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UNVEILING – TO THE END?
A Paper on Apocalyptic Thinking
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Unremitting travail and oppression in the ancient world gave birth to apocalyptic thinking. This paper will offer: fundamental paradigms of apocalyptic thinking; the sources and development of Jewish apocalyptic and apocalyptic eschatology literature; the traits of the genre determined by scholarship; review three documents that best express the literature; examine the apocalyptic tradition's influence upon the early Jesus follower/Christian movement; and conclude with remarks concerning the continued influence of the ancient tradition.

HISTORY UNVEILED:

The trajectory of ancient Israel's apocalyptic tradition into the early-rabbinic Jewish tradition and formative decades of emerging Christianity provided hope for people in the midst of hopeless historical circumstances. The hope expressed by the Israelite prophets before the Exile in Babylon (586-538 BCE) relied upon change of behavior *in history through actions* of king, priest and the people's embracing the Covenant in order to avoid calamity. In the post-exilic Persian occupation era (539-333 BCE) the Temple was rebuilt (520-515 BCE) and a transition in prophecy occurred because of frustration of no longer being an independent nation and questions raised about the authority and behavior of the priesthood. With Greek occupation (333-164

BCE) the overwhelming force of Hellenization¹ brought despair and anger to devout Judeans, spawning a body of apocalyptic eschatological literature extending from the late 4th-century BCE into the early 2nd-century CE. Jewish hope in messianic expectations in the 1st-century CE brought oppressive actions against them by the power of the Roman Empire resulting in similar persecutions toward the emerging Christian movement stimulating salvific apocalyptic eschatological messages.

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO US *THEN*?

Defeat and disaster seem to inspire witnesses to weave a historical pattern to explain them. And often this explanation is their contemporaries' only solace for failed hopes.²

The process "to weave a historical pattern" is the main feature of the apocalyptic genre. When the world around people in *a sector of society* is beyond their control, imminent danger is perceived giving rise to feel under siege by the dominant culture. Despair is off-set with the hope of an alternative "world" construct as being the only aspiration and salvation. A "symbolic universe" emerges in

. . . which now constitutes a universe in the literal sense of the word, because *all* human experience can now be conceived of as taking place *within* it. The symbolic universe is

¹ Carmichael, pg. 2; "Alexander's conquest changed the nature of the [Ancient Near East] fundamentally: the notion of a vast society clinging to universal ideals revolving around Greek language and culture replaced the earlier congeries of relatively sealed-off states and societies. Whereas absorption in Babylonian culture would have made one a Babylonian, absorption in Greek civilization made one not a Greek, but a citizen, more or less, of the world." "Hellenism" and "Hellenist" derived from Hellen, son of Deucalion, the mythical ancestor of the Greeks and the term probably derived from the verb *hellenizein*, "to speak Greek" or "to live and think in the Greek manner."

² Olster, pg. 1.

conceived of as the matrix of *all* socially objectivated and subjectively real meanings; the entire historic society and the entire biography of the individual are seen as events taking place *within* this universe.³

A “symbolic universe” is the foundation of *all* apocalyptic thinking.

Apokalypsis (“to uncover” in Greek) or *revelare* (“to reveal” in Latin) are root words to the interchangeable terms for the apocalypse and revelation genre. An apocalypse or revelation is a vision that offers to a trusted recipient an insight beyond “the now,” to see and understand what truth resides in the past and/or beyond the present. The vision may be benign or fraught with violence. The person is commanded to keep the revelation secret within a group, or to offer a testament to the public the wisdom achieved. This is the primary content of an apocalypse or revelation.

Eschatos (the “last” or “farthest”) is the root word to the eschaton and eschatology, a description of the future, how a current age will be judged at the end of time. Reward for the righteous provides salvation and redemption for those suffering oppression and injustice. Punishments are judged against those oppressing. A new age will be set into motion in favor of a sector of society, or the whole of society. The judgment may come from angels (“messengers”) or directly from God. The eschatological scene is usually violent.

³ Berger and Luckman, pg. 96. Italics by the authors.

Apocalyptic/eschatological literature does not have a specific form or structure. What the genres do share are clusters of traits. These include, but not limited to a narrative framework, revelation to a human recipient by an otherworldly being, a transcendent temporal reality perhaps of eschatological salvation, and a transcendent spatial reality of another supernatural world⁴ defining an alternate “world” of hope and redemption. Frequently the means of revelation is in the form of dreams, visions, other-worldly journeys and occasionally by a heavenly book, all with a hortatory aspect, using “language that is expressive, rather than referential, symbolic rather than factual.”⁵ Often angels serve as guide or interpreter for the human recipient through discourse or dialog. Presented as religious perspective using symbolic/metaphoric language in support of a “symbolic universe,” a divine plan is defined to set aright the errors of the dominant society by way of visions and/or the eschaton. “Moreover, the symbolic universe of an individual apocalyptic movement is not handed down to it ready-made by an authoritative antecedent tradition, but is formed within a specific historical-sociological matrix”⁶

⁴ Cited in Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, pg. 5. Paul Hanson distinguishes between *apocalypse* as “literary form or genre,” and *apocalyptic eschatology* “a religious perspective which in important respects represents a continuation of prophetic eschatology”, and *apocalypticism* a “‘symbolic universe’ of a group in which apocalyptic eschatology has assumed the all-powerful role of an ideology.” (cited in VanderKam, pg. 2). Actually, the genre is a construct of academic scholarship, since none of the many documents falling into this category identify themselves as “revelation” or “apocalypse,” except the Book of Revelation.

⁵ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, pg. 17. All referential language is not directed toward the historical events of the past, but rather intended to be expressive of the current, local circumstances: narratives that may rely upon factual individuals and events are in reality used as symbolic images to correspond with the current, local circumstances.

⁶ Hanson, pg. 29. “Apocalyptic eschatology, then, is neither a genre, nor a socioreligious movement, nor a system of thought, but rather a religious perspective, a way of viewing divine plans in relation to mundane realities.” This paper does recognize a genre regardless. Also according to the author, “The socioreligious phenomenon of apocalypticism, therefore, must not be uncritically identified with the literary form of the apocalypse” (pg. 29).

Contrary to popular belief apocalyptic/eschatological literature does *not* predict the future: the protagonist figuratively placed before the events “predict” what already happened (*ex eventu* prophecy) lending credence and authority to the message. Apocalyptic/eschatological text’s *only* reference is to present circumstances at the time of writing. Each era has its own form of apocalyptic thinking, its own “symbolic universe”: sometimes referring to prior images of persecution and other times creating new images to address oppression. Apocalyptic/eschatological imagery is a cryptic way of defining current, contemporary religious, social, political and economic circumstances set down by authors aimed at a specific audience within the larger society. The message is from the point of view of the oppressed sector under siege by the dominant social structure; an expression of the anxiety and hope that prevails within the oppressed audience.

The development of the genres took on diverse features and elements. Reverence for righteous past figures occurs in many apocalyptic/eschatological genres:⁷ some figures are historical, others legendary if not mythical. Pseudonymity, an accepted ancient literary device lent authority, credence and sanction to the message of hope, giving to the text authenticity in the name of a revered prophet or apostle.⁸ Authors seized upon the reputations of these figures and literary/symbolic images surrounding them as instruments of a “symbolic universe” to address current injustice and oppression.

⁷ There are 21 known documents that are classified by scholars as apocalyptic.

⁸ These include Noah, Abraham, Solomon, Isaiah, Ezra, Baruch, Peter, Paul, James, Mary of Magdala, etc. Pseudonymity in the pre-exilic eras were prompted more by the work of disciples of the prophet carrying on the prophetic tradition, re: 2nd Is and 3rd Is.

The apocalyptic imagination caused a major shift in prophecy early in the post-exilic era. Israelite prophetic tradition took on a new form. Scholars propose the apocalyptic/eschatological trajectory extends from “prophetic eschatology” (bad things happening to people for doing bad things) to “apocalyptic eschatology” (bad things happening to good people). Both eschatological traditions were suspicious of the “men of renown” and “heroes of old.”

As historical and sociological conditions made it increasingly difficult to identify contemporary individuals and structures with divine agents and end-time realities, as the elect increasingly were deprived of power within social and religious institutions, and as the vision of ancient myth began to offer world-weary individuals a means of resolving the tensions between brilliant hopes and bleak realities, *the perspective of prophetic eschatology yielded to that of apocalyptic eschatology*. Gradually God’s final saving acts came to be conceived of not as the fulfillment of promises within political structures and historical events, but as deliverance out of the present order into a new transformed order. . . .⁹

Specific eschatological prophetic sources can be identified.

The earliest seeds to apocalyptic thinking are found in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, 2nd and 3rd Isaiah; followed by Zechariah, Haggai and Joel.¹⁰ Jeremiah opens with the cosmic unraveling of the Crea-

⁹ Hanson, pg. 30; emphasis added.

¹⁰ Jeremiah ca. 627-587 BCE; Ezekiel ca. 593-571 BCE; 2nd Isaiah ca. 545-539 BCE (Chaps 40-55); Haggai ca. 520 BCE; 3rd Isaiah ca. 530-510 BCE (Chaps 56-66); Zechariah (Chaps. 1 – 8) ca. 520, (Chaps 9 – 48) ca. 515 BCE; and Joel is indeterminate since there are no historical markers, but appears best to fit into the post-exilic era. P. D. Hanson cites “Prophecy is *one* current (even if the central one) alongside others.” (pg. 29; emphasis by author).

tion myth (4:23-28 vs. Gen 1 – 2:4), the beginnings of “apocalyptic history,” bemoaning the apostasy of Israel and Judah: yet holds up a promise of writing a new Covenant upon the heart.¹¹ Ezekiel is transitional from the pre-exilic period. Prophecy delivery is changed: instead of the “Word of God,” Ezekiel’s messages are through visions of an alternative world, including bizarre animals. Ezekiel’s message was of hope for the resettlement of the homeland and rebuilding the Temple. 2nd Isaiah, written before the end of Babylonian Exile is a message of God’s deliverance, promise, hope and redemption. The Persian king Cyrus II “the Great” was the divine instrument, anointed by God to defeat the Babylonians. Awaiting freedom with great anticipation, the people of Israel in 2nd Isaiah are the suffering servant, ravaged and demoralized, yet exalted.

3rd Isaiah is the turning point in this early trajectory of the sources to apocalyptic thinking and is eschatological in nature. The glorious return to Jerusalem and Judah was far less than promised by 2nd Isaiah: harsh circumstances including economic oppression with strife and conflict between the remnant population and those returning to reclaim the land.¹² After it was built, the Second Temple cult was less than expected by the righteous returnees, and God would judge the oppressors and syncretists to set society right. The eventual deliverance will include the weakest: with the crisis so evident the rewards of the righteous will be *postponed into a*

¹¹ “See, a time is coming – declares the LORD – when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers But such is the covenant I will make with the House of Israel after these days – declares the LORD: I will put My Teaching into their inmost being and inscribe it upon their hearts.” (*Tanakh*, Jer 31:31-33).

¹² When some of the Israelite elites returned from Exile they faced considerable enmity, particularly from the Samaritans and the Galileans to the north. Judah and Jerusalem were peopled by non-Israelites and the returnees were probably in the minority. Also there was a language distinction between the two groups.

future time. Disappointment is also expressed by the reversal in Zechariah 9 – 14, from enthusiasm for the priests and Temple initially expressed in Chaps. 1 – 8. His contemporary, Haggai saw the completion of the Temple as the prelude to the messianic age. Joel introduces an expression of God's judgment upon *all* humanity *in the future*, not just Israel's enemies (2:28 – 3:21), an opening for a universal aspect of the eschaton.

The seeds planted by these later prophets begin the growth of the genre. By the end of the 4th-century BCE these strands begin to coalesce into a pattern of apocalyptic thinking and consistent eschatological expression. The precise inception of the genre tradition is not known, the apocalyptic strand appearing sometime after the building of the Second Temple in 515 BCE and the eschatological tradition late in the oppressive Greek occupation period. Not all texts were stimulated by foreign occupation: some reacted to Judean leadership seen as antithetical to the Covenant and righteousness.¹³

There were other seeds planted that formed the growth of the two traditions and genres. Along with influences from the biblical wisdom and biblical prophecy traditions, extra-biblical sources are identified for both genres including dream narratives, oracles and testaments from Greece. Mesopotamian/Babylonian mantic¹⁴ wisdom and divination influences the apocalyptic genre with decoded deterministic mysterious signs and symbols by way of dreams, astrological

¹³ This became intense during the Hasmonean dynasty (164-40 BCE) and the Herodian reigns (40 BCE-ca. 44 CE) particularly as revealed in the *Damascus Document*, the *War Rule* and the *Community Rule* of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

¹⁴ The faculty of divination and prophecy from animal organs, oil in water, drawing lots, etc.

events¹⁵, oracles and prophecy. Persian influence tended toward the eschatological tradition entailing four main features: violent cosmic dualism, the periodization of history into discrete sectors of good and ill, political upheaval and belief in resurrection.¹⁶

Biblical wisdom influences are present to “indeed present a kind of wisdom insofar as [the genre does], first, offer an understanding of the structure of the universe and of history, and second, see right understanding as the precondition of right action.”¹⁷ The biblical wisdom tradition carried into the genre the development of “apocalyptic history” by the vision of the meaning of the past giving increased perspectives of what was happening in the current world. Job is one wisdom source, the quintessential theodicy narrative. His righteousness is answered with calamitous events. By accepting the mystery within which he resides, he is rewarded: a sterling example for later generations.¹⁸

This is a summary of the apocalyptic and apocalyptic eschatological genres that are very complex and diverse spanning centuries and addressing different social and religious issues in specific ways. There are three documents of many that best express the totality of the genres: 1st *Enoch*, the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation.

¹⁵ Mantic divination persists to this day by way of astrology.

¹⁶ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, pp. 29-33. These influences were evident by the Hellenistic era, also including historical interpretation by a divine being and *ex eventu* prophecy. The earliest division of history into cosmic periods of unfolding was by the Persians in the 12th-century BCE.

¹⁷ *ibid*, pg. 21.

¹⁸ Esther and *Tobit* also belong in part to the wisdom tradition by illustrating exemplary behavior by those in Diaspora.

1ST ENOCH:

1 Enoch is a collection of apocalyptic (revelatory) texts that were composed between the late fourth century B.C.E. and the turn of the era. The size of the collection, the diversity of its contents, and its many implications for the study of ancient Judaism and Christian origins make it arguably the most important Jewish writing that has survived from the Greco-Roman period.¹⁹

Given the spread of time it is evident several authors were responsible for the final text, with each book within the entire narrative having a number of authors. Originally composed in Aramaic, then translated into Greek, the current complete text is in the Ethiopic Bible as part of that canon. Portions and fragments of the Aramaic text are in the Dead Sea Scroll collection. The Ethiopic text organizes *1st Enoch* into eight books.²⁰

Pseudonymic apocalyptic figures are taken from the biblical texts: Enoch (*hanok*, “teacher” in Heb.²¹) is the first figure. Other than appearing in Gen 4:17 as Cain’s firstborn and the first city named after him according to the “J” genealogy, Enoch of apocalyptic dimensions is the 7th generation from Adam and Eve (Gen 5:18) in the “P” genealogy. In Gen 5:21-24;

¹⁹ Nickelsburg and VanderKam, pg. vii. The influences include the Book of Daniel, the Synoptic Gospels, Paul’s epistles, 1st Peter (3:18-22) and Jude (vss. 6 and 14-15; also a reference to the *Testament of Moses* in vs. 9).

²⁰ “Book of Watchers” (Chaps. 1-36), “Book of Parables” (aka “Similitudes,” Chaps. 37-71), “Book of the Luminaries” (aka “Astronomical Book,” Chaps. 72-82), “The Dream Visions” (aka “Book of Dreams” or “Animal Apocalypse,” Chaps. 83-90), “A Narrative Bridge” (aka “Apocalypse of Weeks,” Chap. 91), “Epistle of Enoch” (Chaps. 92-105), “Birth of Noah” (Chaps. 106-107) and “A Final Book of Enoch” (Chap. 108).

²¹ The etymology of the word also lends credence to the singularity of Enoch. The “J” writers saw *hanak* as “to dedicate” the basis for the relation to the first city. For the “P” editors, the root *hek* or *hink* means “worldly experience, worldly wisdom gained through experience, sophistication” as a cognate to the name (VanderKam, pg. 29).

When Enoch had lived 65 years, he begot Methuselah. After the birth of Methuselah, Enoch *walked with God* 300 years; and he begot sons and daughters. All the days of Enoch came to 365 years. Enoch *walked with God*; then he was no more, for God took him up.²²

Speculation by scholars about these enigmatic verses centers on two points: the redaction of the older “J” text by the “P” editors; and for some on the meaning of the Hebrew.

The “J” genealogy places Enoch as the third generation and namesake of the first city, implying maintenance if not establishment of civilization. The “P” genealogy has Enoch the seventh antediluvian generation.²³ In either case, numerology plays a role in the persona of Enoch. Secondly, from a numerological standpoint, Enoch’s life-span is far less than others in the genealogical listing,²⁴ symbolically equivalent to the solar year as understood at the time of redaction. “Scholars have been aware for a long time that adequate explanations for the unique elements in Gen 5:21-24 could not be derived from biblical literature alone and, in their quest for parallel material from which to elucidate these enigmatic phrases, they have regularly turned to the so-called ‘Sumerian’ King List.”²⁵ This leads to an influence from Sumerian/Babylonian mythology. The seventh antediluvian Sumerian king was Enmeduranki, founder of the guild of diviners and who was able to be in the presence of, and share fellowship with the solar god Shamash and

²² *Tanakh*. Emphasis added.

²³ Gen 4:17-26 for the “J” and Gen 5:1-32 for the “P.” The “J” source tradition dates from the 10th-century BCE and the “P” source tradition during and after the Exile in the 6th-century BCE. “. . . J’s Enoch embodies a tradition that has nothing in common with P’s portrait of him other than the name” (VanderKam, pg. 28).

²⁴ Jared, his father lived 962 years and Methuselah, his son lived 969 years, an anomaly given the same gene pool!

²⁵ *ibid*, pp. 33-34.

the god Adad, the oracle-giver.²⁶ This association leads scholars to believe the biblical passage is the “P” redactor’s way of integrating Enoch into an aniconic monotheism idiom based upon a polytheistic persona and mythos of divination, solar relationship and “walking with God.” This probability places an interest in the way the biblical text is read.

One unique aspect about Enoch is that, similar to Elijah,²⁷ the text says he did not die but “was taken up” by God, later placing both in apocalyptic and eschatological contexts. James Vander-Kam argues over the term “walking with God.” The first two Hebrew designations of God in the text are with the definite article *ha elohim* while the third and final reference to God is without the definite article, merely *elohim* (all in the plural form).

This is not to say, of course, that the priestly editor meant *ha elohim* as a reference to several gods; the suggestion is merely that P did not succeed in removing all hints of the foreign source from which he borrowed for his portrait of Enoch [from the *Sumerian King List*]. Also, later interpreters developed this definite plural as a reference to angels among whom they pictured Enoch as living both during and after his 365 years. As a matter of fact, *elohim* does mean *angels* at times in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Ps 97:8 . . .)

²⁶ “In the *Sumerian King List*, the seventh king is Enmeduranki or Enmenduranna. Sippar, the city ruled by this king, was a center of the cult of Shamash, the sun god. Enoch is associated with the solar calendar: his age is given as 365 years in Genesis and [“The Book of Luminaries”] presupposes a calendar of 364 days. Enmeduranki was also the founder of a guild of diviners and a recipient of revelations” (Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, pg. 45).

²⁷ 2nd Kgs 2:1a; 11.

and it may be that P in Gen 5:22, 24 suggested this by the definite article in the two occurrences of the phrase in contrast to the anarthrous *elohim* at the end of v.24.²⁸

Enoch assumes unique features that are favorable to God as presented by the “P” redactors, which captured the imagination of later generations, establishing the tone and imagery for the apocalyptic genre to continue using biblical figures of the past.

In the narrative of *1st Enoch* two biblical stories are used, expounded and expanded upon in order to be instructive, to give deeper meaning to the contemporary circumstances.²⁹ It is remarkable that the entirety of the *1st Enoch* tradition stems from just a few passages of Genesis:

When men began to increase on earth and daughters were born to them, the divine beings [or sons of God] saw how beautiful the daughters of men were and took wives from among those that pleased them It was then, and later too, that the Nephilim appeared on earth – when the divine beings cohabited with the daughters of men, who

²⁸ VanderKam, pg. 31. These differences do not appear in English translations. I do not hold to the “sloppy editing” thesis of the author. The redactors were intelligent and otherwise careful scribes, and the retention of *ha elohim* may be rooted in theological experiences during the Exile, prompting the inclusion for reasons now lost.

²⁹ It is not known what socio-political circumstance inaugurated the initial collection of the text, which probably began with the death of Alexander in 323 BCE and during the following benign reign of the Ptolemies (301-198 BCE). After more than twenty years of war, the Seleucids assumed occupation of Judea at the beginning of the 2nd-century. If the assembling of the “The Book of Watchers” and “The Book of Luminaries” began in the late 4th-century then perhaps the war caused some oppression or social distress. Even with the transfer of power, no known era of persecution is recorded. Perhaps the stimulation came from within the Judean society with the High Priest acting as a petty monarch. Even though there is little evidence of direct oppression, “. . . in *1 Enoch* 1–5 one moves in an eschatological world and indeed Enoch is, for the first time in surviving literature, brought into relation with the *eschaton* . . .” (*ibid*, pg. 119).

bore them offspring [or giants]. They were the heroes of old, men of renown (Gen 6:1-4).³⁰

This terse and enigmatic passage is expanded in the first book of the total text, “The Book of Watchers,” the Watchers being the divine beings charged to watch over humanity and disgraced by their actions. Enoch is the central figure and “that by the Hellenistic period he had attracted to himself not only the traits that Gen 5:21-24 had ascribed to him but also mythological characteristics of disparate kinds and apparently from various sources.”³¹ “The Book of Watchers” (late 4th- to late-3rd-century BCE), is a composite text forming the basis for the remaining collection. Essentially apocalyptic, Enoch’s heavenly journey compares the orderliness of nature with the wickedness of the human world. This is followed by the visions of the Watchers’ (fallen angels’) sins by marrying women giving birth to the giants who gave improper revelation and secrets to humanity³² that created the chaos requiring the Flood.³³ Enoch is the arbiter announcing condemnation by God to the Watchers following his ascent to heaven and

³⁰ *Tanakh*. Some scholars see this passage as a polemic against inter-species sexual intercourse, not only at the cosmic plane, but in the mundane as well.

³¹ VanderKam, pg. 110. These include modeling after Dt 33:1 and the Balaam cycle in Num 22 – 24, as well as influences of Mesopotamian mantic divination and Greek, particularly the myth of Prometheus.

³² *ibid*, pp. 114-115. Contained in the opening lines of “The Book of Watchers,” *1st Enoch* 1 – 5. The author(s) deemed the secrets taught by the Watchers (crafts, arts, weapon manufacture, cosmetics, and mantic astrology) led “to untold wickedness and misery” (*ibid*, pg. 126). Keeping Enoch within the biblical tradition, “the introductory paragraph, which tells the reader very little about the identity of Enoch, begins with words modeled on Deut 33:1 and then continue with several phrases borrowed from the [diviner] Balaam stories in Numbers 22 – 24” (*ibid*, pg. 115). “His associations with the mantic world are reaffirmed in that he is presented in language that is unmistakably drawn from the Balaam stories and poems of Numbers 22 – 24. Divining necessarily entails prediction, and here Enoch does predict; but in these chapters a new and momentous step is taken in that Enoch becomes the first herald of the *eschaton*” (*ibid*, pg. 122).

³³ Scholars have long known the Noah/Flood episode is patterned after the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which includes a flood narrative.

the Throne Vision.³⁴ His two journeys elaborate the biblical theme that “Enoch walked with God (*ha elohim*).”

“The Book of Luminaries” (dates from 200-150 BCE) is also revelatory, celebrating the order of the cosmos and giving Enoch observations of the sun, moon and stars to substantiate the solar year as opposed to the lunar year.³⁵ Babylonian divination related to astronomic observations and pseudo-scientific observations was a primary influence upon these two books. “Enoch’s Dream Vision” (ca. 164-160 BCE) is eschatological dated to the contemporary Book of Daniel in support of the Maccabean revolt. The “Epistle of Enoch” and “A Narrative Bridge” (ca. 2nd-century BCE) are in the wisdom genre as testamentary teaching to Enoch’s sons, stressing righteousness. These remaining books are eschatological with the earliest extant reference to the “Son of Man.” “The Book of Parables” dates to the turn of the era (with some influence from Daniel³⁶). “The Final Book of Enoch” summarizes with an interpretive conclusion, “which exhorts the righteous who live ‘in the end of days’ to endure in their expectation because the judgment will soon vindicate them and eradicate sin and sinners who have troubled and oppressed them.”³⁷ 1st *Enoch* set the tone and standard for following apocalyptic/eschatological literature by symbolically referring to the past while really speaking to the present generation.

³⁴ The Throne Vision is rooted in Ezekiel’s Throne Chariot, the *Merkabah*.

³⁵ There is also scholarly suspicion these attributes given to Enoch were intended to introduce into the Hellenistic world an Israelite figure who could be superior to the founding heroes of ancient Greece and Egypt.

³⁶ The influence from the Book of Daniel includes passages related to Dan 7:9-14; 8:15; 9:21; 10:5; and 12:6.

³⁷ Nickelsburg & VanderKam, pg. 13.

It is the first manifestation of apocalyptic thinking in coherent literary form using symbolic/mythological language to describe a “symbolic universe.”

THE BOOK OF DANIEL:

As with Enoch, “Daniel” is a pseudonym for the unknown author(s) of the Book of Daniel. The legendary “person” Daniel appears only in two places in Ezekiel that was an influence upon the author(s); along with Job and Noah he is righteous and wise.³⁸ The Book of Daniel was probably edited between 167-164 BCE, during the persecutions of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. It is in two parts: a collection of stories in third person (Chaps. 1 – 6) mostly in Aramaic; and four visions in the first person (Chaps. 7 – 12) mostly in Hebrew.³⁹ The latter is similar to sections of *1st Enoch* written contemporaneously and earlier but no dependence between the two can be found; evidence that separate “symbolic universes” can co-exist. Manuscript fragments of the Book of Daniel are in the Dead Sea Scroll collection.⁴⁰

The first part is folklore genre establishing Daniel’s persona and locus of activity – a Jew in exile in Babylon. The delineation of the history of the Babylonian and Persian eras is erroneous and confused indicating a non-contemporary recounting. The second part describes the “apocalyptic history” of the Hellenist era and is essentially accurate, thereby dating the complete narra-

³⁸ The passages are Ezek 14:14; 28:3. Further reference to a person Daniel occurs in Ezra 8:2; also in *1st Mac* 1:60.

³⁹ The Aramaic portion deals with the non-Judean history of Babylon, while the Hebrew section focuses upon Israel and the final judgment.

⁴⁰ The excluded portions are in the apocrypha: *Prayer of Azariah*, *Song of the Three Jews*, *Suzanna* and *Bel and the Dragon*. The additions in the Dead Sea Scroll collection are *Prayer of Nabonidus* and a fragment of *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Daniel*.

tive. There are distinct genre differences between the two parts: the first royal court tales derived from Babylonia and the second apocalyptic eschatology. It is believed by scholars the tales in the first section were independent and collected at an indeterminate time well before the Maccabean revolt.

The first part is similar to Esther and *Tobit*; tales collected about how Jews in foreign lands remain *Torah* obedient, as well as the Joseph narrative cycle (Gen 37 – 50).⁴¹ Affinity with Joseph is clear: lowly wise captives becoming courtiers of a foreign king with dream interpretation abilities.⁴² The tales affirmed Diaspora Jews fidelity to *Torah* obedience and to participate in the foreign life, following Jeremiah's advice.⁴³ The court tales in the Book of Daniel are literary devices to provide authority to the protagonist undergirding the revelations in the second part.

The purpose of the apocalyptic eschatological second part is to show how the Maccabean struggle is not a human endeavor. Tracing the Hellenistic regimes allows the author(s) to illustrate the Greek king's wars were really manifestations of angelic wars and not requiring human efforts. This section has various literary influences, particularly Persian. The visions in part rely upon those of Ezekiel, symbolic imagery that relate to Zechariah and prophecy from Jere-

⁴¹ Collins, *Daniel*, pp. 39-40. Also included in the source matrix are *Judith*, *1st Esdras* 3, and the Ugaritic story of *Ahikar*.

⁴² *ibid*, pg. 39.

⁴³ "Thus said the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, to the whole community which I exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters. Multiply there, do not decrease. And seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to the LORD in its behalf; for in its prosperity you shall prosper" (*Tanakh*, Jer 29:4-9).

miah⁴⁴. The primary issue for the author(s) of the Book of Daniel is not for the re-establishment of Israel, but rather the eradication of a persecuting and sinful kingdom and the establishment of the sovereignty of God.⁴⁵ As with all apocalyptic literature, there is no straight line delineation from the previous 1st *Enoch*, but rather an intricate weaving of prior prophetic traditions into a new fabric to address the ever-changing “symbolic universe.”

THE BOOK OF REVELATION:

The Book of Revelation culminates the Jewish apocalyptic eschatology genre⁴⁶. For scholars it is ironic this text gave the apocalyptic genre its name even though it lacks many traits, with an anomalous absence of pseudonymity and *ex eventu* review of history. Its circular letter form is unique within the tradition. The narrative does adhere “to the apocalyptic manner of revelation – mediation by an angel, visions, even a brief suggestion of a heavenly ascent in 4:1.”⁴⁷ The images with reference to Ezekiel and the Book of Daniel place the author in the Jewish eschatological tradition even though he is addressing seven emerging Christian communities. Based on Semitic features of the Greek text John of Patmos likely migrated from Judea, proba-

⁴⁴ From Ezekiel the animals in 1:5-10; from Zechariah are the symbols of the scroll, the four horse-drawn chariots; from Jeremiah the 70-year period of trial.

⁴⁵ Collins, *Daniel*, pg. 66.

⁴⁶ Contemporary apocalyptic documents include the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, 4th *Ezra*, 2nd *Baruch* and 3rd *Baruch*.

⁴⁷ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, pg. 271. Rev 4:7; “After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this’” (NRSV).

bly after the war of 66-73 CE to Asia Minor, the suspected site of the writing⁴⁸, dated to the end of the 1st-century CE.⁴⁹

It is well known that Revelation never explicitly quotes Scripture. It is equally well known that it is permeated with the language, forms, and ideas of older Scripture, especially the prophets . . . [including] several sayings that allude to Daniel 7:13 and two that are variants of sayings in the Synoptic tradition that, in one or more forms, refer to the Son of Man⁵⁰

It is clear that John, in using 1st Enoch's and Daniel's "Son of Man" image of arriving on the clouds was referring to the risen Christ. Yet, the "Son of Man" was a common, although imprecise term used in the latter half of the 1st-century CE. The Book of Revelation reflects an "independent development of a very early christological tradition."⁵¹

The beast in Rev 13:1 is a direct influence from the fourth beast in Dan 7, each with ten horns and seven heads, and in making war. "The author of Revelation adapted images of Daniel in an analogously historical and political way"⁵² with Daniel's beast representing the Hellenistic kingdom and John's the Roman Empire. Other similarities include the length the rebellion against

⁴⁸ Meeks, pg. 2307.

⁴⁹ Some scholars place the date to 64 CE during the persecutions of Nero in Rome, also the site of composition.

⁵⁰ A. Y. Collins, pg. 102.

⁵¹ *ibid*, pg.105.

⁵² *ibid*, pg. 108. The number "seven" may refer to the seven hills of the City of Rome, perhaps to the mythical seven kings of Rome before the Republic. The number 666 is from the numeric value of the Greek letters spelling out Nero Caesar whose death was by suicide, but there were few, if any, witnesses. There lingered for decades the belief he never died and lived in exile in Parthia to return at a future date. The *Sibylline Oracle* 5 describes the return of Nero. By the time of the writing by John of Patmos in the later period of the reign of Domitian the specter of Nero still prevailed as the evil counterpart to the coming of the Messiah.

God would last, the heavenly throne room, the heavenly roster of the elect, angelic images, and the sealing of the words at the closing of the text. The difference from the Book of Daniel and prior genres: a lack of historical review to understand predetermined events, which is replaced with deliverance by the risen Christ. A messianic tradition infuses the narrative as a key to this “symbolic universe.”

THE JESUS FOLLOWER/EARLY CHRISTIAN CONTEXT:

Paul’s letters and the Synoptic Gospels bears the mark of apocalyptic eschatological worldviews, lacking heavenly ascents (save for 2nd Cor 12:2-4⁵³), and prophecies of the periods of history.⁵⁴ Visions do occur: Mary’s visitation, Joseph’s two dreams, God’s favor descending upon Jesus during his baptism, Satan (a fallen angel) showing Jesus the realm he could obtain, the transfiguration and the apostles “seeing” the risen Christ – including particularly Paul. Whether these visions can be ascribed as apocalyptic may be debated. I hold they are specific forms of the evolving tradition since there was wide diversity within apocalyptic eschatology at the turn of the era⁵⁵.

⁵³ “I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows – was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat.” Regardless if this is not autobiographical it remains clearly within the apocalyptic tradition. Certainly the resurrection of Jesus fits within the apocalyptic tradition.

⁵⁴ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, pgs. 256 & 258. “The extended narratives of the Gospels are problematic both because of their diversity and because they are written from a perspective of faith that Jesus was the messiah, exalted Lord. These problems bear directly on the role of apocalypticism in early Christianity.” (*ibid*, pg. 256).

⁵⁵ These include some of the Dead Sea Scrolls; the *Sibylline Oracles* 1, 2, 3, 4 and 11; 2nd *Enoch*; *Testament of Abraham*; *Testament of Moses*; and the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*.

Mark 13 is identified as the “little apocalypse” with references to the “Son of Man.”⁵⁶ The thesis of this paper proposes Mk 13 is not an apocalypse but rather eschatology. The post-Easter references to the Son of Man⁵⁷ ties the text to 1st *Enoch* and Dan 7, implying cosmic judgment and messianic claims.

The identification of Jesus as the Son of Man who would come on the clouds of heaven presupposes the belief that he was risen and ascended. This belief became the cornerstone of early Christian apocalypticism. The resurrection is the premise on which all hope of the second coming is based. But the resurrection cannot be understood in isolation. It was viewed as part of an eschatological sequence similar to what we find in the apocalypse of the historical type.⁵⁸

The “historical type” of apocalypse describes by way of historical periodization how the contemporary circumstances came about using a broad historical perspective, now replaced with the death and resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection was believed in the early stages of the christological tradition to be the forerunner of the eschaton to imminently take place. Scholarly debates now argue whether Jesus promoted apocalyptic eschatology or was within the wisdom or prophetic traditions; all positions being indeterminate since we have no autobiographical material.⁵⁹ However, the eschaton is not necessarily the chaotic end of the physical world, but

⁵⁶ *ibid*, pp. 261-263. Also Mt 24 – 25 and Lk 21:5-36 with equal references to the Son of Man. Mt refers directly to Daniel (24:15). Whether these references are directly related to Dan 7:13 are debated (A. Y. Collins, pp. 90-96).

⁵⁷ Mk 2:10, 28; 8:31; 13:24-26, 32; 14:61-62.

⁵⁸ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, pg. 264.

⁵⁹ Schweitzer portrayed “Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet” with some basis for promoting the eschaton, which lends itself to the various eschatological Jewish literatures around the turn of the era. On the other hand, the eschatological expression can be interpreted as a present attainable state; that of wisdom related to the *Psalms of*

according to a “symbolic universe” could be an alteration of human and divine relationships within the existing physical world. “After the death of Jesus, the movement of his followers had a strong eschatological orientation in most of its forms” expressing a popular, non-scribal, non-speculative (in the relation to earlier Jewish texts) eschatological hope.⁶⁰

What we know about Paul is different. He was a messianic Pharisee, holding strongly to prominent Pharisaic conceptions of mass bodily resurrections of the dead at the eschaton, not a spiritual resurrection since Pharisees did not hold a dualistic view.⁶¹ In his understanding of the risen Christ, with his Pharisaic stance Paul believed he was called by God⁶² and saw the resurrection as the precursor of the eschaton, as found in the “historical apocalypses.” Bodily resurrection of the dead was a prominent aspect of Pharisaic teaching at the turn of the era.⁶³ His mission was to prepare the people, Jew and Gentile for the inevitable world and life beyond. His argument for preparation of the imminent eschaton was for the Jew to be *Torah* obedient *as he interpreted it* (being a Pharisee) and the Gentile to have the *faith of the Christ as he interpreted it* (being an apostle) in order to bring in the reign of the God of Israel for all nations and inaugu-

Solomon, *Testament of Moses* and “The Book of Parables” in *1st Enoch*, interpretations of the *Gospel of Thomas* and “Q” along with some of the Dead Sea Scroll collection (*ibid*, pp. 257-259).

⁶⁰ *ibid*, pg. 260.

⁶¹ According to Josephus (*War*, 2.162-163 and *Antiquities* 18.13-14).

⁶² Rom 1:1; 1st Cor 1:1; Gal 1:15.

⁶³ “And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people but rather as people of the flesh” (1st Cor 3:1). “When the doctrine of the resurrection came into Jewish thought . . . the supposition that accompanied it was that both the body and the soul perished, but were destined in time both to be revived.” Sandmel, pg. 178. The first reference known was by Jason of Cyrene in *2nd Maccabees*, originally written in Greek ca. 150 BCE.

rate the messianic age.⁶⁴ Needless to say, the messianic impulse was a strong element in this form of apocalyptic eschatology.

One connection to the apocalyptic tradition is *ex eventu* prophecy. With all the Gospels written after the fall of the Temple in 70 CE, putting such disastrous prophecy in the mouth of Jesus who lived forty years before fits well with the trait; giving authority and credibility to Jesus once afforded to a pseudonym.

CONCLUSION: WHAT IS HAPPENING TO US NOW?

The development and trajectory of apocalyptic and apocalyptic eschatological genres were executed by schools of scribes learned in the biblical texts. Each school expressed a “symbolic universe” apart from that of either of the leaders and people of the dominant society and/or their own Judean contemporaries who were willing to compromise the Covenant. As the genre unfolded through history, a language and sets of imagery and symbols stimulated the imagination of each successive generation. The trajectory was not a theological enterprise: rather an admonition aimed at what was deemed right praxis. We do not know how lastingly the messages were received by the contemporary audience. A lasting audience did accumulate from the era of the early Church and the developing rabbinate. Copies of some apocalyptic doc-

⁶⁴ Pamela Eisenbaum makes compelling arguments to support a radical alternative view of the ministry of Paul in opposition to the lens produced by the pessimism and self-loathing of Augustine and Luther. According to her *Torah* was to be observed by the Jews in preparation of bringing all the nations into the Covenant, while the Gentiles had to have *the faith of Christ* in order to be a part of that eschaton. She argues against Paul proclaiming that one should have *faith in Christ*, but rather *the [faithfulness or] faith of Christ* in God in preparation for facing the eschaton, because “In the Greek text that underlies the English there is no preposition between the nouns ‘faith’ and ‘Christ’” (pp. 189-195).

uments were collected past the 5th-century CE, a fact reinforced by 1st *Enoch* being a part of the Ethiopic Bible.⁶⁵ Apocalyptic thinking continued well past the tumultuous historical periods of the devout Judeans desperately holding onto a valued tradition against all odds imaginable.

Oppressions following the approximate four-hundred-year arc of the initial trajectory did not end. What did fade was the genre itself. The intensity of the originating apocalyptic thinking began to evaporate as the nature of a “symbolic universe” to address oppression changed. The destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE signaled the development of two new genres of apocalyptic thinking. Beginning in 68 CE during Vespasian’s siege of Jerusalem, with the escape from the city by the Pharisee R. Johanan b. Zakkia to Yavneh, we see the founding of the rabbinic tradition and a new “symbolic universe.” In a few years following the rabbi’s escape the Gospel of Mark was written establishing a new eschatological genre to express yet another “symbolic universe.” For the Jews these formative and nascent rabbinic efforts continued through the catastrophic bar Kokhba revolt in 132-135 CE; and for the Christians, final and complete separation from the synagogue by the third generation (100-140 CE) developed into an embryonic church structure by the first decades of the 2nd-century CE. New literary genres developed. For the Jews, beginning with R. Johanan b. Zakkia, followed by his disciples and R. Akiba the *Mishnah* began to be collected⁶⁶; for the emerging Christians apologia begun by Quadratus,

⁶⁵ This includes the *Book of Jubilees* in that bible. There are at least four known documents that are identified by scholars written between 1st *Enoch* and at the same time or a decade or two after the Book of Revelation as representing a form of apocalyptic and apocalyptic eschatological literature (4th Ezra, *Apocalypse of Abraham*, *Sibylline Oracles* 5 and 8).

⁶⁶ The core to the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds.

Aristides and Justin Martyr and letters by Ignatius and Diognetus: *all* attempting to spread a respective uniform “symbolic universe” early in the century. Neither emerging genre held out the hope for an eschaton in the near future. Visions, prophecies and self-declared messiahship by the non-learned were discouraged.⁶⁷ The institutionalization of the two traditions attempted to mitigate any sense of hopelessness through formal organization and eventually ordination.

The position of this paper is that it is important to be aware of the earliest manifestations of apocalyptic thinking in order to better comprehend what persists to this day. The importance of the genre in the so-called inter-testamental period was long overlooked. Biblical scholars writing through the 19th-century and three-quarters of the 20th-century ignored the period between the Book of Daniel and the earliest letters of Paul. The genre was a theological embarrassment.

The word “apocalyptic” is popularly associated with fanatical millenarian expectation, and indeed the canonical apocalypses of Daniel and especially John have very often been used by millenarian groups. Theologians of a more rational bent are often reluctant to admit that such material played a formative role in early Christianity. There is

⁶⁷ Simon, pg. 11. After the final destruction of Jerusalem in 135 CE by Hadrian, the apocalyptists came to a screeching halt, since they “. . . had had their day. The day of the visionaries was over; their place was taken by the rabbis, who from now on were to fill the office of spiritual guide.” The advice to the people by the rabbis was that if one heard of the arrival of the Messiah, “finish [plowing] and then go to see if the messiah has come.” For the emerging Christian Church, in this period of proto-orthodoxy, local and lay prophecy was beginning to be neutralized by way of the Pauline Pastoral letters and 2nd Peter.

consequently a prejudice against the apocalyptic literature which is deeply ingrained in biblical scholarship.⁶⁸

That “prejudice” subsided within the past 35 years of intense and intelligent scholarship. To understand the genre of the past is to afford glimpses to see why sectors of today’s societies can feel under siege because that portion of the general population has a “symbolic universe” at odds with the dominant culture.

The arrival of the messianic age for some Jews and the Second Coming of Christ for some Christians persisted for two thousand years.⁶⁹ For the Zionists and the millenarians when political and religious pressures mount enough for each group to feel under siege, the apocalyptic and eschatological aspects of the respective “symbolic universe” kicks in. To destroy one’s “symbolic universe” is to annihilate one’s place in the world making it “less than inevitable.”⁷⁰ How the retention and expression of those views are manifest varies: some laughable, others tragically. The eschatological elements of apocalyptic thinking are rooted deeply in the past, and will remain for the unforeseeable future.

We all possess a “symbolic universe,” a social construct that shapes each person’s relationship to the world. Each personal “symbolic universe” is the hermeneutic that gives meaning to

⁶⁸ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, pg. 1. Until recently, interpretations of Paul’s letters were based upon the evolution of the later Christian Church without any references to the importance of apocalyptic thinking of which he was a part.

⁶⁹ Theological and apocalyptic references to the literature of the past maintain and support that fervor in extreme elements of each religious tradition, following the tradition of using “prior images of persecution and other times creating new images to address oppression” (pg. 4 of this paper).

⁷⁰ Berger and Luckman, pg. 108.

one's "world" and relationships. To the extent a "symbolic universe" is rigid, fixed and deemed permanent is the measure of the depth and breadth of apocalyptic thinking. I have members of the congregation I currently serve ardently engaged in issues of immigration and global warming. In some cases the tendency toward apocalyptic thinking is strong, even unto an eschaton. I do not believe this congregation is unique, the specifics of the issues aside.

If the premises of this paper have any validity, to what extent does apocalyptic thinking reveal itself in our Unitarian Universalist faith tradition today? How is apocalyptic thinking manifest, not only in the life of a Unitarian Universalist congregation, but in personal lives? How rigid is the "symbolic universe" in some sectors of our faith tradition? How *are* the images, symbols and rhetoric of the ancient past currently alive in Jewish and Christian traditions, *revealed* in our congregations today? For my part, I believe them to be inescapable.

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