

# 2 *Baruch*, the Messiah, and the Bar Kochba Revolt

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## I. Introduction

**S**econd (Syriac) *Apocalypse of Baruch* (2 *Baruch*) clearly belongs to the genre of the Jewish apocalypses of the Interbellum Period (73–132 CE) and should be seen together with 4 *Ezra*, *Apocalypse of Abraham*, 5th *Sibylline Oracle Book*, and in a way also the Revelation of John as belonging to one group of apocalypses with a shared historical setting and theological theme. What they have in common are a similar eschatological perspective on history, a certain dualism between good and evil, sin and righteousness, a real concern for the fate of a remnant of the people, reflections on life after death including resurrection and reward and punishment at the end of days, and equally important, an emphasis of the Roman Empire as Israel's main enemy.<sup>1</sup>

The author and/or editors of 2 *Baruch*, as well as that or those of 4 *Ezra*, its twin-apocalypse, aim at offering to its audience words of comfort and understanding for the situation the Jewish people had found itself in after the devastating First Jewish War (66–73 CE; cf. Josephus' *Bellum Judaicum*).<sup>2</sup> This anonymous author (and/or his later editors), who had

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1. Moreover, these historical and eschatological apocalypses of the Interbellum Period both reflect—in the world-political context of the devastating political events between the two Jewish wars against Rome (66–73 CE and 132–135 CE)—and represent—as part of a mostly inner-Jewish development—the transition from Greco-Roman Judaism to Rabbinic Judaism (and for the Revelation of John of Jewish Christianity to orthodox Christianity) within the context of the Roman world.

2. Despite its desperate state, the author is not tired to express that the people should first look back at what had gone wrong and especially at what they themselves had done wrong. Only by reflecting on the past history of Israel and the many mistakes made therein, they could learn what may lie ahead, do repentance and move on with their lives. This is the author's remedy, put in simple words.

adopted the name of the secretary of the Biblical prophet Jeremiah, and claims to have written in the twenty-fifth year of king Jojakim, 590 BCE (although the book was composed around 100 CE or later), by doing so, must have seen certain parallels between the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE and the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. Of these parallels, not the least one is between the time of past renewal with Cyrus the Great, the Lord's Anointed or Messiah (cf. Isa 45:1), in 538 BCE, and the time of the expected renewal with the coming of the Messiah at the end of days, which was calculated to take place at the beginning of the second century CE. This expected Messiah figure was understood by his followers, including Rabbis such as Rabbi Akiva, as referring to Bar Kochba.

The following study will focus on the eschatological and messianic expectations in *2 Baruch*, the historical context of its messiah concepts, and how they relate to Bar Kochba.<sup>3</sup>

## II. The Apocalyptic Character of the Book *2 Baruch*

The book of *2 Baruch* is normally divided into seven “visions” and 87 chapters, which goes back to B. Violet and his German translation of 1924 and since then has been accepted by most scholars.<sup>4</sup> However, all in all, the book actually contains only three real visions (instead of the seven literary units called “visions” as suggested by Violet) introduced and interrupted by

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3. On *2 Baruch* see, *inter alia*, K. Berger, *Synopse des Vierten Buches Esra und der Syrischen Baruch-Apokalypse*, Tübingen: Francke, 1992; P. Bogaert, *Apocalypse de Baruch*, Paris: CERF 1969; V.C.R.A. Dobroruka, *Aspects of Late Second Temple Jewish Apocalyptic: A Cross-Cultural Comparison*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005; D.M. Gurtner, *Second Baruch: A Critical Edition of the Syriac Text. With Greek and Latin Fragments, English Translation, Introduction and Concordance*, New York: T&T Clark Ltd., 2009; W. Harnisch, *Verhängnis und Verheissung der Geschichte*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969; A.F.J. Klijn, *2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch*, in: J.H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Garden City: Doubleday 1983, Vol. 1, 615–652; F.J. Murphy, *The Structure and Meaning of Second Baruch*, Atlanta: Scholars Press 1985; G.S. Oegema, *Apokalypsen*, JSHRZ, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 2001, 58–75; G.B. Saylor, *Have the Promises Failed? A Literary Analysis of 2 Baruch*, Chico: Scholars Press, 1984; J.E. Wright, *The Social Setting of the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch*, in: JSPE 16 (1997), 81–96.

4. According to this division, the contents of the text can be described as follows:



other literary units, such as prayers, conversations, as well as warnings and speeches:

	1:1–8:5	Historical introduction
	9:1–20:5	Prayers and conversations
<b>Vision I</b>	21:1–30:5	<i>Vision of the twelve periods</i>
	31:1–34:1	Warning to the people
<b>Vision II</b>	35:1–43:3	<i>Visions of the forest and the vine</i>
	44:1–46:7	Warning to the people
	47:1–52:7	Prayers and conversations
<b>Vision III</b>	53:1–74:4	<i>Vision of the cloud</i>
	75:1–77:26	Warning to the people
	78:1–87:1	Letter to the nine-and-a-half tribes

I.	1:1–8:5	Destruction of Jerusalem after the Temple treasures have been taken away by the angels
	9:1–12:5	Baruch's lament, preceded and followed by seven days of fasting
II.	13:1–20:5	Question and answer about justice
III.	21:1–30:5	After seven more days of fasting: Question about the future <i>Vision of the twelve periods</i> until the end of days, the coming of the Messiah, the resurrection and the final judgment
	31:1–34:1	Baruch speaks to the people and for the first time warns them
IV.	35:1–43:3	<i>Vision of the forest and of the vine</i> ; Interpretation of the two visions
	44:1–46:7	Baruch speaks to the people a second time
V.	47:1–48:50	Baruch fasts and prays to God
VI.	49:1–52:7	Question about the fate of the righteous after their resurrection
VII.	53:1–74:4	<i>Vision of a cloud</i> with light and dark waters
	75:1–77:26	Baruch thanks God and speaks a third time to the people
	78:1–87:1	Epistle to the nine and a half tribes

The book can not only be divided into seven so called “visions”, but also by genre, namely into parts with an historical content (1:1–8:5), prayers to God and conversations between Baruch and God (9:1–20:5; 47:1–48:50; 49:1–52:7), Baruch’s warnings and speeches to the people (31:1–34:1; 44:1–46:7; 75:1–77:26), and actual visions about the future (21:1–30:5; 35:1–43:3; 53:1–74:4). The letter to the nine and a half tribes at the end (78:1–87:1) is an appendix.

As these three “real” visions partly have an historical, explanatory and theological character, also they are therefore not pure apocalyptic visions, as we know them from other apocalypses, but serve a very specific narrative purpose, namely to contain the theological message of the apocalypse. In light of this and despite *2 Baruch* being (called) an apocalypse, the characteristics of an apocalypse found in *2 Baruch* are also of a somewhat artificial nature, as the author has added many non-apocalyptic material and genres to his book, like conversations between Baruch and God, parables, prayers, tasks, and episodes about the people. These are characteristic of the older prophetic literature, a type of literature the author is close to and very well versed in, and clearly tries to imitate.<sup>5</sup>

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5. *2 Baruch* is connected with the canonical texts of the Hebrew Bible in a number of ways: through the interpretation of Biblical passages, the use of genres known from the Biblical and especially prophetic literature, and the portrayal of Biblical figures.

As far as Biblical passages are concerned, we find a quotation of part of Jer 1:18 in *2 Bar* 2:2 in reference to the prophet Jeremiah and his secretary Baruch, the latter being a possible hint to the author himself. Isa 49:16 is quoted in *2 Bar* 4:2 as a proof of the existence of Jerusalem before Paradise; Jer 22:29 is cited in *2 Bar* 6:8, as it concerns the rescue of the Temple vessels, and Deut 30:15.19 is used in *2 Bar* 19:1 as the Biblical foundation of good and evil and the reward of life and death, which is a red thread in the whole of the theology of *2 Baruch*. Paraphrases of and allusions to portions of Ezekiel 17 and Daniel 7 are found in *2 Baruch* 35–41.

As for the use of Biblically inspired genres and themes, we find the description of the “Fall of Jerusalem” in *2 Bar* 1:1–3:9; a “Lament over Jerusalem” in *2 Bar* 10:1–15; 19:4–20:2; a “Prayer of Baruch” in *2 Bar* 21:4–25; an “Eagle bringing a Letter” to the dispersed tribes in *2 Bar* 77:18–26 and the “Letter to the nine and a half tribes” itself in *2 Bar* 78:1–85:15. As for Biblical figures, *2 Baruch* describes the main figures in their historical order and does not fail to mention whether they belonged to the bright or dark periods in the history of Israel: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Miriam, Elijah, David, Solomon, Jeremiah as well as Nebuchadnezzar, Sanherib, Salmanasar and the kings Gedaliah, Hezekiah, Jechoniah, Jerobeam, Josiah, Isebel, Kaleb, Neriah, Nun, Scheraja and Zedekiah.

Among the motifs and allusions in *2 Baruch* it is especially worth mentioning both the Temple and the people of Israel and the latter days and the final judgment. The Temple plays a role in the religion—and tradition—historical background of the “Lament over the Temple” and at the same is central to the apocalypse itself. The Second Temple destroyed in 70 CE keeps its theological relevance despite its physical absence; more than that, *2 Baruch* is—with the other apocalypses of the time—at the very forefront of a radical re-interpretation of the Temple since its destruction that would last for centuries and give it a lasting meaning in the collective memory of the people of Israel. It would be connected with the future hope for a restoration not only of the Temple, but also of the Torah, the cult and the Jewish state in the messianic



Here it is important to note that the very few Biblical passages the author of 2 *Baruch* refers to or quotes are significant for his overall theme and vision of the future:

1. Isa 49:16 in 2 *Bar* 4:2 as part of Isaiah 49:1–26 about the Servant's Mission being to bring back Zion's children from the exile.
2. Jer 22:29 in 2 *Bar* 6:8 as part of Jeremiah 22:1–30 with Jeremiah's call to repent and his words to the sons of Josiah, the reformer, continued with Jeremiah 23:1–8 about Israel's restoration and the coming of a Messiah from the house of David.
3. Ezekiel 17:1–24 in 2 *Bar* 35–41 with the vision of the Two Eagles and the Vine and the vision of Israel's final exaltation.
4. Daniel 7:1–14 in 2 *Bar* 35–41 with the visions of the Four Animals and the Judgment by the Son of Man, who according to the interpretation in Daniel 7:15–28 will bring to an end the reign of the four empires (with Greece-Rome being the fourth animal/empire) and restore the house of Israel.

### III. The Concept of History in 2 *Baruch*

Theologically spoken 2 *Baruch*, as is the case with 4 *Ezra*, *Apocalypse of Abraham*, *Sibylline Oracle Book 5* and the Revelation of John, tries to give answers to the questions of why so much evil and destruction has fallen upon Israel, when exactly the end of time will come, when the Messiah will appear, what he will be and how he will act, what the rewards of the righteous will be, how the wicked people will be punished, and especially how the Roman Empire will fall.

One of the prominent theological themes in 2 *Baruch* is therefore the interpretation of history until the presence, which for that reason can

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age. This clearly goes beyond the Prophetic critique of a defiled Temple cult that is in need of restoration.

Also the "Lament over the Temple" in 2 *Bar* 35:2–5 as well as 2 *Bar* 10:6–12:4 receives a new dimension compared to the Biblical laments and has parallels in *Sifre on Deuteronomy* § 43, *b. Baba Batra* 60b, *Pesiqta Rabbati* 34 *et al.* The main focus of the apocalypse, however, is on the people of Israel. To Israel Baruch addresses his speeches, letters, rebukes, interpretations of history, visions and Biblical interpretations, parables and prayers. Israel's future is his main concern. Israel he wants to see restored.

even be referred to as 2 *Baruch*'s "theology of history". At the core of this theology we find a periodization of history, which is characterized by light and dark or righteous and wicked periods and an eschatological perspective on history emphasizing its climatic outcome. The dark and "bad" periods get darker and worse until the end of days and with it the final destruction comes. However, also the light and "good" periods, which become brighter and better, end in history's final destiny, namely the coming of the Messianic kingdom or reign.<sup>6</sup> The 14 periods (in 2 *Bar* 56:5–74:4), beginning with a dark period and ending with a light period, are as follows:

Dark Periods	Light Periods
1. Adam's Fall	2. The Patriarchs
3. Egypt	4. Moses
5. The Judges	6. David and Solomon
7. Jerobean and the Assyrians	8. Hezekiah
9. Manassah	10. Josiah
11. Destruction of Jersalem	12. Rebuilding of Zion
13. The End	14. Messianic Reign

#### IV. 2 *Baruch* and the Messianic Expectations of the Interbellum Period

During the period between the First and Second Jewish War the Messiah is most often conceptualized as a combination of a Son of Man, Judge and Warrior-King (who will gather the people of God), especially in the Apocalypses of *Abraham*, *Baruch*, *Ezra*, John and in *Sibylline Oracle 5*, as is illustrated in the following overview.

In 2 *Baruch* 35–41, Ezekiel 17 and Daniel 7 are interpreted in such a way that the latter-day liberator is expected at the end of a periodiced history to judge and destroy the remaining rulers of the nations, to gather the remnant of the people of God and to rule for ever. The latter-day figure

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6. Unlike in the theology of the Prophets, the author of 2 *Baruch* hardly believes that repentance and God's final day of Judgment would be able to change the course of history. Instead, the fall of Adam has set a development in motion, which is irreversible, as the seed of sin in Adam carries the final destruction of mankind in it.



in 2 *Baruch* 70–73 has received more direct military and juridical functions. He will judge the nations who have ruled over Israel, and deliver them to the sword. In 4 *Ezra* 11–12 the vision of Daniel 7 is enlarged, actualized and applied to Rome. In 2 *Baruch* and in 4 *Ezra* the Roman Empire and the order of its emperors play a dominant role in the view of history and influence the conceptualization of Messiah figures.

The latter-day liberator, who has been kept by God until the end of days, is portrayed as a lion and can thus be understood as a Davidic King Messiah. Additionally it is said that he will judge the kings and free the remnant of the people of God. In 4 *Ezra* 13 the Messiah is portrayed as the ‘One like a Man’, who with the fire of his will kills those who make war with him. He will restore the creation and gather the nine-and-a-half tribes.

In the Book of Revelation a great number of expressions for one and the same latter-day figure is found: the Lamb, the Son of Man, the Word of God and Christ. Rome and a time of persecutions form the background of both the author and his readers. The messiah concept has strong military, royal and juridical aspects and is then adapted to Christ: Christ will come to rule and to gather the saints. In *Apocalypse of Abraham* 29 a latter-day liberator is expected, who will play the role of a righteous judge in the twelfth period of the age of wickedness. He is also called the ‘Chosen’ and will gather the people of God. Abraham’s rejection of idolatry is exemplary for the fate of the just in the latter day. Finally, *Sibylline Oracle* 5 should also be mentioned here. Whereas *Sibylline Oracle* 3 hails a Ptolemy as latter-day liberator, *Sib. Or.* 5.414 and 526 expect a Man from the sky to oppose the historical figure of Nero. He is portrayed as a Warrior-King, Judge and Son of Man (the latter based on Isa. 11.1–5 and Dan. 7.13).

In conclusion, 2 *Baruch* understands and portrays the expected Messiah, similar to other apocalypses of the same period, very much as a Warrior-Messiah and Son of Man/Latter-Day Judge. He will come to destroy the Roman Empire, and play an important role in bringing back the people of God and the rebuilding the Temple of God.<sup>7</sup>

## V. 2 *Baruch* and the Bar Kochba Revolt

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7. See my *The Anointed and His People. Messianic Expectations from the Maccabees to Bar Kochba* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha, Vol. 27), Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1998.

According to the re-discovered letters and documents and archeological artifacts attributed to Bar Kochba and his revolt against Rome three themes play a prominent role during the Bar Kochba Revolt: 1. The character of Bar Kochba as a warrior-like Messiah type, 2. his battle against the oppression of the Roman Empire, and 3. the return of the Law and a rebuilding of the Temple.<sup>8</sup>

In light of this it is justified to ask about a possible comparison between the Messiah expected in 2 *Baruch* and Bar Kochba. Apart from the more general observation that both all contemporary apocalypses and the historical figure of Bar Kochba present a mostly warrior-like Messiah type, who will fight against Rome, there is also another parallel between both figures, the expected Messiah in 2 *Baruch* and Bar Kochba, namely their involvement or connection with the restoration of the Torah and the rebuilding of the Temple. In the following we want to cement this observation even further, by looking at, as one example of many other aspects of the Messiah concepts in the Second Temple Period, the calculation of the expected time of the coming of the Messiah and his involvement in the rebuilding of the Temple.

## VI. A Rebuilt Temple in 2 *Baruch* 28:2; 32:2–4; 61:7, and 68:5?

There are four passages in 2 *Baruch* with hints and references to a possible rebuilding of the Temple as well as a certain calculation of the exact time of end of days, namely in 2 *Baruch* 28:2; 32:2–4; 61:7, and 68:5.

But everyone who will understand will be wise at that time. For the measure and the calculation of that time will be two parts: weeks of seven weeks. (2 *Bar* 28:1–2)

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8. For example, the Sabbath was kept, Sukkoth was celebrated, tithes were given, collected and distributed. There was a new calendar and coins were struck with new years, counting from the “liberation of Israel”. Jerusalem, Tekoa, En-Gedi, and Herodium seem to have been re-conquered from the Romans. A Nasi (Bar Kochba) ruled over the several new districts, governed by military rulers and administrators, and the interest on the tithes was given to a community fund. The revolt against Rome, or Second Jewish War, ended in 135 CE with the defeat of Bar Kochba and his followers. The fate of Israel was sealed by Rome for many centuries to come. Bar Kochba’s reputation in later Rabbinic Judaism was mostly negative, and apocalypticism, associated with messianic inspired revolts, was in general rejected by the same Rabbinic Judaism. Hence, 2 *Baruch*, a Jewish apocalypse from this period, received no further attention from Jewish side and became fully ignored.



The first saying in 2 *Bar* 28:1–2, which comes without an explanation, is a reference to Dan 12:10, the second saying, also without an explanation, is an allusion to the seventy weeks in Dan 9:24–27 which on its part is an allusion to Jeremiah 25:11–12 and 29:10. The expression “weeks of seven weeks” is best known from its use in Daniel 9:25, where—as seventy weeks—it is connected with the coming of a (past) Messiah and the (expected) rebuilding of the Temple: seven weeks until a rebuilt Jerusalem and sixty-two weeks of a built Jerusalem in troubled times, as such referring to the Maccabean Revolt. For the author of 2 *Baruch* the passages from Jeremiah and Daniel then become the basis for his actualization in his own days.

For a short time, the building of Zion will be shaken in order that it will be rebuilt. That building will not remain: but it will again be uprooted after some time and will remain desolate for a time. And after that it is necessary that it will be renewed in glory and that it will be perfected into eternity. (2 *Bar* 32:2–4)

This passage distinguishes between three times:

- a short time, when the building of Zion will be shaken in order that it will be rebuilt.
- a time that the building will not remain but will be uprooted for some time and will remain desolate for a time.
- a time in which the building will be renewed in glory and will be perfected into eternity.

About all three times specific details about its character and duration are giving. The first time is short and is characterized by a rebuilding of the building of Zion, i.e. the Temple in Jerusalem. The second time is characterized by three intervals: a. the building will not remain, b. the building will be uprooted, and c. the space left by the uprooted building will remain desolate for some time. The third time is the expected time in the future characterized by the rebuilding of the Third Temple. Whereas the third time belongs to the world to come and is further explained in 2 *Bar* 61:7 and 68:5, the first and second time possibly refer to Daniel 9:26–27 with its one and half week of a covenant and sacrifices (first time) until a time of abomination and desolation (second time); the third time is referred to, though briefly, at the end of Daniel 9:27, where the end of the abomination

is decreed. For the author of *2 Baruch*, however, this third time is the time of the rebuilding of the Temple.<sup>9</sup>

And the land which then received mercy, since its inhabitation did not sin, was praised above all countries, and the city of Zion ruled over all countries and regions at that time. (*2 Bar* 61:7)

This is the explanation of the sixth of the fourteen bright and dark waters of the vision of the cloud. The sixth water or period refers to the time of David and Solomon and the building of the Temple on Mount Zion, which would become the model of the time of the Messiah, during which also the Third Temple would be rebuilt.

And at that time, after a short time, Zion will be rebuilt again, and the offerings will be restored, and the priests will again return to their ministry. And the nations will again come to honor it. (*2 Bar* 68:5)

This passage describes the aspect of the renewed priesthood and service in the rebuilt Third Temple, again in the messianic age, with the possibility that this messianic age was understood to be arriving very soon, for example around the time of Bar Kochba.

All four passages, *2 Bar* 28:2; 32:2–4; 61:7, and 68:5 taken together, belong to two of the three real visions and their explanations, *2 Bar* 28:2 concludes the first vision of the twelve periods with the calamities and the coming of the Messiah in *2 Bar* 27:1–28:2. *2 Bar* 32:2–4 belongs to Baruch's speech to the people after having received this first vision and its explanation by angel, and thus relates on a one to one basis, what Baruch had seen in a vision to the reality the people were in after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. *2 Bar* 61:7 is part of the third vision of the

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9. It would be of interest to see, whether there was any time in first and second century CE Judea that the Temple in Jerusalem destroyed in 70 CE was about to be rebuilt or hoped for to be rebuilt and then uprooted again. And as a matter of fact, rumors of this kind did exist during the reign of Hadrian around 117 CE. And that would correspond with the approximate time of the final edition of this apocalypse. *2 Bar* 68:1–5 would then either refer to these same rumors of a Temple being rebuilt around 117 CE or to a second time of rebuilding after these rumors, for example around the time of Bar Kochba 132–135 CE. In any case, no matter how we interpret these rumors of a rebuilt Temple, as referring to one and the same time or to different times, they make most sense in the period of 115 to 135 CE, the time the apocalypse was edited in its final form, and the time Bar Kochba was active.



cloud with the fourteen bright and dark waters, itself representing the time of David and Solomon and the building of the Temple, a foreshadowing of the time of the Messiah and the Third Temple.

And finally, 2 *Bar* 68:5, refers to the twelfth and bright water of the same third vision of the cloud with the fourteen bright and dark waters, and as such represents to the time just before the final and most dark thirteenth water and final and most bright fourteenth water, i.e. the tribulations at the end of days and the beginning of the Messianic age. The twelfth bright water thus marks the end of this age and the beginning of the coming age. This is a significant observation, as according to the author this time is characterized by a short period of a rebuilding of the Temple and restoration of the Temple worship.

## VII. Conclusion

The parallels between the Messiah expected by 2 *Baruch* (and other apocalypses of the same period) and Bar Kochba are the following:

1. The character of expected Messiah and Bar Kochba is that of a Warrior-Messiah with elements of a Son of Man/latter-day Judge.
2. The battle of the expected Messiah and Bar Kochba is directed against the oppression of the Roman Empire, understood as the fourth empire of the vision of the four animals/empires of the book of Daniel.
3. The goal of the expected Messiah and Bar Kochba is to restore the people of Israel, make them return to the Law of Moses and enable the rebuilding of the Temple.
4. The crucial elements of 2 *Baruch* are all contained in his “real” visions and less the many other genres the author employs. At the same time these real visions refer to messianic passages in the Hebrew Bible
5. And finally, the few Biblical texts and quotations found in 2 *Baruch* are crucial for the author’s vision of the future: Here it is important to note that the very few Biblical passages the author of 2 *Baruch* refers to or quotes are significant for his overall theme and vision of the future, namely from these prophetic texts: Isa 49:16; Jer 22:29; Ezekiel 17, and Daniel 7.

Whether this means that Bar Kochba is directly dependent on the apocalyptic book of *2 Baruch* is difficult to say, but that both acted in the same mindset and that there was something in the air at the beginning of the second century CE is a pretty safe conclusion. A number of people, authors like the one of *2 Baruch*, military leaders like Bar Kochba and religious authorities like Rabbi Akiva, all had similar expectations of a Warrior-Messiah/Latter-Day Judge/Son of Man, who would destroy the Romans and restore the fate of Israel. More than that, they also made calculations on the basis of their analysis of the events and their interpretation of Scripture and thought that the first third of the second century CE would see the beginning of Messianic Age and the rebuilding of the Third Temple.