

2 Esdras

1 THE SECOND BOOK of the prophet Ezra, son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of 2 Ahitub, son of Ahijah, son of Phinehas, son of Eli, son of Amariah, son of Aziah, son of Marimoth, son of Arna, son of Uzzi, son 3 of Borith, son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, of the tribe of Levi. I, Ezra, was a captive in Media in the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, 4, 5 when the word of the Lord came to me: 'Go to my people and proclaim their crimes; tell their children how they have sinned against me, and let 6 them tell their children's children. They have sinned even more than their 7 fathers; they have forgotten me and sacrificed to alien gods. Was it not I who rescued them from Egypt, the country where they were slaves? And yet they have provoked me to anger and ignored my warnings. 8 "Now, Ezra, pluck out your hair and let calamities loose upon these people 9 who have disobeyed my law. They are beyond correction. How much longer shall I endure them, I who have lavished on them such benefits? Many are the kings I have overthrown for their sake; I struck down Pharaoh: 10 with his court and all his army. I destroyed every nation that stood in their 11 way, and in the east I routed the peoples of two provinces, Tyre and Sidon, and killed all the enemies of Israel. 12, 13 'Say to them, "These are the words of the Lord: Was it not I who brought you through the sea, and made safe roads for you where no road had been? gave you Moses as your leader, and Aaron as your priest; 14 I gave you light from a pillar of fire, and performed great miracles among you. And yet you have forgotten me, says the Lord. 15 ' "These are the words of the Lord Almighty: I gave you the quails as a sign; I gave you a camp for your protection. But all you did there was to 16 grumble and complain -instead of celebrating the victory I had given you when I destroyed your enemies. From that day to this you have never 17 stopped complaining. Have you forgotten what benefits I conferred on you? When you were hungry and thirsty in your journey through the 18 desert, you cried out to me, 'Why have you brought us into this desert to kill us? Better to have remained in Egypt as slaves than to die here in the 19 desert!' I was grieved by your complaints, and gave you manna for food; 20 you ate the bread of angels. When you were thirsty, I split open the rock and out flowed water in plenty. Against the summer heat I gave you the 21 shelter of leafy trees. I gave you fertile lands to divide among your tribes expelling the Canaanites, Perizzites, and Philistines who opposed you. What more could I do for you? says the Lord. 22 ' "These are the words of the Lord Almighty: When you were in the 23 desert, suffering thirst by the stream of bitter water and cursing me, I did not bring down fire upon you for your blasphemy; I cast a tree into the 24 stream and made the water sweet. What am I to do with you, Jacob? Judah, you have refused to obey me. I will turn to other nations; I will 25 give them my name, and they will keep my statutes. Because you have deserted me, I will desert you; when you cry for mercy, I will show you 26 none; when you pray to me, I will not listen. You have stained your hands 27 with blood; you run hot-foot to commit murder. It is not I whom you have deserted, but yourselves, says the Lord. 28 ' "These are the words of the Lord Almighty: Have I not pleaded with you as a father with his sons, as a mother with her daughters or a nurse with 29 her children? Have I not said, 'Be my people, and I will be your God; be 30 my sons, and I will be your father? I gathered you as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings. But now what am I to do with you? I will toss 31 you away. When you offer

me sacrifice, I will turn from you; I have rejected 32 your feasts, your new moons, and your circumcisions. I sent you my servants the prophets, but you took them and killed them, and mutilated their dead bodies. For their murder I will call you to account, says the Lord. 33 ' "These are the words of the Lord Almighty: Your house is abandoned 34 I will toss you away like straw before the wind. Your children shall have no posterity, because like you they have ignored my commandments and 35 done what I have condemned. I will hand over your home to a people soon to come; a people who will trust me, though they have not known me 36 who will do my bidding, though I gave them no signs; who never saw the 37 prophets, and yet will keep in mind what the prophets taught of old. I vow that this people yet to come shall have my favour. Their little ones shall jump for joy. They have not seen me with their eyes, but they shall perceive by the spirit and believe all that I have said." 38 'Now, father Ezra, look with triumph at the nation coming from the east. 39 The leaders I shall give them are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Hosea and 40 Amos, Micah and Joel, Obadiah and Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, Haggai and Zechariah, and Malachi, who is also called the Lord's Messenger.

2 1 'These are the words of the Lord: I freed this people from slavery, and gave them commandments through my servants the prophets; but they shut their ears to the prophets, and let my precepts become a dead letter. 2 The mother who bore them says to them: "Go, my sons; I am widowed 3 and deserted. Joyfully I brought you up; I have lost you with grief and sorrow, because you have sinned against the Lord God and done what I 4 know to be wrong. What can I do for you now, widowed and deserted 5 I am? Go, my sons, ask the Lord for mercy." Now I call upon you, father Ezra, to add your testimony to hers, that her children have refused to keep 6 my covenant; and let your words bring confusion on them. May their 7 mother be despoiled, and may they themselves have no posterity. Condemn them to be scattered among the nations, and their name to vanish from the earth, because they have spurned my covenant. 8 'Woe to you, Assyria, for harbouring sinners! Remember, you wicked 9 nation, what I did to Sodom and Gomorrah: their land lies buried under lumps of pitch and heaps of ashes. That is how I will deal with those who have disobeyed me, says the Lord Almighty. 10 'These are the words of the Lord to Ezra: Tell my people that I will 11 give to them the kingdom of Jerusalem which once I offered to Israel. I will withdraw the splendour of my presence from Israel, and the home 12 that was to be theirs for ever I will give to my own people. The tree of life shall spread its fragrance over them; they shall not toil or grow weary. 13 Ask, and you shall receive; so pray that your short time of waiting may be made shorter still. The kingdom is ready for you now; be on the watch! 14 Call heaven, call earth, to witness: I have cancelled the evil and brought the good into being; for I am the Living One, says the Lord. 15 'Mother, cherish your sons. Rear them joyfully as a dove rears her nestlings; teach them to walk without stumbling. You are my chosen one, 16 says the Lord. I will raise up the dead from their resting-places, and bring them out of their tombs, for I have acknowledged that they bear my name. 17 Have no fear, mother of many sons; I have chosen you, says the Lord. 18 'I will send my servants Isaiah and Jeremiah to help you. As they prophesied, I have set you apart to be my people. I have made ready for you twelve trees laden with different kinds of fruit, 19 twelve fountains flowing with milk and honey, and seven great mountains covered with roses and 20 lilies. There will I fill your sons with joy. Champion the widow, defend the cause of the fatherless, give to the poor, protect the orphan, clothe the 21 naked. Care for the weak and the helpless, and do not mock at the cripple; watch over the disabled, and bring the blind to the vision of my brightness. 22 Keep safe within your walls both old, and young. 23 'When you find the dead unburied, mark them with the sign and commit them to the tomb; and then, when I cause

the dead to rise, I will give you 24, 25 the chief place. Be calm, my people; for your time of rest shall come. Care for your children like a good nurse, and train them to walk without falling. 26 Of my servants whom I have given you not one shall be lost; I will demand 27 them back from among your number. Do not be anxious when the time of trouble and hardship comes; others shall lament and be sad, but you shall 28 have happiness and plenty. All nations shall envy you, but shall be powerless against you, says the Lord. 29, 30 'My power shall protect you, and save your sons from hell. Be joyful, 31 mother, you and your sons, for I will come to your rescue. Remember your children who sleep in the grave; I will bring them up from the depths of the earth, and show mercy to them; for I am merciful, says the Lord 32 Almighty. Cherish your children until I come, and proclaim my mercy to them; for my favour flows abundantly from springs that will never run dry.' 33 I, Ezra, received on Mount Horeb a commission from the Lord to go to Israel; but when I came, they scorned me and rejected the Lord's commandment. 34 Therefore I say to you Gentiles, you who hear and understand: 'Look forward to the coming of your shepherd, and he will give you everlasting rest; for he who is to come at the end of the world is close at 35 hand. Be ready to receive the rewards of the kingdom; for light perpetual 36 will shine upon you for ever and ever. Flee from the shadow of this world and receive the joy and splendour that await you. I bear witness openly to 37 my Saviour. It is he whom the Lord has appointed; receive him and be joyful, giving thanks to the One who has summoned you to the heavenly 38 realms. Rise, stand up, and see the whole company of those who bear the 39 Lord's mark and sit at his table. They have moved out of the shadow of this 40 world and have received shining robes from the Lord. Receive, O Zion your full number, and close the roll of those arrayed in white who have 41 faithfully kept the law of the Lord. The number of your sons whom you so long desired is now complete. Pray that the Lord's kingdom may come, so that your people, whom he summoned when the world began, may be set apart as his own.' 42 I, Ezra, saw on Mount Zion a crowd too large to count, all singing hymns 43 of praise to the Lord. In the middle stood a very tall young man, taller than all the rest, who was setting a crown on the head of each one of them; he 44 stood out above them all. I was enthralled at the sight, and asked the angel 45 'Sir, who are these?' He replied, 'They are those who have laid aside their mortal dress and put on the immortal, those who acknowledged the name 46 of God. Now they are being given crowns and palms. 'And I asked again, 'Who is the young man setting crowns on their heads and giving them 47 palms?', and the angel replied, 'He is the Son of God, whom they acknowledged in this mortal life. 'I began to praise those who had stood so valiantly 48 for the Lord's name. Then the angel said to me: 'Go and tell my people all the great and wonderful acts of the Lord God that you have seen.'

3 1 IN THE THIRTIETH YEAR after the fall of Jerusalem, I, Salathiel (who am also Ezra), was in Babylon. As I lay on my bed I was troubled; my 2 mind was filled with perplexity, as I considered the desolation of Zion and 3 the prosperity of those who lived in Babylon. My spirit was deeply disturbed; 4 and I uttered my fears to the Most High, 'My Lord, my Master ,I said, 'was it not you, and you alone, who in the beginning spoke the word 5 that formed the world? You commanded the dust, and Adam appeared. His body was lifeless; but yours were the hands that had moulded it, and into it you breathed the breath of life. So you made him a living person. 6 You led him into paradise, which you yourself had planted before the 7 earth came into being. You gave him your one commandment to obey; he disobeyed it, and thereupon you made him subject to death, him and his descendants. 'From him were born nations and tribes, peoples and families, too 8 numerous to count. Each nation went its own way, sinning against you 9 and scorning you; and you did not stop them. But then again, in due time you brought the flood

upon the inhabitants of the earth and destroyed 10 them. The same doom came upon all: death upon Adam, and the flood 11 upon that generation. One man you spared Noah, with his household and all his righteous descendants. 12 "The population of the earth increased; families and peoples multiplied, nation upon nation. But then once again they began to sin, more wickedly 13 than those before them. When they sinned, you chose for yourself one of 14 them, whose name was Abraham; him you loved, and to him alone, 15 secretly, at dead of night, you showed how the world would end. You made an everlasting covenant with him and promised never to abandon 16 his descendants. You gave him Isaac, and to Isaac you gave Jacob and Esau; of these you chose Jacob for yourself and rejected Esau; and Jacob grew to be a great nation. 17 You rescued his descendants from Egypt and brought them to Mount 18 Sinai. There you bent the sky, shook the earth, moved the round world, 19 made the depths shudder, and turned creation upside down. Your glory passed through the four gates of fire and earthquake, wind and frost; and you gave the commandments of the law to the Israelites, the race of Jacob. 20 But you did not take away their wicked heart and enable your law to bear 21 fruit in them. For the first man, Adam, was burdened with a wicked heart; 22 he sinned and was overcome, and not only he but all his descendants. So the weakness became inveterate. Although your law was in your people's hearts, a rooted wickedness was there too; so that the good came to nothing, and what was bad persisted. 23 Years went by, and when the time came you raised up a servant for 24 yourself, whose name was David. You told him to build the city that bears your name and there offer to you in sacrifice what was already your own. 25 This was done for many years; until the inhabitants of the city went astray, 26 behaving just like Adam and all his line; for they had the same wicked 27 heart. And so you gave your own city over to your enemies. 28 'I said to myself: "Perhaps those in Babylon lead better lives, and that is 29 why they have conquered Zion." But when I arrived here, I saw more wickedness than I could reckon, and these thirty years I have seen many 30 evil-doers with my own eyes. My heart sank, because I saw how you tolerate sinners and spare the godless; how you have destroyed your own 31 people, but protected your enemies. You have given no hint whatever to anyone how to understand your ways. Is Babylon more virtuous than 32 Zion? Has any nation except Israel ever known you? What tribes have put 33 their trust in your covenants as the tribes of Jacob have? But they have seen no reward, no fruit for their pains. I have travelled up and down among the nations, and have seen how they prosper, heedless though they are of 34 your commandments. So weigh our sins in the balance against the sins of the rest of the world; and it will be clear which way the scale tips. Has there ever been a time when the inhabitants of the earth did not sin against you? 36 Has any nation ever kept your commandments like Israel? You may find one man here, one there; but nowhere a whole nation.'

4 1 2 The angel who was sent to me, whose name was Uriel, replied: 'You are at a loss to explain this world; do you then expect to understand the ways 4 of the Most High?' 'Yes, my lord', I replied. 3 'I have been sent to propound to you three of the ways of this world,' 4 he continued, 'to give you three illustrations. If you can explain to me any one of them, then I will answer your question about the way of the Most High, and teach you why the heart is wicked.' 5 I said, 'Speak, my lord.' 'Come then,' he said, 'weigh me a pound of fire, measure me a bushel of wind, or call back a day that has passed.' 6 'How can you ask me to do that?' I replied; 'no man on earth can do it.' 7 He said: 'Suppose I had asked you, "How many dwellings are there in the heart of the sea? or how many streams to feed the deep? or how many watercourses above the vault of heaven? Where are the paths out of the 8 grave, and the roads into paradise?", you might then have replied, "I have never been down into the deep, I have not yet gone

down into the 9 grave, I have never gone up into heaven." But, as it is, I have only asked you about fire, about wind, and about yesterday, things you are bound to have met; and yet you have failed to tell me the answers. 10 'If then', he went on, 'you cannot understand things you have grown 11 up with, how can your small capacity comprehend the ways of the Most High? A man corrupted by the corrupt world can never know the way of the incorruptible.' 12 When I heard that, I fell prostrate and exclaimed: 'Better never to have come into existence than be born into a world of wickedness and 13 suffering which we cannot explain!' He replied, 'I went out into a wood, 14 and the trees of the forest were making a plan. They said, "Come, let us make war on the sea, force it to retreat, and win ground for more woods." 15 The waves of the sea made a similar plan: they said, "Come, let us attack 16 the trees of the forest, conquer them, and annex their territory." The plan made by the trees came to nothing, for fire came and burnt them down. 17 The plan made by the waves failed just as badly, for the sand stood its 18 ground and blocked their way. If you had to judge between the two, which would you pronounce right, and which wrong?' 19 I answered, 'Both were wrong; their plans were impossible, for the land is assigned to the trees, and to the sea is allotted a place for its waves.' 20 'Yes,' he replied, 'you have judged rightly. Why then have you failed to 21 do so with your own question? Just as the land belongs to the trees and the sea to the waves, so men on earth can understand earthly things and nothing else; only those who live above the skies can understand the things above the skies.' 22 'But tell me, my lord,' I said, 'why then have I been given the faculty of 23 understanding? My question is not about the distant heavens, but about the things which happen every day before our eyes. Why has Israel been made a byword among the Gentiles; why has the people you loved been put at the mercy of godless nations? Why has the law of our fathers been 24 brought to nothing, and the written covenants made a dead letter? We pass like a flight of locusts, our life is but a vapour, and we are not worth the 25 Lord's pity, though we bear his name; what then will he do for us? These are my questions.' 26 He answered: 'If you survive, you will see; if you live long enough, you 27 will marvel. For this present age is quickly passing away; it is full of sorrow and frailties, too full to enjoy what is promised in due time for the 28 godly. The evil about which you ask me has been sown, but its reaping has 29 not yet come. Until the crop of evil has been reaped as well as sown, until the ground where it was sown has vanished, there will be no room for the 30 field which has been sown with the good. A grain of the evil seed was sown in the heart of Adam from the first; how much godlessness has it produced 31 already! How much more will it produce before the harvest! Reckon this 32 up: if one grain of evil seed has produced so great a crop of godlessness, how vast a harvest will there be when good seeds beyond number have been sown! 33 'I asked, 'But when? How long have we to wait? Why are our lives so 34 short and so miserable?' He replied, 'Do not be in a greater hurry than the Most High himself. You are in a hurry for yourself alone; the Most High 35 for many. Are not these the very questions which were asked by the righteous in the storehouse of souls: "How long must we stay here? 36 When will the harvest begin, the time when we get our reward?" And the arch- angel Jeremiel gave them this answer: "As soon as the number of those like yourselves is complete. For the Lord has weighed the world in a 37 balance, he has measured and numbered the ages; he will move nothing, alter nothing, until the appointed number is achieved.'" 38 'But, my lord, my master,' I replied, 'we are all of us sinners through and 39 through. Can it be that because of us, because of the sins of mankind, the 40 harvest and the reward of the just are delayed?' 'Go ,' he said, 'ask a pregnant woman whether she can keep the child in her womb any longer after the 41 nine months are complete.' 'No, my lord,' I said, 'she cannot.' He went 42 on: 'The storehouses of souls in the world below are like the womb. As a woman in travail is impatient to see the end of her labour, so

they are impatient to give back all the souls committed to them since time began. 43 Then all your questions will be answered.' 44 I said, 'If it is possible for you to tell and for me to understand, will you 45 be gracious enough to disclose one thing more: which is the longer --the 46 future still to come, or the past that has gone by? What is past I know, but not what is still to be.' 'Come and stand on my right,' he said; 'you shall see a vision, and I will explain what it means.' 48 So I stood and watched, and there passed before my eyes a blazing fire when the flames had disappeared from sight, there was still some smoke 49 left. After that a dark rain-cloud passed before me; there was a heavy storm, 50 and when it had gone over, there were still some raindrops left. 'Reflect on this', said the angel. 'The shower of rain filled a far greater space than the drops of water, and the fire more than the smoke. In the same way, the past far exceeds the future in length; what remains is but raindrops and smoke.' 51 'Pray tell me,' I said, 'do you think that I shall live to see those days? 52 Or in whose lifetime will they come?' 'If you ask me what signs will herald them,' he said, 'I can tell you in part. But the length of your own life I am not commissioned to tell you; of that I know nothing.

5 1 'But now to speak of the signs: there will come a time when the inhabitants of the earth will be seized with panic. The way of truth will be hidden 2 from sight, and the land will be barren of faith. There will be a great increase in wickedness, worse than anything you now see or have ever 3 heard of. The country you now see governing the world will become a 4 trackless desert, laid waste for all to see. After the third period (if the Most High grants you a long enough life) you will see confusion everywhere. The sun will suddenly begin to shine in the middle of the night, and the 5 moon in the day-time. Trees will drip blood, stones will speak, nations 6 will be in confusion, and the courses of the stars will be changed. A king unwelcome to the inhabitants of earth will succeed to the throne; even the 7 birds will all fly away. The Dead Sea will cast up fish, and at night a voice 8 will sound, unknown to the many but heard by all. Chasms will open in many places and spurt out flames incessantly. Wild beasts will range far 9 afield, women will give birth to monsters, fresh springs will run with salt water, and everywhere friends will become enemies. Then understanding 10 will be hidden, and reason withdraw to her secret chamber. Many will seek her, but not find her; the earth will overflow with vice and wickedness. 11 One country will ask another, "Has justice passed your way, or any just 12 man?", and it will answer, "No." In those days men will hope, but hope in vain; they will strive, but never succeed. 13 'These are the signs I am allowed to tell you. But turn again to prayer, continue to weep and fast for seven days; and then you shall hear further signs, even greater than these.' 14 I awoke With a Start, shuddering; my spirit faltered, and I was near to 15 fainting. But the angel who had come and talked to me gave me support and strength, and set me on my feet. 16 The next night Phaltiel, the leader of the people, came to me. 'Where 17 have you been?' he asked, 'and why that sad look? Have you forgotten that 18 Israel in exile has been entrusted to your care? Rouse yourself, take nourishment. Do not abandon us like a shepherd abandoning his flock to 19 savage wolves.' I replied: 'Leave me; for seven days do not come near me, then you may come again.' When he heard this, he left me. 20 FOR SEVEN DAYS I fasted, with tears and lamentations, as the angel 21 Uriel had told me to do. By the end of the seven days my mind was again 22 deeply disturbed, but I recovered the power of thought and spoke once more to the Most High. 23 'My Lord, my Master,' I said, 'out of all the forests of the earth, and all 23 their trees, you have chosen one vine; from all the lands in the whole world you have chosen one plot; and out of all the flowers in the whole world you 25 have chosen one lily. From all the depths of the sea you have filled one stream for yourself, and of all the cities ever built you have set Zion apart 26

as your own. From all the birds that were created you have named one dove, and from all the animals that were fashioned you have taken one 27 sheep. Out of all the countless nations, you have adopted one for your own, and to this chosen people you have given the law which all men have 28 approved. Why then, Lord, have you put this one people at the mercy of so many? Why have you humiliated this one stock more than all others, and 29 scattered your own people among the hordes of heathen? Those who reject your promises have trampled on the people who trust your covenants. 30 If you so hate your people, they should be punished by your own hand.' 31 When I had finished speaking, the angel who had visited me that previous 32 night was sent to me again. 'Listen to me,' he said, 'and I will give you instruction. Attend carefully, and I will tell you more.' 'Speak on, my lord', I replied. He said to me, 'You are in great sorrow of heart for Israel's sake. Do you 34 love Israel more than Israel's Maker does?' 'No, my lord,' I said, 'but sorrow has forced me to speak; my heart is tortured every hour as I try to understand the ways of the Most High and to fathom some part of his judgements.' 35 He said to me, 'You cannot.' 'Why not, my lord?' I asked. 'Why then was I born? Why could not my mother's womb have been my grave? Then I should never have seen Jacob's trials and the weariness of the race of Israel.' 36 He said to me, 'Count me those who are not yet born, collect the scattered 37 drops of rain, and make the withered flowers bloom again; unlock me the storehouses and let loose the winds shut up there; or make visible the shape of a voice. Then I will answer your question about Israel's trials.' 38 'My lord, my master,' I said, 'how can there be anyone with such knowledge 39 except the One whose home is not among men? I am only a fool; how then can I answer your questions?' 40 He said to me, 'Just as you cannot do any of the things I have put to you, so you will not be able to find out my judgements or the ultimate purpose of the love I have promised to my people.' 41 I said, 'But surely, lord, your promise is to those who are alive at the end. What is to be the fate of those who lived before us, or of ourselves, or of those who come after us?' 42 He said to me, 'I will compare the judgement to a circle: the latest will not be too late, nor the earliest too early.' 43 To this I replied, 'Could you not have made all men, past, present, and future, at one and the same time? Then you could have held your assize 44 with less delay.' But he answered, 'The creation may not go faster than the Creator, nor could the world support at the same time all those created to live on it.' 45 'But, my lord,' I said, 'you have told me that you will at one and the same time restore to life every creature you have made; how can that be? If it is going to be possible for all of them to be alive at the same time and for the world to support them all, then it could support all of them together 46 now.' 'Put your question in terms of a woman's womb', he replied. 'Say to a woman, "If you give birth to ten children, why do you do so at intervals? 47 Why not give birth to ten at one and the same time?" ' 'No , my lord, she 48 cannot do that,' I said; 'the births must take place at intervals.' 'True,' he answered; 'and I have made the earth's womb to bring forth at intervals 49 those conceived in it. An infant cannot give birth, nor can a woman who is too old; and I have made the same rule for the world I have created.' 50 I continued my questions. 'Since you have opened the way,' I said, 'may I now ask: is our mother that you speak of still young, or is she already 51 52 growing old?' He replied, 'Ask any mother why the children she has lately 53 borne are not like those born earlier, but smaller. And she will tell you, "Those who were born in the vigour of my youth are very different from 54 those born in my old age, when my womb is beginning to fail." Think of it 55 then like this: if you are smaller than those born before you, and those who follow you are smaller still, the reason is that creation is growing old and losing the strength of youth.' 56 I said to him, 'If I have won your favour, my lord, show me through

6 whom you will visit your creation.' He said to me, 'Think of the beginning of this earth: the gates of the world had not yet been set up; no winds 2 gathered and blew, no thunder pealed, no lightning flashed; the foundations 3 of paradise were not yet laid, nor were its fair flowers there to see; the powers that move the stars were not established, nor the countless hosts of 4 angels assembled, nor the vast tracts of air setup on high; the divisions of the firmaments had not received their names. Zion had not yet been chosen 5 as God's own footstool; the present age had not been planned; the schemes of its sinners had not yet been outlawed, nor had God's seal yet been set on 6 those who have stored up a treasure of fidelity. Then did I think my thought; and the whole world was created through me and through me alone. In the same way, through me and through me alone the end shall come.' 7 'Tell me', I went on, 'about the interval that divides the ages. When will 8 the first age end and the next age begin?' He said, 'The interval will be no bigger than that between Abraham and Abraham; for Jacob and Esau were his descendants, and Jacob's hand was grasping Esau's heel at the 9 moment of their birth. Esau represents the end of the first age, and Jacob 10 the beginning of the next age. The beginning of a man is his hand, and the end of a man is his heel. Between the heel and the hand, Ezra, do not look for any interval.' 11 12 'My lord, my master,' I said, 'if I have won your favour, make known to me the last of your signs, of which you showed me a part that former night.' 13 'Rise to your feet,' he replied, 'and you will hear a loud resounding voice. 14 15 When it speaks, do not be frightened if the place where you stand tremble and shakes; it speaks of the end, and the earth's foundations will understand 16 that it is speaking of them. They will tremble and shake; for they 17 know that at the end they must be transformed.' On hearing this I rose to my feet and listened; and a voice began to speak. Its sound was like the 18 sound of rushing waters. The voice said: 'The time draws near when I shall come to judge those who live on the 19 earth, the time when I shall inquire into the wickedness of wrong-doer 20 the time when Zion's humiliation will be over, the time when a seal will be set on the age about to pass away. Then I will perform these signs: the books shall be opened in the sight of heaven, and all shall see them at the 21 same moment. Children only one year old shall be able to talk, and pregnant women shall give birth to premature babes of three and four months, 22 who shall live and leap about. Fields that were sown shall suddenly prove 23 unsown, and barns that were full shall suddenly be found empty. There shall be a loud trumpet-blast and it shall strike terror into all who hear it. 24 At that time friends shall make war on friends as though they were enemies, and the earth and all its inhabitants shall be terrified. Running streams shall stand still; for three hours they shall cease to flow. 25 'Whoever is left after all that I have foretold, he shall be preserved, and shall see the deliverance that I bring and the end of this world of mine. 26 They shall all see the men who were taken up into heaven without ever knowing death. Then shall men on earth feel a change of heart and come to 27 28 a better mind. Wickedness shall be blotted out and deceit destroyed, but fidelity shall flourish, corruption be overcome, and truth, so long unfruitful, be brought to light.' 29 While the voice was speaking to me, the ground under me began to 30 quake. Then the angel said to me, 'These, then, are the revelations I have 31 brought you this night.' If once again you pray and fast for seven days, 32 then I will return to tell you even greater things. For be sure your voice has been heard by the Most High. The Mighty God has seen your integrity 33 and the chastity you have observed all your life. That is why he has sent me to you with all these revelations, and with this message: 'Be confident 34 and have no fear. Do not rush too quickly into unprofitable thoughts now in the present age; then you will not act hastily when the last age comes.' 35

THEREUPON I WEPT and fasted again for seven days in the same way as 36 before, thus completing the three weeks enjoined on me. On the eighth 37 night I was again disturbed at heart, and spoke to the

Most High. With 38 spirit aflame and in great agony of mind I said: 'O Lord, at the beginning of creation you spoke the word. On the first day you said, "Let heaven and earth be made!", and your word carried 39 out its work. At that time the hovering spirit was there, and darkness 40 circled round; there was silence, no sound as yet of human voice. Then you commanded a ray of light to be brought out of your store-chambers, 41 to make your works visible from that time onwards. On the second day you created the angel of the firmament, and commanded him to make a dividing barrier between the waters, one part withdrawing upwards and the other 42 remaining below. On the third day you ordered the waters to collect in a seventh part of the earth; the other six parts you made into dry land, and 43 from it kept some to be sown and tilled for your service. Your word went 44 forth, and at once the work was done. A vast profusion of fruits appeared instantly, of every kind and taste that can be desired, with flowers of the most subtle colours and mysterious scents. These were made on the third 45 day. On the fourth day by your command you created the splendour of the 46 sun, the light of the moon, and the stars in their appointed places; and you ordered them to be at the service of man, whose creation was about to take 47 place. On the fifth day you commanded the seventh part, where the water 48 was collected, to bring forth living things, birds and fishes. And so, at your command, dumb lifeless water brought forth living creatures, and gave the 49 nations cause to tell of your wonders. Then you set apart two creatures; 50 one you called Behemoth and the other Leviathan. You put them in separate places, for the seventh part where the water was collected was not 51 big enough to hold them both. A part of the land which was made dry on the third day you gave to Behemoth as his territory, a country of a thousand 52 hills. To Leviathan you gave the seventh part, the water. You have kept 53 them to be food for whom you will and when you will. On the sixth day you ordered the earth to produce for you cattle, wild beasts, and creeping 54 things. To crown your work you created Adam, and gave him sovereignty over everything you had made. It is from Adam that we, your chosen people, are all descended. 55 I have recited the whole story of the creation, O Lord, because you have 56 said that you made this first world for our sake, and that all the rest of the nations descended from Adam are nothing, that they are no better than 57 spittle, and, for all their numbers, no more than a drop from a bucket. And yet, O Lord, those nations which count for nothing are today ruling over 58 us and devouring us; and we, your people, have been put into their power --- your people, whom you have called your first-born, your only son, your 59 champion, and your best beloved. Was the world really made for us? Why then, may we not take possession of our world? How much longer shall it be so?'

7 1 When I had finished speaking, the same angel was sent to me as on the 2 previous nights. He said to me, 'Rise to your feet, Ezra, and listen to the 3 message I have come to give you.' 'Speak, my lord', I said. He said to me: 'Imagine a sea set in a vast open space, spreading far 4 5 and wide, but the entrance to it narrow like the gorge of a river. If anyone is determined to reach this sea, whether to set eyes on it or to gain command of it, he cannot arrive at its open waters except through the narrow gorge 6 Or again, imagine a city built in a plain, a city full of everything you can 7 desire, but the entrance to it narrow and steep, with fire to the right and 8 deep water to the left. There is only the one path, between the fire and the 9 water; and that is only wide enough for one man at a time. If some man has been given this city as a legacy, how can he take possession of his inheritance 10 except by passing through these dangerous approaches?' 'That is the only way, my lord', I agreed. 11 He said to me: 'Such is the lot of Israel. It was for Israel that I made the world, and when Adam transgressed my decrees the creation came under 12 judgement. The entrances to this world were made narrow, painful, and 13 arduous, few

and evil, full of perils and grinding hardship. But the entrances 14 to the greater world are broad and safe, and lead to immortality. All men must therefore enter this narrow and futile existence; otherwise they can 15 never attain the blessings in store. Why then, Ezra, are you so deeply disturbed 16 at the thought that you are mortal and must die? Why have you not turned your mind to the future instead of the present?' 17 My lord, my master,' I replied, 'in your law you have laid it down that the just shall come to enjoy these blessings but the ungodly shall be lost. 18 The just, therefore, can endure this narrow life and look for the spacious life hereafter; but those who have lived a wicked life will have gone through the narrows without ever reaching the open spaces.' 19 He said to me: 'You are not a better judge than God, nor wiser than the 20 Most High. Better that many now living should be lost, than that the law God has set before them should be despised! 21 God has given clear instructions for all men when they come into this world, telling them how to 22 attain life and how to escape punishment. But the ungodly have refused to 23 obey him; they have set up their own empty ideas, and planned deceit and wickedness; they have even denied the existence of the Most High 24 and have not acknowledged his ways. They have rejected his law and refused his promises, have neither put faith in his decrees nor done what 25 he commands. Therefore, Ezra, emptiness for the empty, fullness for the full! 26 'Listen! The time shall come when the signs I have foretold will be seen; the city which is now invisible shall appear and the country now 27 concealed be made visible. Everyone who has been delivered from the evils 28 I have foretold shall see for himself my marvellous acts. My son the Messiah shall appear with his companions and bring four hundred years 29 of happiness to all who survive. At the end of that time, my son the 30 Messiah shall die, and so shall all mankind who draw breath. Then the world shall return to its original silence for seven days as at the beginning 31 of creation, and no one shall be left alive. After seven days the age which is not yet awake shall be roused and the age which is corruptible shall die. 32 The earth shall give up those who sleep in it, and the dust those who rest there in silence; and the storehouses shall give back the souls entrusted to 33 them. Then the Most High shall be seen on the judgement-seat, and there 33 shall be an end of all pity and patience. Judgement alone shall remain; 35 truth shall stand firm and faithfulness be strong; requitals shall at once begin and open payment be made; good deeds shall awake and wicked [36] deeds shall not be allowed to sleep. Then the place of torment shall appear and over against it the place of rest; the furnace of hell shall be displayed, and on the opposite side the paradise of delight. [37] "Then the Most High shall say to the nations that have been raised from the dead: "Look and understand who it is you have denied and refused to [38] serve, and whose commandment you have despised. Look on this side, then on that: here are rest and delight, there fire and torments." That is what he will say to them on the day of judgement. [39] [40] "That day will be a day without sun, moon, or stars; without cloud, thunder, or lightning; wind, water, or air; darkness, evening, or morning; [41] without summer, spring, or winter; without heat, frost, or cold; without [42] hail, rain, or dew; without noonday, night, or dawn; without brightness, glow, or light. There shall be only the radiant glory of the Most High, by [43] which all men will see everything that lies before them. It shall last as it [44] were for a week of years. Such is the order that I have appointed for the Judgement. I have given this revelation to you alone.' [45] I replied: 'My lord, I repeat what I said before: "How blest are the [46] living who obey the decrees you have laid down!" But as for those whom I have been praying, is there any man alive who has never sinned, [47] any man who has never transgressed your covenant? I see now that there are few to whom the world to come will bring happiness, and many to [48] whom it will bring torment. For the wicked heart has grown up in us which has estranged us from God's ways, brought us into corruption and the way of death, opened out to us the paths of ruin, and

carried us far away from life. It has done this, not merely to a few, but to almost all who have been created.' [49] The angel replied: 'Listen to me and I will give you further instruction [50] and correction. It is for this reason that the Most High has created not one [51] world but two. There are, you say, not many who are just, but only a few, [52] whereas the wicked are very numerous; well then, hear the answer. Suppose you had a very few precious stones; would you add to their number [53] by putting common lead and clay among them?' 'No,' I said, 'no one [54] would do that.' 'Look at it also in this way,' he continued; 'speak to the [55] earth and humbly ask her; she will give you the answer. Say to her: "You [56] produce gold, silver, and copper, iron, lead, and clay. There is more silver than gold, more copper than silver, more iron than copper, more lead than [57] iron, more clay than lead." Then judge for yourself which things are valuable and desirable -- those that are common, or those that are rare.' [58] 'My lord, my master,' I said, 'the common things are cheaper, and the [59] rarer are more valuable.' He replied, 'Consider then what follows from that: the owner of something hard to get has more cause to be pleased than [60] the owner of what is common. In the same way, at my promised judgement, I shall have joy in the few who are saved, because it is they who have made my glory prevail, and through them that my name has been made [61] known. But I shall not grieve for the many who are lost; for they are no more than a vapour, they are like flame or smoke; they catch fire, blaze up and then die out.' [62] Then I said: 'Mother Earth, what have you brought forth! Is the mind [63] of man, like the rest of creation, a product of the dust? Far better then if the very dust had never been created, and so had never produced man's mind [64] But, as it is, We grow up with the power of thought and are tortured by it; [65] we are doomed to die and we know it. What sorrow for mankind; what happiness for the wild beasts! What sorrow for every mother's son; what [66] gladness for the cattle and flocks! How much better their lot than ours They have no judgement to expect, no knowledge of torment or salvation after death. What good to us is the promise of a future life if it is going [67] to be one of torment? For every man alive is burdened and defiled [68] with wickedness, a sinner through and through. Would it not have [69] been better for us if there had been no judgement awaiting us after death?' [70] The angel replied: 'When the Most High was creating the world and Adam and his descendants, he first of all planned the judgement and what [71] goes with it. Your own words, when you said that man grows up with the [72] power of thought, will give you the answer. It was with conscious knowledge that the people of this world sinned, and that is why torment awaits them; they received the commandments but did not keep them, they [73] accepted the law but violated it. What defense will they be able to make [74] at the judgement, what answer at the last day? How patient the Most High has been with the men of this world, and for how long!- not for their own sake, but for the sake of the destined age to be.' [75] Then I said: 'If I have won your favour, my lord, make this plain to me: at death, when every one of us gives back his soul, shall we be kept at rest until the time when you begin to create your new world, or does our torment [76] begin at once?' 'I will tell you that also', he replied. 'But do not include yourself among those who have despised my law; do not count [77] yourself with those who are to be tormented. For you have a treasure of good works stored up with the Most High, though you will not be shown [78] it until the last days. But now to speak of death: when the Most High has given final sentence for a man to die, the spirit leaves the body to return to the One who gave it, and first of all to adore the glory of the Most High. [79] But as for those who have rejected the ways of the Most High and despised [80] his law, and who hate all that fear God, their spirits enter no settled abode, but roam thenceforward in torment, grief, and sorrow. And this for seven [81] [82] reasons. First, they have despised the law of the Most High. Secondly, they have lost their last chance of making a good repentance and so gaining [83]

life. Thirdly, they can see the reward in store for those who have trusted the [84] covenants of the Most High. Fourthly, they begin to think of the torment [85] that awaits them at the end. Fifthly, they see that angels are guarding [86] the abode of the other souls in deep silence. Sixthly, they see that they are [87] soon to enter into torment. The seventh cause for grief, the strongest cause of all, is this: at the sight of the Most High in his glory, they break down in shame, waste away in remorse, and shrivel with fear remembering how they sinned against him in their lifetime, and how they are soon to be brought before him for judgement on the last day. [88] 'As for those who have kept to the way laid down by the Most High, this is what is appointed for them when their time comes to leave their mortal [89] bodies. During their stay on earth they served the Most High in spite of constant hardship and danger, and kept to the last letter the law given [90][91] them by the lawgiver. Their reward is this: first they shall exult to see the glory of God who will receive them as his own, and then they shall enter [92] into rest in seven appointed stages of joy. Their first joy is their victory in the long fight against their inborn impulses to evil, which have failed to [93] lead them astray from life into death. Their second joy is to see the souls of the wicked wandering ceaselessly, and the punishment in store for [94] them. Their third joy is the good report given of them by their Maker, that throughout their life they kept the law with which they were entrusted. [95] Their fourth joy is to understand the rest which they are now to share in the storehouses, guarded by angels in deep silence, and the glory waiting for [96] them in the next age. Their fifth joy is the contrast between the corruptible world they have escaped and the future life that is to be their possession, between the cramped laborious life from which they have been set free and the spacious life which will soon be theirs to enjoy for ever and ever. [97] Their sixth joy will be the revelation that they are to shine like stars, never [98] to fade or die, with faces radiant as the sun. Their seventh joy, the greatest joy of all, will be the confident and exultant assurance which will be theirs, free from all fear and shame, as they press forward to see face to face the One whom they served in their lifetime, and from whom they are now to receive their reward in glory. [99] 'The joys I have been declaring are the appointed destiny for the souls of the just; the torments I described before are the sufferings appointed for the rebellious.' [100] Then I asked: 'When souls are separated from their bodies, will they be] be given the opportunity to see what you have described to me?' 'They will be allowed seven days,' he replied; 'for seven days they will be permitted to see the things I have told you, and after that they will join the other souls in their abodes.' [102] Then I asked: 'If I have won your favour, my lord, tell me more. On the day of judgement will the just be able to win pardon for the wicked, or [103] pray for them to the Most High? Can fathers do so for their sons, or sons for their parents? Can brothers pray for brothers, relatives and friends for their nearest and dearest?' [104] 'You have won my favour,' he replied, 'and I will tell you. The day of judgement is decisive, and sets its seal on the truth for all to see. In the present age a father cannot send his son in his place, nor a son his father, a master his slave, nor a man his best friend, to be ill for him, or sleepy, or [105] eat or be cured for him. In the same way no one shall ever ask pardon for a another; when that day comes, every individual will be held responsibly for his own wickedness or goodness.' To this I replied: 'But how is it, then, that we read of intercessions in 36 [106] scripture? First, there is Abraham, who prayed for the people of Sodom then Moses, who prayed for our ancestors when they sinned in the desert. 37 [107] Next, there is Joshua, who prayed for the Israelites in the time of Achan, 38 [108] then Samuel in the time of Saul, David during the plague, and Solomon 39 [109] at the dedication of the temple. Elijah prayed for rain for the people, and 40 [110] for a dead man that he might be brought back to life. Hezekiah prayed for the nation in the time of Sennacherib; and there are many more besides. 41 [111] If, then, in the time when corruption grew and

wickedness increased, the just asked pardon for the wicked, why cannot it be the same on the day of judgement?' 42 [112] The angel gave me this answer: 'The present world is not the end, and the glory of God does not stay in it continually. That is why the strong 43 [113] have prayed for the weak. But the day of judgement will be the end of the present world and the beginning of the eternal world to come, a world in 44 [114] which corruption will be over, all excess abolished, and unbelief uprooted, in which justice will be full-grown, and truth will have risen like the sun. 45 [115] On the day of judgement, therefore, there can be no mercy for the man who has lost his case, no reversal for the man who has won it.' 46 [116] I replied, 'But this is my point, my first point and my last: how much better it would have been if the earth had never produced Adam at all, or, 47 [117] since it has done so, if he had been restrained from sinning! For what good does it do us all to live in misery now and have nothing but punishment to 48 [118] expect after death? O Adam, what have you done? Your sin was not your 49 [119] fall alone; it was ours also, the fall of all your descendants. What good is the 50 [120] promise of immortality to us, when we have committed mortal sins; or the hope of eternity, in the wretched and futile state to which we have come; 51 [121] or the prospect of dwelling in health and safety, when we have lived such 52 [122] evil lives? The glory of the Most High will guard those who have led a life of purity; but what help is that to us whose conduct has been so wicked ? 53 [123] What good is the revelation of paradise and its imperishable fruit, the source 54 [124] of perfect satisfaction and healing? For we shall never enter it, since we 55 [125] have made depravity our home. Those who have practised self-discipline shall shine with faces brighter than the stars; but what good is that to us 56 [126] whose faces are darker than the night? For during a lifetime of wickedness we have never given a thought to the sufferings awaiting us after death.' 57 [127] The angel replied, 'This is the thought for every man to keep in mind 58 [128] during his earthly contest: if he loses, he must accept the sufferings you have mentioned, but if he wins, the rewards I have been describing will be his. 59 [129] For that was the way which Moses in his time urged the people to 60 [130] take, when he said, "Choose life and live! " But they did not believe him, 61 [131] nor the prophets after him, nor me when I spoke to them. Over their damnation there will be no sorrow; there will only be joy for the salvation of those who have believed.' [132] 62 'My lord,' I replied, 'I know that the Most High is called "compassionate", [133] 63 because he has compassion on those yet unborn; and called "merciful", because he shows mercy to those who repent and live by his [134] 64 law; and "patient", because he shows patience to those who have sinned, [135] 65 his own creatures as they are; and "benefactor", because he prefers giving [136] 66 to taking; and "rich in forgiveness", because again and again he forgives [137] 67 sinners, past, present, and to come. For without his continued forgiveness [138] 68 there could be no hope of life for the world and its inhabitants. And he is called "generous", because without his generosity in releasing sinners from their sins, not one ten-thousandth part of mankind could hope to be [139] 69 given life; and he is also called "judge", for unless he grants pardon to those who have been created by his word, and blots out their countless [140] 70 offences, I suppose that of the entire human race only very few would be spared.'

8 1 The angel said to me in reply: 'The Most High has made this world for 2 many, but the next world for only a few. Let me give you an illustration, Ezra. Ask the earth, and it will tell you that it can produce plenty of clay for making earthenware, but very little gold-dust. The same holds good 3 for the present world: many have been created, but only a few will be saved.' 4 I SAID: 'My soul, drink deep of understanding and eat your fill of wisdom! 5 Without your consent you came here, and unwillingly you

go away; only 6 a brief span of life is given you. O Lord above, if I may be allowed to approach you in prayer, plant a seed in our hearts and minds, and make it 7 grow until it bears fruit, so that fallen man may obtain life. For you alone are God, and we are all shaped by you in one mould, as your word declares. 8 The body moulded in the womb receives from you both life and limbs that which you create is kept safe amid fire and water; for nine months the 9 body moulded by you bears what you have created in it. Both the womb which holds safely and that which is safely held will be safe only because you keep them so. And after the womb has delivered up what has been 10 created in it, then from the human body itself, that is from the breasts 11 milk, the fruit of the breasts, is supplied by your command. For a certain time what has been made is nourished in that way; and afterwards it is still 12 cared for by your mercy. You bring it up to know your justice, train it in 13 your law, and correct it by your wisdom. It is your creature and you made 14 it; you can put it to death or give it life, as you please. But if you should lightly destroy one who was fashioned by your command with so much labour, what was the purpose of creating him? 15 'And now let me say this: about mankind at large, you know best; but 16 it is for your own people that I grieve, for your inheritance that I mourn 17 my sorrow is for Israel and my distress for the race of Jacob. For them and for myself, therefore, I will address my prayer to you, since I perceive how 18 low we have fallen, we dwellers on earth; and I know well how quickly 19 your judgement will follow. Hear my words then, and consider the prayer which I make to you.' Here begins the prayer which Ezra made, before he was taken up to heaven. 20 'O Lord, who dost inhabit eternity, to whom the sky and the highest 21 heavens belong; whose throne is beyond imagining, and whose glory is 22 past conceiving; who art attended by the host of angels trembling as they turn themselves into wind and fire at thy bidding; whose word is true and 23 constant; whose commands are mighty and terrible; whose glance dries up the deeps, whose anger melts the mountains, and whose truth stands 24 forever: hear thy servant's prayer, O Lord, listen to my petition, for 25 thou hast fashioned me, and consider my words. While I live I will speak; while understanding lasts, I will answer. 26 'Do not look upon thy people's offences, look on those who have served 27 thee faithfully; pay no heed to the godless and their pursuits, but to those 28 who have observed thy covenant and suffered for it. Do not think of those who all their life have been untrue to thee, but remember those who have 29 acknowledged and feared thee from the heart. Do not destroy those who have lived like animals, but take account of those who have borne shining 30 witness to thy law. Do not be angry with those judged to be worse than beasts; but show love to those who have put unflinching trust in thy glory. 31 For we and our fathers have lived in mortal sin, yet it is on our account 32 that thou art called merciful; for if it is thy desire to have mercy on us sinners, who have no just deeds to our credit, then indeed thou shalt be 33 called merciful. For the reward which will be given to the just, who have many good works stored up with thee, will be no more than their own deeds have earned. 34 'What is man, that thou shouldst be angry with him? or the race 35 of mortals, that thou shouldst treat them so harshly? The truth is, no man 36 was ever born who did not sin; no man alive is innocent of offence. It is through thy mercy towards those with no store of good deeds to their name that thy justice and kindness, O Lord, will be made known.' 37 The angel said to me in reply: 'Much of what you have said is just, and 38 it will be as you say. Be sure that I shall not give any thought to sinners, to 39 their creation, death, judgement, or damnation; but I shall take delight in the just, in their creation, their departure from this world, their salvation, 40 41 and their final reward. So I have said, and so it is. The farmer sows many seeds in the ground and plants many plants, but not all the seeds sown come up safely in season, nor do all the plants strike root. So too in the world of men: not all who are sown will be preserved.' 42 43 To that I replied: 'If I have won your favour, let me speak.

The farmer's seed may never come up because it is given no rain at the right time, or it 44 may rot because of too much rain. But man, who was formed by your hands and made in your image, and for whose sake you made everything --- will you 45 compare him with seed sown by a farmer? Surely not, O Lord above! Spare your own people and pity them, for you will be pitying your own creation.' 46 He answered: 'The present is for those now alive, the future for those 47 yet to come. You cannot love my creation with a love greater than mine --- far from it! But never again rank yourself among the unjust, as you have 49 so often done. Yet the Most High approves of the modesty you have rightly shown; you have not sought great glory by including yourself among the 50 godly. In the last days, then, the inhabitants of the world will be punished 51 for their arrogant lives by bitter sufferings. But you, Ezra, should direct 52 your thoughts to yourself and the glory awaiting those like you. For all of you, paradise lies open, the tree of life is planted, the age to come is made ready, and rich abundance is in store; the city is already built, rest from 53 toil is assured, goodness and wisdom are brought to perfection. The root of evil has been sealed off from you; for you there is no more illness, death 54 is abolished, hell has fled, and decay is quite forgotten. All sorrows are at 55 an end, and the treasure of immortality has been finally revealed, Ask no 56 more questions, therefore, about the many who are lost. For they were given freedom and used it to despise the Most High, to treat his law with 57 contempt and abandon his ways. Yes, and they trampled on his just servants; 58 they said to themselves, "There is no God", though well aware that 59 they must die. Yours, then, will be the joys I have predicted; theirs the thirst and torments which are prepared. It is not that the Most High has 60 wanted any man to be lost, but that those he created have themselves brought dishonour on their Creator's name, and shown ingratitude to the 61 One who had put life within their reach. My day of judgement is now 62 close at hand, but I have not made this known to all; only to you and a few like you.' 63 'My lord,' I replied, 'you have now revealed to me the many signs which you are going to perform in the last days; but you have not told me when that will be.'

9 1 The angel answered: 'Keep a careful count yourself; when you see that 2 some of the signs predicted have already happened, then you will understand that the time! has come when the Most High will judge the world he 3 has created. When the world becomes the scene of earthquakes, insurrections, plots among the nations, unstable government, and panic among 4 rulers, then you will recognize these as the events which the Most High 5 has foretold since first the world began. Just as everything that is done on 6 earth has its beginning and end clearly marked, so it is with the times which the Most High has determined: their beginning is marked by portents and miracles, their end by manifestations of power. 7 'Whoever comes safely through and escapes destruction, thanks to his 8 good deeds or the faith he has shown, will survive all the dangers I have foretold and witness the salvation that I shall bring to my land, the country 9 I have marked out from all eternity as my own. Then those who have misused my law will be taken by surprise; their contempt for it will bring 10 them continual torment. All who in their lifetime failed to acknowledge me 11 in spite of all the good things I had given them, all who disdained my law while freedom still was theirs, who scornfully dismissed the thought of 12 penitence while the way was still open- all these will have to learn the 13 truth through torments after death. Do not be curious any more, Ezra, to know how the godless will be tormented, but only how and when the just will be saved; the world is theirs and it exists for their sake.' 14 15 I answered, 'I repeat what I have said again and again: the lost outnumber 16 the saved as a wave exceeds a drop of water.' 17 The angel replied: 'The seed to be sown depends on the soil, the colour on the flower, the product on the workman, and the

harvest on the farmer. 18 There was once a time before the world had been created for men to dwell in; at that time I was planning it for the sake of those who now exist. No one 19 then disputed my plan, for no one existed. I supplied this world with unfailing food and a mysterious law; but those whom I created turned to a 20 life of corruption. I looked at my world, and there it lay spoilt, at my earth 21 in danger from men's wicked thoughts; and at the sight I could scarcely bring myself to spare them. One grape I saved out of a cluster, one tree 22 out of a forest. So then let it be: destruction for the many who were born in vain, and salvation for my grape and my tree, which have cost me such labour to bring to perfection. 23 24 'You, Ezra, must wait one more week. Do not fast this time, but go to a flowery field where no house stands, and eat only what grows there --- no 25 meat or wine --- and pray unceasingly to the Most High. Then I will come and talk to you again.' 26 SO I WENT OUT as the angel told me to a field called Ardat. There I sat among the flowers; my food was what grew in the field, and I ate 27 to my heart's content. The week ended, and I was lying on the grass 28 troubled again in mind with all the same perplexities. I broke my silence 29 and addressed the Most High 'O Lord,' I said, 'you showed yourself to our fathers in the desert at the time of the exodus from Egypt, when they 30 were travelling through the barren and untrodden waste. You said, "Hear 31 me, Israel; listen to my words, race of Jacob. This is my law, which I sow 32 among you to bear fruit and bring you glory for ever." But our fathers who received your law did not keep it; they did not observe your commandments. Not that the fruit of the law perished; that was impossible, for it 33 was yours. Those who received it perished, because they failed to keep 34 safe the good seed that had been sown in them. Now the usual way of things is that when seed is put into the earth, or a ship on the sea, or food 35 or drink into a jar, then if the seed, or the ship, or the contents of the jar should be destroyed, what held or contained them does not perish with 36 them. But with us sinners it is different. Destruction will come upon us, the recipients of the law, and upon our hearts, the vessel that held the law. 37 The law itself is not destroyed, but survives in all its glory.' 38 While these thoughts were in my mind, I looked round, and on my right I saw a woman in great distress, mourning and loudly lamenting; her dress 39 was torn, and she had ashes on her head. Abandoning my meditations, I 40 turned to her, and said: 'Why are you weeping? What is troubling you?' 41 'Sir,' she replied, 'please leave me to my tears and my grief; great is my 42 bitterness of heart, great my distress.' 'Tell me,' I asked, 'what has happened 43 to you?' 'Sir,' she replied, 'I was barren and childless through thirty 44 years of marriage. Every hour of every day during those thirty years, day 45 and night alike, I prayed to the Most High. Then after thirty years, my God answered my prayer and had mercy on my distress; he took note of my sorrow and granted me a son. What happiness he brought to my husband and myself and to all our neighbours! What praise we gave to the 46 47 Mighty God! I took great pains over his upbringing. When he came of age, I chose a wife for him, and fixed the date of the wedding.

10 1 'But when my son entered his wedding-chamber, he fell down dead. 2 So we all put out our lamps, and all my neighbours came to comfort me; 3 I controlled my grief till the evening of the following day. When they had all ceased urging me to take comfort and control my grief, I rose and 4 stole away in the night, and came here, as you can see, to this field. I have made up my mind never to go back to the town, but to stay here eating nothing and drinking nothing, and to continue my mourning and fasting unbroken till I die.' 5 At that I interrupted the train of my thoughts, and I spoke sternly to 6 the woman: 'You are the most foolish woman in the world,' I said; 'are 7 you blind to the grief and sufferings of our nation? It is for the sorrow and humiliation of Zion, the mother of us all, that you should mourn so deeply; 8 you

should share in our common mourning and sorrow. But you are deep 9 in sorrow for your one son. Ask the earth and she will tell you; she must mourn for the thousands and thousands who come to birth upon her. 10 From her we all originally sprang, and there are more to come. Almost all 11 her children go to perdition, and their vast numbers are wiped out. Who then has the better right to be in mourning --- the earth, who has lost such 12 vast numbers, or you, whose sorrow is for one alone? You may say to me, "But my grief is very different from the earth's grief; I have lost the fruit 13 of my own womb, which I brought to birth with pain and travail, but it is only in the course of nature that the vast numbers now alive on earth should 14 depart in the same way as they have come." My answer to that is: at the cost of pain you have been a mother, but in the same way the earth has always been the mother of mankind, bearing fruit to earth's creator. 15 'Keep your sorrow to yourself, therefore, and bear your misfortunes 16 bravely. If you will accept God's decree as just, then in due time you will receive your son back again, and win an honoured name among women. 17 So go back to the town and to your husband.' 18 'No, I will not,' she replied; 'I will not go back to the town; I will stay here to die.' 19 20 But I continued to argue with her. 'Do not do what you say,' I urged; 'be persuaded because of Zion's misfortunes, and take comfort to yourself 21 from the sorrow of Jerusalem. You see how our sanctuary has been laid 22 waste, our altar demolished, and our temple destroyed. Our harps are unstrung, our hymns silenced, our shouts of joy cut short; the light of the sacred lamp is out, and the ark of our covenant has been taken as spoil; the holy vessels are defiled, and the name which God has conferred on us is disgraced; our leading men have been treated shamefully, our priests burnt alive, and the Levites taken off into captivity; our virgins have been raped and our wives ravished, our god-fearing men carried off, and our children abandoned; our youths have been enslaved, and our strong 23 warriors reduced to weakness. Worst of all, Zion, once sealed with God's 24 own seal, has forfeited its glory and is in the hands of our enemies. Then throw off your own heavy grief, and lay all your sorrows aside; may the Mighty God restore you to his favour, may the Most High give you rest and peace after your troubles!' 25 Suddenly, while I was still speaking to the woman, I saw her face begin to shine; her countenance flashed like lightning, and I shrank from her in 26 terror. While I wondered what this meant, she suddenly uttered a loud and 27 terrible cry, which shook the earth. I looked up and saw no longer a woman but a complete city, built on massive foundations. I cried aloud in terror, 28 'Where is the angel Uriel, who visited me before? It is his doing that I have fallen into this bewilderment, that all my hopes are shattered, and all my prayers in vain.' 29 I was still speaking when the angel appeared who had visited me before. 30 When he saw me lying in a dead faint, unconscious on the ground, he grasped me by my right hand, put strength into me, and raised me to my 31 feet. 'What is the matter?' he asked. 'Why are you overcome? What was it 32 that disturbed your mind and made you faint?' 'It was because you deserted me', I replied. 'I did what you told me: I came out to the field; and what I have seen here and can still see is beyond my power to relate.' 33 'Stand up like a man,' he said, 'and I will explain it to you.' 34 Speak, my lord,' I replied; 'only do not abandon me and leave me to die 35 unsatisfied. For I have seen and I hear things beyond my understanding --- 36 37 unless this is all an illusion and a dream. I beg you to tell me, my lord, the meaning of my vision.' 38 Listen to me,' replied the angel, 'while I explain to you the meaning of the things that terrify you; for the Most High has revealed many secrets 39 to you. He has seen your blameless life, your unceasing grief for your 40 people, and your deep' mourning over Zion. Here then is the meaning of 41 the vision. A little while ago you saw a woman in mourning, and tried to 42 43 give her comfort; now you no longer see that woman, but a whole city. She 44 told you she had lost her son, and this is the explanation. The woman you 45 saw is Zion, which you now see as a city with all its buildings. She told you she was

childless for thirty years; that was because there were three 46 thousand years in which sacrifices were not yet offered in Zion. But then, after the three thousand years, Solomon built the city and offered the 47 sacrifices; that was the time when the barren woman bore her son. She took great pains, she said, over his upbringing; that was the period when 48 Jerusalem was inhabited. Then she told you of the great loss she suffered, how her son died on the day he entered his wedding-chamber; that was the 49 destruction which overtook Jerusalem. Such then was the vision that you --- saw the woman mourning for her son --- and you tried to comfort her in 50 her sufferings; this was the revelation you had to receive. Seeing your sincere grief and heartfelt sympathy for the woman, the Most High is now 51 showing you her radiant glory and her beauty. That was why I told you to 52 stay in a field where no house stood, for I knew that the Most High intended 53 to send you this revelation. I told you to come to this field, where no 54 foundation had been laid for any building; for in the place where the city of the Most High was to be revealed, no building made by man could stand. 55 'Have no fear then, Ezra, and set your trembling heart at rest; go into the city, and see the magnificence of the buildings, so far as your eyes have 56 power to see it all. Then, after that, you shall hear as much as your ears 57 have power to hear. You are more blessed than most other men, and few 58 have such a name with the Most High as you have. Stay here till tomorrow 59 night, when the Most High will show you in dreams and visions what he intends to do to the inhabitants of earth in the last days.' I did as I was told and slept there that night and the next.

11 1 ON THE SECOND NIGHT I had a vision in a dream; I saw, rising from 2 the sea, an eagle with twelve wings and three heads. I saw it spread its wings over the whole earth; and all the winds blew on it, and the clouds 3 gathered. Out of its wings I saw rival wings sprout, which proved to be 4 only small and stunted. Its heads lay still; even the middle head, which was 5 bigger than the others, lay still between them. As I watched, the eagle rose 6 on its wings to set itself up as ruler over the earth and its inhabitants. I saw it bring into subjection everything under heaven; it met with no 7 opposition at all from any creature on earth. I saw the eagle stand erect on 8 its talons, and it spoke aloud to its wings: 'Do not all wake at once,' it said 9 'sleep in your places, and each wake up in turn; the heads are to be kept till 10 the last.' I saw that the sound was not coming from its heads, but from the 11 middle of its body. I counted its rival wings, and saw that there were eight of them. 12 As I watched, one of the wings on its right side rose and became ruler 13 over the whole earth. After a time, its reign came to an end, and it disappeared from sight completely. Then the next one arose and established 14 its rule, which it held for a long time. When its reign was coming to an 15 end and it was about to disappear like the first one, a voice could be heard 16 saying to it: 'You have ruled the world for so long; now listen to my message 17 before your time comes to disappear. None of your successors will 18 achieve a reign as long as yours, nor even half as long.' Then the third wing arose, ruled the world for a time like its predecessors, and like them disappeared. 19 In the same way all the wings came to power in succession, and in turn disappeared from sight. 20 As time went on, I saw the wings on the left side also raise themselves up to seize power. Some of them did so, and passed immediately from 21 22 sight, while others arose but never came to power. At this point I noticed that two of the little wings were, like the twelve, no longer to be seen. 23 Nothing was now left of the eagle's body except the three motionless heads and 24 six little wings. As I watched, two of the six little wings separated from the rest and took up a place under the head on the right. The other four 25 remained where they were; and I saw them planning to rise up and seize 26 27 power. One rose, but disappeared immediately; so too did the second

28 vanishing even more quickly than the first. I saw the last two planning to 29 seize the kingship for themselves. But while they were still plotting, suddenly one of the heads woke from sleep, the one in the middle, the 30 31 biggest of the three. I saw how it joined with the other two heads, and along with them turned and devoured the two little wings which were planning 32 to seize power. This head got the whole earth into its grasp, establishing an oppressive rule over all its inhabitants and a world-wide kingdom mightier than 33 any of the wings had ruled. But after that I saw the middle head vanish 34 just as suddenly as the wings had done. There were two heads left, and they 35 also seized power over the earth and its inhabitants, but as I watched, the head on the right devoured the head on the left. 36 Then I heard a voice which said to me: 'Look carefully at what you see 37 before you.' I looked, and saw what seemed to be a lion roused from the forest; it roared as it came, and I heard it address the eagle in a human 38 39 voice. 'Listen to what I tell you', it said. 'The Most High says to you: Are you not the only survivor of the four beasts to which I gave the rule over 40 41 my world, intending through them to bring my ages to their end? You are the fourth beast, and you have conquered all who went before, ruling over the whole world and holding it in the grip of fear and harsh oppression. You have lived long in the world, governing it with deceit and with no 42 regard for truth. You have oppressed the gentle and injured the peaceful, hating the truthful and loving liars; you have destroyed the homes of the prosperous, and razed to the ground the walls of those who had done you 43 no harm. Your insolence is known to the Most High, and your pride to the 44 Mighty One. The Most High has surveyed the periods he has fixed: they 45 are now at an end, and his ages have reached their completion. So you, eagle, must now disappear and be seen no more, you and your terrible great wings, your evil small wings, your cruel heads, your grim talons, and 46 your whole worthless body. Then all the earth will feel relief at its deliverance from your violence, and look forward hopefully to the judgement and mercy of its Creator.'

12 1 2 While the lion was still addressing the eagle, I looked and saw the one remaining head disappear. Then the two wings which had gone over to him arose and set themselves up as rulers. Their reign was short and 3 troubled, and when I looked at them they were already vanishing. Then the eagle's entice body burst into flames, and the earth was struck with terror. 4 So great was my alarm and fear that I awoke, and said to myself: 'See 5 the result of your attempt to discover the ways of the Most High! My mind is weary; I am utterly exhausted. The terrors of this night have completely 6 drained my strength. So I will now pray to the Most High for strength to 7 hold out to the end.' Then I said: 'My Master and Lord, if I have won your favour and stand higher in your approval than most men, if it is true that 8 my prayers have reached your presence, then give me strength; reveal to me, my Lord, the exact interpretation of this terrifying vision, and so 9 bring full consolation to my soul. For you have already judged me worthy to be shown the end of the present age.' 10 11 He said to me: 'Here is the interpretation of your vision. The eagle you saw rising from the sea represents the fourth kingdom in the vision seen 12 by your brother Daniel. But he was not given the interpretation which I am 13 now giving you or have already given you. The days are coming when the 14 earth will be under an empire more terrible than any before. It will be ruled 15 by twelve kings, one after another. The second to come to the throne will 16 have the longest reign of all the twelve. That is the meaning of the twelve wings you saw. 17 'As for the voice which you heard speaking from the middle of the 18 eagle's body, and not from its heads, this is what it means: After this second king's reign, great conflicts will arise, which will bring the empire into danger of falling; and yet it will not fall then, but will be restored to its original strength. 19 'As for the eight lesser wings which you saw growing from the eagle's 20 wings, this is what they mean:

The empire will come under eight kings 21 whose reigns will be trivial and short-lived; two of them will come and go just before the middle of the period, four will be kept back until shortly before its end, and two will be left until the end itself. 22 'As for the three heads which you saw sleeping, this is what they mean: 23 In the last years of the empire, the Most High will bring to the throne three 24 kings, who will restore much of its strength, and rule over the earth and its inhabitants more oppressively than anyone before. They are called the 25 eagle's heads, because they will complete and bring to a head its long series 26 of wicked deeds. As for the greatest head, which you saw disappear, it 27 signifies one of the kings, who will die in his bed, but in great agony. The 28 two that survived will be destroyed by the sword; one of them will fall by the sword of the other, who will himself fall by the sword in the last days. 29 'As for the two little wings that went over to the head on the right side, 30 this is what they mean: They are the ones whom the Most High has reserved until the last days, and their reign, as you saw, was short and troubled. 31 'As for the lion which you saw coming from the forest, roused from sleep and roaring, which you heard addressing the eagle, taxing it with its 32 wicked deeds and words, this is the Messiah whom the Most High has kept back until the end. He will address those rulers, taxing them openly 33 with their sins, their crimes, and their defiance. He will bring them alive 34 to judgement; he will convict them and then destroy them. But he will be merciful to those of my people that remain, all who have been kept safe in my land; he will set them free and give them gladness, until the final day of judgement comes, about which I told you at the beginning. 35,36 'That, then, is the vision which you saw, and its meaning. It is the secret of the Most High, which no one except yourself has proved worthy to be 37 told. What you have seen you must therefore write in a book and deposit it 38 in a hiding-place. You must also disclose these secrets to those of your people whom you know to be wise enough to understand them and to keep them safe. 39 But stay here yourself for seven more days, to receive whatever revelation the Most High thinks fit to send you.' Then the angel left me. 40 When all the people heard that seven days had passed without my 41 returning to the town, they assembled and came to me. What wrong or injury have we done you,' they asked me, 'that you have deserted us and 42 settled here? Out of all the prophets you are the only one left to us. You are like the last cluster in a vineyard, like a lamp in the darkness, or a safe 43 44 harbour for a ship in a storm. Have we not suffered enough? If you desert us, we had far better have been destroyed in the fire that burnt up Zion. 45 We are no better than those who perished there.' Then they raised a loud lamentation. 46 I replied: 'Take courage, Israel; house of Jacob, lay aside your grief. 47 The Most High bears you in mind, and the Mighty One has not for ever 48 forgotten you. I have not left you, nor abandoned you; I came here to pray for Zion in her distress, and to beg for mercy for your sanctuary that has 49 fallen so low. Go to your homes now, every one of you; and in a few days' time I will come back to you.' 50 So the people returned to the town as I told them, while I remained in the field. I stayed there for seven days in obedience to the angel, eating nothing but what grew in the field, and living on that for the whole of the time.

13 1 2 THE SEVEN DAYS PASSED; and the next night I had a dream. In my dream, 3 a wind came up out of the sea and set the waves in turmoil. And this wind brought a human figure rising from the depths, and as I watched this man came flying with the clouds of heaven. Wherever he turned his 4 eyes, everything that they fell on was seized with terror; and wherever the sound of his voice reached, all who heard it melted like wax at the touch of fire. 5 Next I saw an innumerable host of men gathering from the four winds 6 of heaven to wage war on the man who had risen from the sea. I saw that 7 the man hewed

out a vast mountain for himself, and flew up on to it. I tried to see from what quarter or place the mountain had been taken, but I 8 could not. Then I saw that all who had gathered to wage war against the 9 man were filled with fear, and yet they dared to fight against him. When he saw the hordes advancing to attack, he did not so much as lift a finger 10 against them. He had no spear in his hand, no weapon at all; only, as I watched, he poured what seemed like a stream of fire out of his mouth, a 11 breath of flame from his lips, and a storm of sparks from his tongue. All of them combined into one mass ---the stream of fire, the breath of flame, and the great storm. It fell on the host advancing to join battle, and burnt up every man of them; suddenly all that enormous multitude had disappeared, leaving nothing but dust and ashes and a reek of smoke. I was dumbfounded at the sight. 12 After that, I saw the man coming down from the mountain and calling 13 to himself a different company, a peaceful one. He was joined by great numbers of men, some with joy on their faces, others with sorrow. Some came from captivity; some brought others to him as an offering. I woke up 14 in terror, and prayed to the Most High. I said, 'You have revealed these marvels to me, your servant, all the way through; you have judged me 15 worthy to have my prayers answered. Now show me the meaning of this 16 dream also. How terrible, to my thinking, it will be for all who survive to 17 those days! But how much worse for those who do not survive! Those who 18 do not survive will have the sorrow of knowing what is in store in the last 19 days and yet missing it. Those who do survive are to be pitied for the terrible 20 dangers and trials which, as these visions show, they will have to face. But perhaps after all it is better to endure the dangers and reach the goal than to vanish out of the world like a cloud and never see the events of the last days.' 21 'Yes,' he replied, 'I will explain the meaning of this vision, and tell you 22 all that you ask. As for your question about those who survive, this is the 23 answer: the very person from whom the danger will then come will protect in danger those who have works and fidelity laid up to their credit with the 24 Most High. You may be assured that those who survive are more highly blessed than those who die. 25 'This is what the vision means: The man you saw rising from the depths 26 of the sea is he whom the Most High has held in readiness through many ages; he will himself deliver the world he has made, and determine the lot 27 of those who survive. As for the breath, fire, and storm which you saw 28 pouring from the mouth of the man, so that without a spear or any weapon in his hand he destroyed the hordes advancing to wage war against him, 29 this is the meaning: The day is near when the Most High will begin to 30 bring deliverance to those on earth. Then men will all be filled with great 31 alarm; they will plot to make war on one another, city on city, region on 32 region, nation on nation, kingdom on kingdom. When this happens, and all the signs that I have shown you come to pass, then my son will be 33 revealed, whom you saw as a man rising from the sea. On hearing his voice, all the nations will leave their own territories and their separate wars, and unite in a countless host, as you saw in your vision, with a common intent 35 to go and wage war against him. He will take his stand on the summit of 36 Mount Zion, and Zion will come into sight before all men, complete and fully built. This corresponds to the mountain which you saw hewn out, 37 not by the hand of man. Then my son will convict of their godless deeds the nations that confront him. This will correspond to the storm you saw. 38 He will taunt them with their evil plottings and the tortures they are soon to endure. This corresponds to the flame. And he will destroy them without effort by means off the law --- and that is like the fire. 39 40 Then you saw him collecting a different company, a peaceful one. They are the ten tribes which were taken off into exile in the time of King Hoshea, whom Shalmaneser king of Assyria took prisoner. He deported them 41 beyond the River, and they were taken away into a strange country. But then they resolved to leave the country populated by the Gentiles and go 42 to a distant land never yet inhabited by

man, and there at last to be obedient 43 to their laws, which in their own country they had failed to keep. As they 44 passed through the narrow passages of the Euphrates, the Most High performed miracles for them, stopping up the channels of the river until they 45 had crossed over. Their journey through that region, which is called 46 Arzareth, was long, and took a year and a half. They have lived there ever 47 since, until this final age. Now they are on their way back, and once more the Most High will stop the channels of the river to let them cross. 48 'That is the meaning of the peaceful assembly that you saw. With them too are the survivors of your own people, all who are found inside my sacred 49 boundary. So then, when the time comes for him to destroy the nations 50 assembled against him, he will protect his people who are left, and show them many prodigies.' 51 'My lord, my master,' I asked, 'explain to me why the man that I saw 52 rose up out of the depths of the sea.' He replied: 'It is beyond the power of any man to explore the deep sea and discover what is in it; in the same way no one on earth can see my son and his company until the appointed day. 53 Such then is the meaning of your vision. The revelation has been given to 54 you, and to you alone, because you have given up your own affairs, and 55 devoted yourself entirely to mine, and to the study of my law. You have taken wisdom as your guide in everything, and called understanding your 56 mother. That is why I have given this revelation to you; there is a reward in store for you with the Most High. In three days' time I will speak with you again, and tell you some momentous and wonderful things.' 57 So I went away to the field, giving worship and praise to the Most High 58 for the wonders he performed from time to time and for his providential control of the passing ages and what happens in them. There I remained for three days.

14 1 ON THE THIRD DAY I was sitting under an oak-tree, when a voice 2 came to me from a bush, saying, 'Ezra, Ezra!' 'Here I am, Lord', I 3 answered, and rose to my feet. The voice went on: 'I revealed myself in the bush, and spoke to Moses, when my people Israel was in slavery in Egypt, 4 and sent him to lead my people out of Egypt. I brought him up on to Mount 5 Sinai, and kept him with me for many days. I told him of many wonders, showing him the secrets of the ages and the end of time, and instructed him 6 7 what to make known and what to conceal. So too I now give this order to 8 you: commit to memory the signs I have shown you, the visions you have 9 seen, and the explanations you have been given. You yourself are about to be taken away from the world of men, and thereafter you will remain with 10 my son and with those like you, until the end of time. The world has lost 11 its youth, and time is growing old. For the whole of time is in twelve 12 divisions; nine a divisions and half the tenth have already passed, and only 13 two and a half still remain. Set your house in order, therefore; give warnings to your nation, and comfort to those in need of it; and take your leave 14 of mortal life. Put away your earthly cares, and lay down your human 15 burdens; strip off your weak nature, set aside the anxieties that vex you I6 and be ready to depart quickly from this life. However great the evils you 17 have witnessed, there are worse to come. As this ageing world grows 18 weaker and weaker, so will evils increase for its inhabitants. Truth will move farther away, and falsehood come nearer. The eagle that you saw in your vision is already on the wing.' 19 20 'May I speak in your presence, Lord?' I replied. 'I am to depart, by your command, after giving warning to those of my people who are now alive. But who will give warning to those born hereafter? The world is 21 shrouded in darkness, and its inhabitants are without light. For your law was destroyed in the fire, and so no one can know about the deeds you have 22 done or intend to do. If I have won your favour, fill me with your holy spirit, so that I may write down the whole story of the world from the very beginning, everything that is contained in your law; then men will have the chance to find the right path, and, if they choose, gain life in the last days.' 23

'Go,' he replied, 'call the people together, and tell them not to look for 24 you for forty days. Have a large number of writing-tablets ready, and take with you Seraiah and Dibri, Shelemiah, Ethan, and Asiel, five men all 25 trained to write quickly. Then return here, and I will light a lamp of understanding in your mind, which will not go out until you have finished all 26 that you are to write. When your work is complete, some of it you must make public; the rest you must give to wise men to keep secret. Tomorrow at this time you shall begin to write.' 27 28 I went as I was ordered and summoned all the people, and said: 'Israel, 29 listen to what I say. Our ancestors lived originally in Egypt as foreigners. 30 They were rescued from that land, and were given the law which offers life. 31 But they disobeyed it, and you have followed their example. Then you were given a land of your own, the land of Zion; but you, like your ancestors sinned and abandoned the way laid down for you by the Most High. 32 Because he is a just judge he took away from you in due time what he had 33 given. And so you are now here in exile, and your fellow-countrymen are 34 still farther away. If then you will direct your understanding and instruct your minds, you shall be kept safe in life and meet with mercy after you 35 die. For after death will come the judgement; we shall be restored to life, and then the names of the just will be known and the deeds of the godless 36 exposed. From this moment no one must come to talk to me, nor look for me for the next forty days.' 37 I took with me the five men as I had been told, and we went away to the 38 field, and there we stayed. On the next day I heard a voice calling me, which 39 said: 'Ezra, open your mouth and drink what I give you.' So I opened my mouth, and was handed a cup full of what seemed like water, except that 40 its colour was the colour of fire. I took it and drank, and as soon as I had done so my mind began to pour forth a flood of understanding, and wisdom grew greater and greater within me, for I retained my memory unimpaired. 41 42 I opened my mouth to speak, and I continued to speak unceasingly. The Most High gave understanding to the five men, who took turns at writing down what was said, using characters which they had not known before. They remained at work through the forty days, writing all day, and taking 43 food only at night. But as for me, I spoke all through the day; even at night 44 45 I was not silent. In the forty days, ninety-four books were written. At the end of the forty days the Most High spoke to me. 'Make public the 46 books you wrote first,' he said, 'to be read by good and bad alike. But the last seventy books are to be kept back, and given to none but the wise 47 among your people. They contain a stream of understanding, a fountain 48 of wisdom, a flood of knowledge.' And I did so.

15 1 PROCLAIM TO MY PEOPLE the words of prophecy which I give you to 2 speak, says the Lord; and have them written down, because they are 3 trustworthy and true. Have no fear of plots against you, and do not be 4 troubled by the unbelief of those who oppose you. For everyone who does not believe will die because of his unbelief. 5 Beware, says the Lord, I am letting loose terrible evils on the world, 6 sword and famine, death and destruction, because wickedness has spread over the whole earth and there is no room for further deeds of violence. 7 8 Therefore the Lord says, I will not keep silence about their godless sins; I will not tolerate their wicked deeds. See how the blood of innocent victims cries to me for vengeance, and the souls of the just never cease to 9 plead with me! I will most surely avenge them, says the Lord, and will hear 10 the plea of all the innocent blood that has been shed. My people are being led to the slaughter like sheep. I will no longer allow them to remain in 11 Egypt, but will use all my power to rescue them; I will strike the Egyptians 12 with plagues, as I did before, and destroy their whole land. How Egypt will mourn, shaken to its very foundations, when it is scourged and chastised 13 by the Lord! How the tillers of the soil will mourn, when the seed fails to grow, and when their trees are

devastated by blight and hail and terrible 14 15 storm! Alas for the world and its inhabitants! The sword that will destroy them is not far away. Nation will draw sword against nation and go to war. 16 Stable government will be at an end; one faction will prevail over another, 17 caring nothing in their day of power for king or leading man of rank. A man 18 may want to visit a city, but will not be able to do so; for ambition and rivalry will have reduced cities to chaos, destroyed houses, and filled men with 19 panic. A man will violently assault his neighbour's house and plunder his goods; no pity will restrain him, when he is in the grip of famine and grinding misery. 20 See how I summon before me all the kings of the earth, says God, from sunrise and south wind, from east and south, to turn back and repay what 21 they have been given. I will do to them as they are doing to my chosen people even to this day; I will pay them back in their own coin. 22 These are the words of the Lord God: I will show sinners no pity; the sword will not spare those murderers who stain the ground with innocent 23 blood. The Lord's anger has overflowed in fire to scorch the earth to its 24 foundations and consume sinners like burning straw. Alas for sinners who 25 flout my commands! says the Lord; I will show them no mercy. Away from 26 me, you rebels! Do not bring your pollution near my holiness. The Lord well knows all who sin against him, and has consigned them to death and 21 destruction. Already disaster has fallen upon the world, and you will never escape it; God will refuse to rescue you, because you have sinned against him. 28 29 How terrible the sight of what is coming from the east! Hordes of dragons from Arabia will sally forth with countless chariots, and from the first day of their advance their hissing will spread across the land, to fill all 30 who hear them with fear and consternation. The Carmanians, mad with rage, will rush like wild boars out of the forest, advancing in full force to join battle with them, and will devastate whole tracts of Assyria with their 31 tusks. But then the dragons will summon up their native fury, and will prove the stronger. They will rally and join forces, and fall on them with 32 overwhelming might until they are routed, until their power is silenced 33 and every one of them turns to flight. Then their way will be blocked by a lurking enemy from Assyria, who will destroy one of them. Fear and panic will spread in their army, and wavering among their kings. 34 See the clouds stretching from east and north to south! Their appearance 35 is hideous, full of fury and tempest. They will clash together, they will pour over the land a vast storm; blood, shed by the sword, will reach as 36 37 high as a horse's belly, a man's thigh, or a camel's hock. Terror and trembling will cover the earth; all who see the raging fury will shudder and be 38 stricken with panic. Then vast storm-clouds will approach from north and 39 south, and others from the west. But the winds from the east will be stronger still, and will hold in check the raging cloud and its leader; and the storm which was bent on destruction will be fiercely driven back to the 40 south and west by the winds from the east. Huge mighty clouds, full of fury, will mount up and ravage the whole land and its inhabitants; a 41 terrible storm will sweep over the great and the powerful, with fire and hail and flying swords; and a deluge of water will flood all the fields and 42 rivers. They will flatten to the ground cities and walls, mountains and hills, 43 trees in the woods and crops in the fields. They will advance all the way to 44 Babylon, and blot it out. When they reach it, they will surround it, and let loose a storm in all its fury. The dust and smoke will reach the sky, and all 45 her neighbours will mourn for Babylon. Any of her survivors will be enslaved by her destroyers. 46 And you, Asia, who have shared the beauty and the splendour of 47 Babylon, alas for you, poor wretch! Like her you have dressed up your daughters as whores, to attract and catch your lovers who have always 48 lusted for you. You have copied all the schemes and practices of that vile 49 harlot. Therefore God says, I will bring upon you terrible evils: widowhood and poverty, famine, sword, and plague, bringing ruin to your homes, 50 bringing violence and death. Your strength and splendour will wither like 51 a flower,

when that scorching heat bears down upon you. Then you will be a poor weak woman, bruised, beaten, and wounded, unable to receive your 52 53 wealthy lovers any more. Should I be so fierce with you, says the Lord, if you had not killed my chosen ones continually, gloating over the blows you struck them, and hurling your drunken taunts at their corpses? 54 55 Paint your face; make yourself beautiful! The harlot's pay shall be yours; 56 you will get what you have earned. What you do to my chosen people, God 57 will do to you, says the Lord; he will consign you to a terrible fate. Your children will die of hunger; you will fall by the sword, your cities will be 58 blotted out, and all your people will fall on the field of battle. Those who are up on the mountains will be dying of hunger, and their hunger and thirst will force them to gnaw their own flesh and drink their own blood. 59 60 You will be foremost in misery, and still there will be more to come. As the victors go past on their way home from the sack of Babylon, they will smash your peaceful city, destroy a great part of your territory, and bring 61 much of your splendour to an end. They will destroy you --- you will be 62 stubble, and they the fire. They will completely devour you and your cities, your land and your mountains, and will burn all your forests and 63 your fruit-trees. They will make your children prisoners and plunder your property; and not a trace will be left of your splendid beauty.

16 1 2 Alas for you, Babylon and Asia! Alas for you, Egypt and Syria! Put on sackcloth and hair- shirt, and raise a howl of lamentation for your sons; 3 your doom is close at hand. The sword is let loose against you, and who will 4 5 turn it aside? Fire is let loose upon you, and who will put it out? Calamities have been let loose against you, and who is there to stop them? 6 Can any man stop a hungry lion in a forest, or put out a fire among the 7 stubble once it has begun to blaze? Can any man stop an arrow shot by a 8 strong archer? When the Lord God sends calamities, who can stop them? 9 10 When his anger overflows in fire, who can put it out? When the lightning flashes, who will not tremble? When it thunders, who will not shake with 11 dread? When it is the Lord who utters his threats, is there any man who 12 will not be crushed to the ground at his approach? The earth is shaken to its very foundations, and the sea is churned up from its depths; the waves and all the fish with them are in turmoil before the presence of the Lord 13 and the majesty of his strength. For strong is his arm which bends the bow, and sharp the arrows which he shoots; once they are on their way, they 14 will not stop before they reach the ends of the earth. Calamities are let loose, 15 and will not turn back before they strike the earth. The fire is alight and 16 will not be put out until it has burnt up earth's foundations. An arrow shot by a powerful archer does not turn back; no more will the calamities be recalled which are let loose against the earth. 17 18 Alas, alas for me! Who will rescue me on that day? When troubles come, many will groan; when famine strikes, many will die; when wars break out, empires will tremble; when the calamities come, all will be filled with 19 terror. What will men do then, in the face of calamity? Famine and plague 20 suffering and hardship, are scourges sent to teach men better ways. But even so they will not abandon their crimes, nor keep in mind their scourging. 21 A time will come when food grows cheap, so cheap that they will imagine they have been sent peace and prosperity. But at that very moment the earth will become a hotbed of disasters --- sword, famine, and anarchy. 22 Most of its inhabitants will die in the famine; and those who survive the 23 famine will be destroyed by the sword. The dead will be tossed out like dung, and there will be no one to offer any comfort. For the earth will be 24 left empty, and its cities a ruin. None will be left to till the ground and sow 25 26 it. The trees will bear their fruits, but who will pick them? The grapes will ripen, but who will tread them? There will be vast desolation everywhere. 27 28 A man will long to see a human face or hear a human voice. For out a

whole city, only ten will survive; in the country-side, only two will be left, 29 hiding in the forest or in holes in the rocks. Just as in an olive-grove three 30 or four olives might be left on each trees or as a few grapes in a vineyard 31 might be overlooked by the sharp-eyed pickers, so also in those days three 32 or four will be overlooked by those who search the houses to kill. The earth will be left a desert, and the fields will be overrun with briars; thorns will grow over all the roads and paths, because there will be no sheep to 33 tread them. Girls will live in mourning with none to marry them, women will mourn because they have no husbands, their daughters will mourn 34 because they have no one to support them. The young men who should have married them will be killed in the war, and the husbands wiped out by the famine. 35 BUT LISTEN TO ME, you who are the Lord's servants, and take my 36 words to heart. This is the word of the Lord. Receive it, and do not disbelieve 37 what he says. Calamities are here, close at hand, and will not delay. 38 When a pregnant woman is in the ninth month, and the moment of her child's birth is drawing near, there will be two or three hours in which her womb will suffer pangs of agony, and then the child will come from the 39 womb without a moment's delay; in the same way calamities will come on the earth without delay, and the world will groan under the pangs that grip it. 40 Listen to my words, my people; get ready for battle, and when the 41 calamities surround you, be as though you were strangers on earth. The seller must expect to have to run for his life, the buyer to lose what he buys; 42 the merchant must expect to make no profit, the builder never to live in 43 the house he builds. The sower must not expect to reap, nor the pruner to 44 gather his grapes. Those who marry must expect no children; the unmarried 45 must think of themselves as widowed. For all labour is labour in 46 vain. Their fruits will be gathered by foreigners, who will plunder their goods, pull down their houses, and take their children captive. If they 47 have children, they will have been bred only for captivity and famine; any who make money do so only to have it plundered. The more care they 48 lavish on their cities, houses, and property, and on their own persons, the 49 fiercer will be my indignation against their sins, says the Lord. Like the 50 indignation of a virtuous woman towards a prostitute, so will be the indignation of justice towards wickedness with all her finery; she will accuse her to her face, when the champion arrives to expose all sin upon 51 52 earth. Do not imitate wickedness, therefore, and her actions. For in a very short time she will be swept from the earth, and the reign of justice over us will begin. 53 The sinner must not deny that he has sinned; he will only bring burning coals on to his own head if he says, 'I have committed no sin against the 54 majesty of God.' For the Lord knows all that men do; he knows their 55 plans, their schemes, and their inmost thoughts. He said, 'Let the earth be made', and it was made; and 'Let the heavens be made', and they were made. 56 It was by the Lord's word that the stars were fixed in their places; 57 the number of the stars is known to him. He looks into the depths with their 58 treasures; he has measured the sea and everything it contains. By his word he confined the sea within the bounds of the waters, and above the water he 59 suspended the land. He spread out the sky like a vault, and made it secure 60 upon the waters. He provided springs in the desert, and pools on the 61 mountain-tops as the source of rivers flowing down to water the earth. He created man, and placed a heart in the middle of his body; he gave him 62 spirit, life, and understanding, the very breath of Almighty God who created the whole world and searches out secret things in secret places. 63 He knows well your plans and all your inward thoughts. Alas for sinners 64 who try to hide their sins! The Lord will scrutinize all their deeds; he will 65 call you all to account. You will be covered with confusion, when your sins are brought into the open, and your wicked deeds stand up to accuse you 66 on that day. What can you do? How can you hide your sins from God and 67 his angels? God is your judge: fear him! Abandon your sins, and have done with your wicked deeds for

ever! Then God will set you free from all distress. 68 Fierce flames are being kindled to bum you. A great horde will descend on you; they will seize some of you and make you eat pagan sacrifices. 69 70 Those who give in to them will be derided, taunted, and trampled on. In place after place and in all the neighbourhood there will be a violent 71 attack on those who fear the Lord. Their enemies will be like madmen, 72 plundering and destroying without mercy all who still fear the Lord. They will destroy and plunder their property, and throw them out of their homes. 73 Then it will be seen that my chosen people have stood the test like gold in the assayer's fire. 74 Listen, you whom I have chosen, says the Lord; the days of harsh suffering 75 are close at hand, but I will rescue you from them. Away with your 76 fears and doubts! For God is your leader. You who follow my commandments and instructions, says the Lord God, must not let your sins weigh 77 you down, nor your wicked deeds get the better of you. Alas for those who are entangled in their sins, and overrun with their wicked deeds! They are like a field overrun by bushes, with brambles across the path and no 78 way through, completely shut off and doomed to destruction by fire.