

## CHANGING WORLDVIEWS IN POST-EXILIC ISRAEL

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The discipline of worldview studies has drawn increasing attention from scholars and institutions in recent years. In a good number of academic institutions, Worldview studies have been included in the study programs of the departments of social studies, cultural studies, economics, political science, and cross-cultural communication. Also in biblical studies, we have seen a keen interest in this field. Two recent articles in *The Bible Translator* by Gerrit van Steenbergem demonstrate clearly the relevance of worldview studies for the theory and practice of Bible translation.<sup>1</sup> In this article, I apply worldview studies in the area of exegesis for Bible translation. I am in particular interested in the study of patterns of worldview change in the post-exilic period. An understanding of shifts in worldviews that took place in that period is an important key for the interpretation of late texts of the Hebrew Bible and for the text of the NT. For my reconstruction of worldviews in post-exilic Israel, I use as main sources the text of the Hebrew Bible, the deuterocanonical books, the Pseudepigrapha of the OT, and the text of the NT.

### Worldview—a definition

The concept is used with a number of slightly different meanings in the literature, and the term is also loosely used as a synonym for related concepts, such as culture, religion, and cosmology. It is, therefore, important to give my working definition of the concept at this point in order to create a clear understanding of what I aim to cover with this particular concept.

I define worldview as *a commitment to a web of beliefs concerning World and Self*. I lean in this definition on the one given by James W. Sire in his book, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*.<sup>2</sup> Like Sire, I view the basic element of a worldview as a commitment to truth. Beliefs about the constitution of the world and the place of the self therein are perceived as matters of truth. The metaphor *web* is chosen for two reasons. The dimensions of a web can be easily extended, and when a part is destroyed, other parts remain and the whole can be mended. I have also chosen to use the word *beliefs*, while I could use *assumptions*. A definition such as *a worldview is a set of assumptions about the world and the self* could do, but sounds less dynamic and gives the idea that a worldview has set boundaries. Worldview

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1 Gerrit van Steenbergem, "Worldview Analysis as an Exegetical Tool," *The Bible Translator* 58 (2007): 30-40, 128-47.

2 James Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 122.

is open ended and changes over time as people gain new experience and continue reflecting on human life. Beliefs are, in fact, assumptions and presuppositions and often representations of reality that people hold to be true and real. A worldview is the product of the human mind and as such, it is an expression of the growing consciousness of *Homo sapiens*. That does not mean that the beliefs people hold about Self and World are all conscious beliefs. On the contrary, some are more conscious and others mainly unconscious.

The beliefs of a worldview are not totally consistent with each other; there is a good amount of inconsistency in any given worldview, and yet all beliefs form one web. It is also important to note that not all the beliefs have the same relationship with the empirical world outside. Some beliefs are based on empirically obtained facts, while others are based on imagination and mere supposition.

### **Worldview variables**

In my definition, I mention two basic worldview variables, World and Self. These two variables stand in an oppositional relationship. Self perceives World as Other. World includes all that is not Self. When I use the term *World*, I do not limit it to the natural, physical world, but I include also the symbolic world in the concept.

Michael Kearny comes up with seven worldview variables, which he calls universals: self, relationship, other, classification, causality, time, and space.<sup>3</sup> I do not follow these seven variables in my approach to worldview, but I sometimes do refer to the variables *classification*, *causality*, *time*, and *space*. I regard these as subvariables, while I consider World and Self as main variables.

The variable classification relates to the division of World into categories by Self. Humans tend to bring order in the world around them and classify the world in orders.

Ancient Near Eastern societies divide World into:

- great gods
- minor gods
- benevolent half-human, half-animalistic creatures
- demonic monsters
- super humans, half-god, half-human
- humans
- spirits or shades of ancestors
- super giant animals
- ancient animals (not under control by creator)
- animals (pure and impure)
- plants (powerful and harmless)
- stones
- man-made things containing power

Many individuals in modern Western societies divide World simply into humans, animals, plants, and inanimate objects. It goes without saying that the

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Kearny, *World View* (San Francisco: Chandler & Sharp, 1984), 68-106.

worldview of modern Western people differs considerably from the worldview of ancient Near Eastern peoples in the area of classification.

*Time* is the cyclic and linear framework in which events are perceived to take their course. People perceive the past according to the beliefs they hold about what happened long ago. They evaluate the present often as a result of the past, and they fear the future on account of what happens in the present. Time is also believed to have quality: There are good times and bad times, holy times and neutral ones.

*Space* relates to the areas where crucial events take place and important powers reside. From early times, *Homo sapiens* believed that the cosmos consisted of different worlds. The cosmological model of the ancient Near East with a tripartite structure—the heavenly realm of gods, the earthly realm of humans, and the netherworldly realm of gods and deceased people—probably dates from the early Stone Age. The heavenly world above the earth was considered as the place where the source of life-sustaining power was located. Many ancient peoples assumed that certain places on earth were sacred. Mountains were seen as holy places where gods came down or resided from time to time; expanses of water were often seen as the abodes of demons.

*Causality* is indeed a crucial worldview variable. This variable is closely connected with the concept of power. Self is constantly aware of change and is keen to find out what the agents are that cause changes in World and affect Self. This is in particular relevant as the human being attempts to counteract disaster and evil.

### **Community and individual**

Each person is committed to an individual worldview, but communities also have their worldviews. So there are collective worldviews and individual worldviews. Members of a particular community share large parts of their worldview with one another, but each member has his or her particular variant of the communal worldview. So in theory we cannot speak of two identical worldviews—each person is committed to a personal worldview.

People acquire their web of beliefs through socialization and enculturation in their formative years. The worldview of individuals changes through the experience of life and exposure to agents who are active in transforming worldviews. Biblical authors, for instance, can be regarded as worldview-changing agents.

### **Ancient Israelite worldviews**

In order to make the above more concrete, let us consider what is often referred to as the worldview of ancient Israel. In this case, I am referring to the worldviews of people belonging to the nation of Israel. I focus on ancient Israel of the united kingdom as a starting point (*ca.* 1050-931 B.C.E.). Taking the two main variables that I mention in my definition—World and Self—I can reconstruct the main framework of the communal worldview of ancient Israel based on a limited number of beliefs. By doing this I should keep in mind that the worldview of ancient Israel

is a variant of the more general worldview of the ancient Near East that was shared by all peoples of the Fertile Crescent.<sup>4</sup>

In ancient Israel in the time of David and Solomon, people believed that Yahweh was the god that protected their nation. They perceived Self as the people of Yahweh. They believed that other nations had their divine protectors. They assumed that Yahweh required a fair number of sacrifices and believed that neglecting the needs of Yahweh could bring harm to them. In case of disaster, they used a variety of forms of divination to find out what the cause of the problem was. They believed that various supernatural agents could cause disaster and that Yahweh was not the sole force of causality in the world. They perceived the world as flat and the space above as the abode of Yahweh and other gods. They believed that after death they would continue to exist as shades (*rēpā'im* in Hebrew) in the space under the earth which was called *šē'ōl* in Hebrew. They did not assume that there was reward or punishment after death: The righteous and the wicked became shades after death and went to the same place.

The above-sketched communal worldview of ancient Israel based on the two core variables of World and Self was largely shared by all ancient Israelites living in the time of David and Solomon. At the same time, we should realize that my description of the communal worldview of ancient Israel is a reconstruction. We should also keep in mind that the worldviews of individual Israelites of that period were variants. A particular member of the tribe of Judah would believe that Yahweh supported the house of David in a very special way, and that he invested supernatural powers in the kings of that line of descent. People of other tribes did not have identical beliefs in this respect. A member of the tribe of Naphtali would believe that, besides Yahweh, their local deity protected them in a special way. Individual Israelites had their own beliefs in certain magical practices, in local deities, and in the supernatural powers of their deceased ancestors. The Israelites of that period had a polytheistic worldview, with an emphasis on monolatrous Yahwism. They believed in a great variety of supernatural powers and forces working in the world and felt very powerless in dealing with the vicissitudes of life.

### **Changing worldviews in the post-exilic period**

In a period of 1000 years, roughly the time between David and Jesus, the worldviews of Israelites changed considerably as the world around Israel underwent substantial change. Most of the significant changes occurred in the post-exilic period. In that period, mainly anonymous authors wrote texts which influenced and changed the worldviews of the people of their times; these authors were highly instrumental in worldview transformation. Understanding the dynamics of the changing worldviews in that period of time is therefore a key to the contextual interpretation of a large part of the Bible. Significant changes occurred in five key areas. I list these areas in order to give a bird's eye overview of the worldview changes in that period of one thousand years.

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<sup>4</sup> Krijn van der Jagt, *Anthropological Approaches to the Interpretation of the Bible* (New York: United Bible Societies, 2002).

1. Changes in perception of the supernatural world.
2. Changes in perception of the Self of Israel as a community.
3. Changes in perception of time and space.
4. Changes in beliefs about a life in the hereafter.
5. Changes in beliefs in the human potential to influence life.

### **Changes in perception of the supernatural world**

Ancient Israel inherited from the wider cultural environment of the ancient Near East a belief in anthropomorphic gods (polytheism), belief in a national god, the concept of a personal god, and the concept of a moral universe.<sup>5</sup> The worldview of ancient Israel was not in any significant manner unique at the time of the birth of Israel as a nation, but developed unique traits in the period of the 1000 years between David and Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

The perception of Yahweh as a nature and warrior god and as national god of Israel changed over the centuries into the concept of a universal god—not just the protector of Israel, but also the protector of the moral universe. These changes in the perception of the supernatural world find a meaningful context in the political developments of that period in history. Israel started out as an independent nation under David and Solomon, but lost its military power and independence between 800 and 700 B.C.E., when the Assyrians expanded their rule all over the ancient Near East. The Israelites experienced defeat, and this experience changed their beliefs in the supernatural world. The circumstances forced them to believe that Assur, the national god of the Assyrians, was very powerful. Rethinking their belief in Yahweh led them to the understanding that Yahweh had other interests besides protecting Israel. The political events prompted also the thought that Israel had been punished for neglecting the cult of Yahweh, and that Assyria had been the rod in the hand of Yahweh.

The book of Nahum, which was composed shortly after the fall of Nineveh (and hence the demise of the Assyrian Empire) in 612 B.C.E., reflects these changes in perception of the supernatural world. Israel has been humiliated by Yahweh (Nah 1.12, 13), but the same Yahweh destroys the power of the king of Nineveh, as he has violated the laws of the moral universe (Nah 3.1-7).

The short period between the fall of Assyria and the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire was a period of renewed hope for an independent and prosperous nation of Israel. Although Israel was reduced to the Kingdom of Judah at that time, the hope of a restoration of all Israel inspired the king and the elite of Judah. In that short period, marked by the reign of King Josiah, some parts of the worldview of Israel were reshaped. The introduction of a new scroll of the Law, containing the core of the book of Deuteronomy, as the legal charter for the nation, was instrumental in this process of altering basic worldview components. The Deuteronomistic

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5 The concept of a moral universe is the basic notion that each human being has a right to live. This entails a universal rudimentary respect for the life and property of individuals and ethnic groups.

6 Bertil Albrektson, *History and the Gods: An Essay on the Idea of Historical Events as Divine Manifestations in the Ancient Near East and in Israel* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1967); Robert Gnuse, *Heilsgeschichte as a Model for Biblical Theology: The Debate Concerning the Uniqueness and Significance of Israel's Worldview* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1989).

theology that was formulated in the new scroll and in a number of historiographic writings that were produced during that time provided a new perspective. This new theology can be summarized as follows: If Israel worships Yahweh alone, at the place he has chosen, that is, in Jerusalem, then He will protect his people against all enemies, and he will give them great prosperity in the land he has given them. If Israel is not faithful, then Yahweh will give them over into the hands of their enemies.

The rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire made the dream of an imminent free and prosperous Kingdom of Judah disappear very soon. The reckless policy of the king in resisting the political power of the Babylonians ended up in a major disaster: Jerusalem and the temple of Yahweh were destroyed, and the elite of Judah deported to Babylon. The destruction of the temple of Yahweh caused a crisis in the faith of Israel and forced the Israelites to reshape their beliefs in the supernatural world. The deported Israelites were able to continue their literary activities and a good number of scrolls were composed and edited in Babylon during the time of the exile (587-539 B.C.E.).

The period of the exile up to the beginning of the Common Era, a period of roughly 500 years, saw further changes in beliefs about the supernatural world. In general the people of Israel moved away from the idea of a purely national god. Yahweh was more and more perceived as a universal god, who had a plan and a purpose for all nations. The simple Deuteronomistic doctrine, "If you faithfully worship Yahweh alone, you will prosper," was modified. Yahweh came to be perceived as a transcendental and universal god. The Israelites did not believe anymore in the Deuteronomistic scheme but felt that people were unable to trace the ways of Yahweh, as his doings in the world were beyond human understanding.

The Jewish elite, present at the centers of the Babylonian and Persian empires, was significantly influenced by the worldviews of the world powers of those days. The Jews did not exist on an island, but were part of an intellectual world that was developing new ideas about humankind and its history. In particular, the worldview changes that were effected in ancient Iran under the influence of the visions of Zoroaster became instrumental in the worldview change of the Jewish elite living in Mesopotamia, Persia (ancient Iran), and Palestine.

The deuterocanonical writing 2 Esdras, written shortly after the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E., shows how far Jewish thought had moved away from the Deuteronomistic doctrine and the nationalistic god concept. Chapters 3-14 of 2 Esdras are a Jewish apocalyptic text. In this text, Ezra dialogues with the angel Uriel. Ezra is complaining about the fate of the Jews. He blames the Most High for being unjust and incompetent in ruling the world in an orderly way. He claims that Israel has obeyed the law given by the Most High more than any other nation, and yet they have been humiliated. The angel reproaches Ezra for these thoughts:

Your understanding has utterly failed regarding this world, and do you think you can comprehend the way of the Most High? (2 Esd 4.2)

Ezra learns in his encounters with the angel that the Most High will not act in the present age, but he will put things in order in the coming age. In the present age, evil is mixed with good; this period of time has to pass. When the new age comes,

the Most High will restore his creation to glory. The evil-doers will be punished and the righteous rewarded. Ezra also learns that the bright future for Israel is not for the whole nation, but only for the few:

The Most High made this world for the sake of many, but the world to come for the sake of only a few . . . (2 Esd 8.1)

The changes in the perception of the supernatural world that took place in the post-exilic period implied changes in the patterns of causality of Israel's worldview. The causal attribution of evil and disaster acquired cosmic dimensions and was no longer exclusively embedded in the relationship between Yahweh and Israel.

### **Changes in perception of the Self of Israel as a community**

It goes without saying that changes in perception of the supernatural world have a bearing on the perception of Self. Israel saw itself traditionally as the people of Yahweh. This belief brought a sense of identity and provided a foundation for a perceived destiny. According to Jewish tradition, Yahweh had promised the ancestor of Israel, Abraham, that out of him would be born a great nation, numerous as the sand on the seashore, and that this nation would live in peace in a good and fertile land forever and ever. God made a covenant with Abraham and solemnly promised: "to your descendants I will give this land from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates" (Gen 15.18).

Covenant and election were the two pillars of Israel's identity and destiny, the backbone of Israel's perception of Self. In the course of Israel's history, however, it turned out that nations emerged in the world that were vastly superior and able to destroy the temple of Yahweh and deport Israel from the promised land. This forced the people of Israel to reshape their perception of Self. As from the time of Hezekiah (700 B.C.E.), Israel redefined Self in various frames. After the fall of the northern kingdom and the deportation of the ten tribes, Judah became the Israel of the covenant. After the exile, when parts of the elite of Judah returned to the land, the idea arose of an ethnically and spiritually pure Israel. From 200 B.C.E. onwards, different communities evolved in Palestine who claimed to be the true Israel of the covenant. Among these were apocalyptic communities, who defined themselves as "the few" who would be saved in the eschatological disaster and inherit the Kingdom.

As they had done in the period around 700 B.C.E. on, the people of Israel redefined Self in terms of the supernatural world. The issue of who the true Israel, the chosen people of Yahweh, were, rose to prominence. This question also became extremely relevant as Christianity sprang up as an offshoot of Judaism, as Paul's epistle to the Romans clearly shows.

### **Changes in perception of time and space**

In the post-exilic period, roughly between 500 B.C.E. and the beginning of the Common Era, significant changes in perception of time and space occurred in the ancient Near East. In that period, ancient cosmological models were modified. The concept of a linear time structure arose in ancient Iran and was adopted by Jewish communities. The idea developed that the earth would exist only for a period of time and would disappear at the end of time, and it created a web of

beliefs concerning an eschatological era prior to the demise of the present world and age.

Most scholars believe that the new ideas adopted in that period by various Jewish groups originated from the teachings of an ancient Iranian prophet who lived between 1400 and 1200 B.C.E. This prophet is known under the Greek name Zoroaster. Zoroaster's teachings became the basis of the official religion of the Persian Empire, of which the land of Judah was a province from 539 until 333 B.C.E. During these two hundred years, the teachings of Zoroaster influenced Jewish theology significantly. Zoroastrianism also had a profound influence on Greek philosophy, and it is safe to say that the great Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle were indirectly influenced by the teachings of the Iranian prophet, and that they adopted and modified these in their works.

### **Zoroaster**

The teachings of Zoroaster can be summarized as follows: There is a supreme god, the creator of the universe. There is also an evil power who is opposed to the creator, and not under his control. The supreme god has emanated many lesser divinities, who are his helpers to combat the evil power. He has a purpose for this world. The creator created a world in which nothing was embodied. He created a single cow, a single human being, and a single plant. The evil power broke into the creation by making a hole in the stone firmament. He turned large parts of the good earth into deserts, made the great seas salty, and killed the cow, destroyed the plant, and murdered the human. Out of the destroyed plant many species of plants came forth, and out of the dead cow many species of animals originated and out of the killed human many descendants were born who covered the earth. The present world where good and evil are mixed up will only last three thousand years. A cosmic savior will come towards the end of time on earth and, with his many helpers, will combat the evil power and restore the creation. A new time will then come, and this will also be a period of three thousand years, when there will be only good will on earth.

The dualistic anthropology of Zoroaster influenced the Greek philosophers to a large extent. Zoroaster perceived humans as composed of two parts: body and soul. The soul is a part of the world of light—it is immaterial and immortal, and only temporarily held in the house of darkness, the body. After death, the soul leaves the body and is judged: Pure souls are kept in a place of bliss, contaminated souls in a place of suffering. At the end of time there will be a final judgment for all. The bones of deceased people will be resurrected to become living persons. The righteous will live in paradise. The wicked will be annihilated.<sup>7</sup>

The Greek philosophers adopted a good number of these ancient teachings, and through the Greek educational system that was set up all over the ancient Near East in the Hellenistic period, these ideas were widely disseminated. Belief in the immortality of the soul (*athanatos* in Greek), for instance, became a widely-accepted truth. Jewish communities, too, accepted this belief, as is clear in such

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<sup>7</sup> Mary Boyce, ed., *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 80-96.



writings as the deuterocanonical book Wisdom of Solomon (Wis 3.4; 4.1; 6.18, 19; 8.13, 17; 15.3).

### **Messiah and Son of Man**

Jewish theologians found many elements in the teachings of Zoroaster that were compatible with their traditional beliefs. The traditional messianic belief of ancient Israel, for instance, provided common ground for the idea of the coming of a heroic savior. In Jewish apocalyptic writings from around the beginning of the Common Era, the traditional Davidic national savior has taken on a cosmic role. The savior is presented as a pre-existent figure, and not as a future descendent of David. We notice a shift in beliefs from a descendent of David to a human being (*huios tou anthrōpou*—a son of man) who will come from heaven. This hero will change the cosmic order and establish a new age. Ancient elements such as that of the restoration of all Israel remain, but the cosmic dimensions are new and reflect Zoroastrian teaching.<sup>8</sup>

In late writings of the post-exilic period we find two characters with overlapping roles and functions: the son of man and the messiah of Israel. The expression “son of man” (*ben ’ādām – ben ’ēnōš*) in the Hebrew Bible refers to a human being. It is synonymous with “man.” In some contexts, it is used with the connotation of mortality and fragility (e.g., Isa 51.12; Job 16.21; Ps 8.5). In the deuterocanonical book 1 Enoch, the term is used to refer to a God-appointed judge of the whole earth. Enoch is presented by God as the son of man, the man who will bring justice to the entire world. This text reflects an important shift in beliefs about who executes justice. In the late post-exilic era, the people of Israel became more and more concerned about evil and justice. The Hebrew Bible presents God as the one who will judge the earth; but in later Jewish Writings, we learn about a man appointed by God who will judge the world.

In the pseudepigraphic writing of the Testament of Abraham, written around the beginning of the Common Era, the man appointed as eschatological judge is Abel, the son of Adam.<sup>9</sup> In 2 Esdras (ch. 13) the one who will bring justice in the world is a messianic figure, someone like a human being, who comes out of the sea and flies with the clouds of heaven. The Gospel writers identify Jesus of Nazareth as both the messiah and the eschatological judge. It must have been clear in the minds of the Jewish people at the time of Jesus that the messiah and the eschatological judge would be the same person. We may deduce this from a Gospel text such as John 12.34.

The crowd answered him [Jesus]: “We have heard from the Law that the Messiah remains forever. Then how can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?”

### **Changes in cosmology**

In the post-exilic period, changes in the representation of the cosmos also spread among Jewish communities. The ancient cosmological model of the three spheres—

<sup>8</sup> For the concept of a cosmic Messiah, see 2 Esdras 13.

<sup>9</sup> James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1983), 1:869-903.

the tripartite structure—gave way to a model of a multi-heaven cosmology. The assumption of the ancient model was that heaven, as the abode of the gods, was inaccessible for humans. The new models, with three, five, or seven heavens above the earth, provided access to the heavenly spheres for humans after death. This was a new development.<sup>10</sup>

### **Changes in beliefs about the afterlife**

The cosmology of ancient Israel assumed that all people, the good and the bad, would go to Sheol after death. In Sheol, they would sleep in the dust of the netherworld. In the post-exilic period new beliefs about the afterlife arose. Belief in the immortality of the soul (*psychē* in Greek), which was accepted by a good number of Jewish communities, was in fact incompatible with ancient thoughts about the afterlife. Souls were perceived as elements of the world of light. They would go up to the world of light after death, that is, to heaven, and not descend into the darkness of the netherworld.

The new beliefs also included the notion of judgment after life. Souls were judged, and the pure souls of the righteous would be kept in a place of bliss, while the souls of the wicked would be tortured, and the souls of the half-good purified. The idea that the souls would be kept in heavenly places of bliss, torture, or purification until the last judgment was elaborated in different representations in different communities. When we read the different apocalyptic writings, attributed to great persons of the past such as Enoch, Baruch, and Ezra, we find interesting variants, but the basic idea that souls are kept in heavenly places until the last judgment is there.

### **Changes in beliefs in the human potential to influence life**

In the post-exilic period new ideas about the human potential to control one's personal life evolved. The Wisdom literature of ancient Israel became more and more instrumental as teaching material used to instruct people to live a fruitful and peaceful life. The introduction to the biblical book of Proverbs (Prov 1.1-7) encourages the reader to use the proverbs written down in the book to become wise and have a good life. The ancient idea that a human being is just a toy of supernatural powers and unable to take his life in his own hands became increasingly redundant. People began to see that happiness is something a person can strive for, and that a good life is not entirely dependent on one's physical circumstances or the whims of the gods, but that it has to do with the inner being of a person. It was felt that discipline, prudence, discernment, reflection, etc., are virtues one can learn, and are, in fact, keys to a good life. The Jewish elite learned in this area from the Greek philosophers, who promoted philosophy as a way to obtain peace of mind. It was in particular the philosophical school of the Stoa that influenced Jewish thought in this area. According to Stoic philosophy it was important to free oneself from desires, lusts, greed, and emotions, and control both mind and body in order to obtain a healthy balance. Jewish writings around the beginning of the Common Era reflect the influence of the Greek philosophy of the Stoa. The most striking

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<sup>10</sup> In a number of apocryphal and deuterocanonical writings, such as 1 Enoch, the Apocalypse of Baruch, and 2 Esdras, we find ample references to a multiple-heaven cosmology.

example is the writing known as 4 Maccabees. The opening verse of this writing gives us an idea of the main message the author wanted to communicate:

The subject that I am about to discuss is most philosophical, that is, whether devout reason is sovereign over the emotions. (4 Macc 1.1, RSV)

The author encourages his reader to take philosophy seriously. He deals with the question whether reason can rule over emotion. This issue is relevant for true and faithful observance of the Torah. If a person knows the Torah, but is unable to control himself and fails to discipline himself, he is bound to transgress the Law. Jewish religion with its emphasis on the fear of Yahweh and obedience to the Torah was brought in line with basic concepts of Greek philosophy such as belief in the power of reason.

These changes in beliefs about the role of Self in controlling one's life affected patterns of causality. People in the post-exilic era were less inclined to look for causes of events in World, and began to look for logical cause-effect patterns.

### **Concluding remarks**

In the post-exilic period major changes occurred in the worldview of ancient Israel, as Jewish elites in Palestine, Babylon, Alexandria in Egypt, and other places came into contact with a world that was deeply affected by religious and intellectual innovation. These major changes in the worldviews of ancient Israel are reflected in the later writings of the Hebrew proto-canon, and in the deuterocanonical books as well as the pseudepigraphic writings. The new worldview also forms the background to the writings of the NT. It is therefore of eminent importance for any translator of all these writings to understand the dynamics of worldview changes in the post-exilic period, as translators need to understand the text in its historical setting before they can successfully tackle the translation task.

Translators who do not take changing worldviews into account are bound to mistranslate key concepts and run the risk of misrepresenting ancient worldview components. The concepts and beliefs about the afterlife provide us with good examples. In the OT we find the belief that after life a person continues to live as a shade in Sheol. We saw earlier that both the righteous and the wicked went to the same place, to Sheol. The shades were believed to live dull lives in Sheol where they were deprived of all the pleasant things of life. It was believed that the shades were in need of much sleep in Sheol as they were thought to be physically weak.

The Psalmist of Psalm 6 says:

For in death there is no remembrance of you,  
In Sheol who can give you praise? (Ps 6.5)

The thought that shades are incapable of praising God in Sheol was common in ancient Israel. This thought is not expressed in the NT and is not familiar to Christians of our time and age. The translator of the Living Bible (1971) translates this verse in such a way that it makes sense to him and his audience:

For if I die I cannot give you glory by praising you before my friends.

This translation does not reflect the meaning of the original text. It suggests that the Psalmist intends to say that, if he dies, he will not be able to praise God on earth, and this rendering is for that reason unacceptable.

The same applies to the translation of the Greek term *psychē* (soul) in a good number of NT texts. *Psychē* is the term for the concept of the immortal soul. In Mark 8.36-37 we read:

For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life (*psychē*)? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life (*psychē*)? (NRSV)

In NRSV and GNB, *psychē* is translated “life.” NIV, NLT, and others keep the word “soul,” and by doing so they express the original more accurately. The idea of an immaterial and immortal soul that is judged after death and continues to exist in the hereafter is not in line with the ancient worldview of Israel, but it is a basic component of the worldview of the authors of the NT. The authors of the NT believed in the existence of an immortal soul. They assumed that this part of the human being could be damaged and polluted during life and be punished or purified in the hereafter. The Hebrew term *nepeš* in the OT, which can carry multiple meanings according to the context in which it is used, often means life or inner self. *Psychē* shares some of the components of *nepeš*, but has distinctive components. The translation of *psychē* by “life” is, therefore, not correct in the above-mentioned example of Mark 8.36-37.

Detailed worldview studies of the different Jewish and Christian communities that produced the writings of the OT, the Deuterocanon, and the NT can be very helpful for Bible translators as changing worldviews presents a major challenge in Bible translation.

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