p. 21; J. J. Collins, "The Apocalyptic Imagination…", op.cit., p. 157.

is characterized by symbolic eschatological visions. However, scholars agree that the text divides into seven units: three dialogues followed by four visions. The text contains other genres as well, including prayers, speeches, and lamentations.

4.1.2 The issue of Theodicy

The characteristic dialogues between the archangel Uriel and Ezra contain penetrating questions about God's righteousness in the light of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. In fact, although Uriel avoids answering these questions immediately, Ezra brings the discussion back to its pressing concerns. First, why has God spared Babylon (the Romans) and given them power over Israel, which is the most virtuous nation on earth?[45] Secondly, why, he asks, has God turned his people over to the Gentiles[46]? Thirdly, if God created the world for his people, why do they not possess it as their inheritance[47]? Underlying these questions is a sense of doubt regarding the fairness of God's actions as Israel's covenant partner.

Although the author does not explicitly mention it, he gets the feeling that he is wondering if Israel's apostasy was pervasive enough to justify the punishment they received or why he must cancel God's responsibilities to the people of the covenant Israel. However, these questions thus reflect the frustration of the covenant: even Israel, the most "virtuous" nation on earth, can neither satisfy its terms nor enjoy its benefits. As Collins notes, although the events of 70 A.D. are what provoke Ezra's questions, are the catalyst for wider questions of theodicy[48]. Ezra expresses concern, not only for the Jews, but for all of humanity, the vast majority of whom will fall into evil and destruction[49]. He states that although God gave the Law, he did not adequately address the root problem of sin, which essentially doomed his people to punishment. Because Adam's sin passed on an "evil heart" to all mankind, we are all doomed at birth.

45. *4 Ezra* 3, 28-31.
46. *4 Ezra* 4, 23-4.
47. *4 Ezra* 6, 59.
48. J. J. Collins, "The Apocalyptic Imagination…", op.cit., p. 159.
49. *4 Ezra* 7, 46-8; *4 Ezra* 7, 62-9; *4 Ezra* 8, 24-42; *4 Ezra* 10, 9-11.

If Ezra does not explicitly point out the unfairness in this scenario, he still views it as a basic reason for God to show mercy[50].

The author of *4 Ezra*, therefore, does not avoid the disturbing consequences of the theodicy, both in general and in relation to the destruction of the temple. In other words, it questions God's mercy to mankind, as well as his covenant with the chosen people of Israel[51].

4.2 *2 Baruch*

2 Baruch is a Hebrew text that scholars agree was originally written in Hebrew after 70 A.D.[52]. This consensus is due to its syntactical, grammatical, and lexical Hebraisms, as well as the fact that various aspects of the text are only comprehensible when retroverted into Hebrew, as in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. But while it shows concern for Jews in the Diaspora, its Palestinian origins are supported by the fact that it reflects a perspective from the country of Israel everywhere[53].

4.2.1 Structure of the book

The book mixes a variety of literary genres, including a narrative framework, public speeches, dialogue between God and Baruch, symbolic dream visions, prayers, an angelic discourse, and an epistle[54]. In fact, although most scholars agree that *2 Baruch* should be divided into seven parts, they each propose a different division of material[55]. More recently, Henze has argued that this heptadic rubric is an imported category from *4 Ezra* and is inappropriate to *2 Baruch*[56]. He argues that the work can best be understood as a cohesive whole apart from a seven-part

50. *4 Ezra* 8, 34-6.
51. J. J. Collins, "The Apocalyptic Imagination...", op.cit., p.160.
52. M. Henze, "Jewish Apocalypticism in Late First Century Israel: Reading 'Second Baruch' in Context", in: *Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism* 142, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2011, pp. 18-9, 23-4.
53. M. Henze, "Jewish Apocalypticism in Late First Century Israel: Reading 'Second Baruch' in Context", *op.cit*., Tübingen 2011, p. 33.
54. M. Henze, "Jewish Apocalypticism in Late First Century Israel...", op.cit., pp. 34-5.
55. J. J. Collins, "The Apocalyptic Imagination...", op.cit., p. 170; M. Henze, "Jewish Apocalypticism in Late First Century Israel...", op.cit., pp. 37-8.
56. M. Henze, "Jewish Apocalypticism in Late First Century Israel...", op.cit., pp. 8, 37.

structure[57]. Like *4 Ezra*, although scholars in the nineteenth century proposed various sources for *2 Baruch* and understood it as a composite work, later scholars argued that the tensions within the text probably reflect the complexity of the author's personality[58]. Subsequent scholars agree that *2 Baruch* was most likely authored by a single hand, albeit one that incorporated a diversity of prior material[59].

4.2.2 Theodicy in *2 Baruch*

Along with *4 Ezra* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, *2 Baruch* deals with theological issues raised by the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. However, although the author points out that Israel's sin is to blame for the destruction[60], he wonders why the deeds of the righteous among Israel did not give him mercy[61]. Still, the author does mention that the priests of the temple were "found to be false stewards" but he does not develop this idea; he instead focuses on the sin of the people in general as the cause of the destruction[62].

The author thus feels an ambivalence about the justice of the punishment that Israel has received. Indeed, there was sin among them, but there was also righteousness. But why do the deeds of sinners outweigh those of the righteous? Although formulated differently, this question is closely related to that in *4 Ezra*, which essentially asks why the virtue that exists in Israel (compared to other nations) was not considered. The author also wonders what the consequences of God's covenant with Israel are if he treats them so harshly[63]. In a purely biblical way, the author also points out the effects on God's reputation among the nations[64].

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57. M. Henze, "Jewish Apocalypticism in Late First Century Israel...", op.cit., pp. 37-68.
58. M. Henze, "Jewish Apocalypticism in Late First Century Israel...", op.cit., p. 64.
59. J. J. Collins, "The Apocalyptic Imagination...", op.cit., p. 171; M. Henze, "Jewish Apocalypticism in Late First Century Israel...", op.cit., pp. 60-4; Klijn, 1989: 4.
60. *4 Ezra* 1, 3-5; *4 Ezra* 77, 8-10.
61. *4 Ezra* 14, 5-7.
62. F. J. Murphy, "The Temple in the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch", *JBL* 106, 4 (1987), p. 681.
63. *4 Ezra* 3, 5-6; *4 Ezra* 3, 9.
64. *4 Ezra* 5, 1.

4.3 The *Apocalypse of Abraham*

Although the first section contains traditional material, in its form the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is mentioned in such a way as to serve the purposes of the text as a whole. In addition to the narrative, *Apocalypse of Abraham* contains dialogues – sometimes between Abraham and God and sometimes between Abraham and the angel Yahoel, as well as the vision of the throne, other heavenly visions, and song. Unlike the *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*, it does not contain prayers, epistles or speeches.

4.3.1 Structure of the book

The structure of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is quite easy to follow since the various episodes are clearly demarcated. The content of the first part (chs. 1-8) refers to Abraham's rejection of idolatry and includes: i. the performance of the priestly duties of Abraham and his relatives in a worshipful sanctuary of pagan statues; ii. the complete perception of the futility of idols by the young Abraham, and iii. the abandonment of the infamous earthly house of worship by the hero.

Next, the content of the second part (chs. 9-32) of this work refers to Abraham's heavenly journey and includes: i. the sacrificial offering of the hero's sacrifice to God (chs. 9-14); ii. its heavenly ascension and its seven apocalyptic visions (chs. 15-27), and iii. the punishment of the pagans (chs. 28-32).

From this summary, one can see that the real revelations that Abraham receives are only the last third of the book. The hero must go through many stages and trials, some of which require angelic guidance, which probably reflects the author's mystical orientation[65].

65. For more on the mystic elements of Jewish apocalypticism in the *Apocalypse of the Abraham*, see M. Dean-Otting, *Heavenly Journeys: A Study of the Motif in Hellenistic Jewish Literature*, Lang, Frankfurt am Main 1984, pp. 251-3; G. H. Box, J. I. Landsman, *The Apocalypse of Abraham*, SPCK, London 1918, pp. xxix-xxx; Ch. Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity*, New Crossroad, York 1982, pp. 86-7; A. Kulik, *Retroverting the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham*, E. J. Brill, Leiden/Boston 2004, pp. 83-8; I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, E. J. Brill, Leiden 1980, pp. 55-6; D. J. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 1988, pp. 103-13; R. Rubinkiewicz, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham en vieux slave: Édition critique du texte*,

It is worth mentioning here that *Gen.* 15 plays a structural role in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. Specifically, everything that happens to Abraham is placed in the narrative context of *Gen.* 15, although out of date compared to the biblical text. The story of Abraham being saved from the fire that burned Terah and his idols is a common midrashic tradition on the biblical statement that God called Abraham out of "*Ur of the Chaldeans*"[66]; yet, Abraham's sacrifice, his encounter with the demon Azazel, his ascension to heaven, and the revelations he receives about the future are all grounded in the biblical text, which is paraphrased at key points throughout the work.

4.3.2 Theodicy in *Apocalypse of Abraham*

As in *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*, although the answer to why the Temple was destroyed is readily given, broader questions of theodicy are raised that do not receive such straightforward answers. According to the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the Jerusalem Temple was destroyed because the Jews angered God with their idolatry and because of murders associated with the Temple: When Abraham sees the burning of the Temple and the captivity of the people, he cries out "*Eternal One! If this is so, why have you afflicted my heart and why will it be so?*"[67]. To this, God replies, "*Listen, Abraham, all that you have seen will happen because of your seed who will provoke me, because of the idol and the murder which you saw in the picture in the temple of jealousy*"[68].

introduction, traduction et commentaire, Société des letters et des sciences de l'Université catholique de Lublin, Lublin 1987, pp. 76-83; A. A. Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2005; B. Philonenko-Sayar, M. Philonenko, «L'Apocalypse d'Abraham: Introduction, texte slave, traduction et notes», in: *Semitica* 31, Adrien Maisonneuve, Paris 1981, pp. 28-33; M. E. Stone, "Apocalyptic Literature", in: M. E. Stone (ed.), *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1984, pp. 383-442; G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Schocken Books, New York 1961, pp. 52, 57-61, 72; G. Scholem, 1974. *Kabbalah*, Quadrangle, New York 1974, p. 18; G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, Jewish Theological Seminary, New York 1965, pp. 23-4.

66. *Gen.* 15, 7.

67. *Ap. Abr.* 27, 6.

68. *Ap. Abr.* 27, 7.

5. Conclusions

First, Egyptian "cosmotheism" distinguishes the meaning of Theodicy into "mythological" and "philosophical". Even more, the issue of Theodicy also occupied the literature of the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Similarly, Theodicy also appears in Hittite texts as well as it is presented in the works of the Ugaritic writer Ilimalku.

Secondly, even if the book of the prophet Habakkuk is relatively short compared to other books of the Holy Bible, with only three chapters, it is a masterpiece of the Old Testament, raising an extremely profound question as to why God allows evil into the world. While most of the other prophets inform the people that their sins have made them deserve of God's punishment, Habakkuk is unique in his boldness to confront God.

He prophesied about the Babylonian captivity and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and about the birth of the Messiah into the world.

From Habakkuk's prophecy comes the idea that God's providence leads all nations. God is the Master of mankind, and His Power extends over all nature and over all peoples. The evil in the world is a consequence of man's misuse of the freedom given to him by God.

The Lord is a just God who will surely judge all nations and the evil in the world will not go unpunished. Despite this, He is also very merciful and loving to people, and that is why He sent His Son into the world to diminish the evil on earth and to bring salvation to the humans.

Thirdly, *4 Ezra* is a text that is not afraid to give way to sorrow and doubt. The first half of it breaks with theological intensity and its range is wide, it concerns itself with the whole human race. He has a dark view of the power of sin in man, seeing reality after Adam's sin as a barrier to justice, both for the individual and for Israel as a whole. Few will be saved, and few will achieve justice. Consequently, the book seems to be addressed to these few, those who also struggle with issues of justice and theodicy and weigh themselves in doubt. One could argue that the book speaks to leaders, since it portrays a famed scribe and leader of Israel who struggles internally, but is able to gain

the perspective needed in order to be the leader the people need: one who will preserve the Law and teach it faithfully[69].This leader has access to eschatological knowledge, but it serves a purpose: it enables him to find a measure of peace in the present, knowing that God will bring the wicked and the Romans to justice. The reality with which he must make peace is a harsh one, but 4 Ezra allows him and others like him to seek the perspective they need to serve as leaders to the righteous few until the imminent end.

Fourth, *2 Baruch* is a text that addresses the pain of the events of 70 AD, in a way that provides a clear plan for moving forward. In particular, the destruction of the earthly temple should force the Jews to focus even more on the heavenly temple and what awaits the righteous in the afterlife. Contrary to *4 Ezra's* optimism about the possibility of righteousness, *2 Baruch* encourages his audience that it is in his power to follow the Law and that it is essential that he do so to secure his eternal destiny. Still, while eschatological secrets are only revealed to Ezra so that he can be the leader his people need, in *2 Baruch* they are open to helping people realize where their priorities should be: in line with what the Torah.

In addition, the two texts seem equally realistic, but with a different audience in mind: *4 Ezra* seats for the leaders and *2 Baruch* for the general public. This analysis supports Henze's claim that *2 Baruch* is not an inferior imitation of *4 Ezra*[70]; instead, they reflect the configuration of similar materials for different purposes. While *4 Ezra* considers modern intellectuals to be more honest, no text has been written as a purely spiritual exercise. Both contain a message for a specific audience that the authors thought was urgently needed.

Finally, the issue of Theodicy is also raised in the Jewish work *Apocalypse of Abraham* and is directly related to the judgment and destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans in 70 A.D.

69. M. A. Knibb, "Apocalyptic and Wisdom in 4 Ezra", *JSJ* 13 (1982), pp. 64, 72.
70. M. Henze, "Jewish Apocalypticism in Late First Century Israel...", op.cit., pp. 8-9.