

The Apocalyptic Imagination

- ◆ Apocalypse = literary genre
- ◆ Apocalypticism = a social ideology
- ◆ Apocalyptic Eschatology = ideas and motifs found in other literary genres and social settings.

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Apocalypse

- ◆ **Apocalypse**: a literary **genre** that takes the form of a narrative in which a revelation is mediated usually by an angel to a human. The revelation involves a transcendent reality concerning eschatological salvation and the supernatural world. Example: Book of the Watchers (1 Enoch 1-36)
- ◆ **Apocalyptic**: any writing that contains apocalyptic motifs is said to be apocalyptic. That writing need **not** be an apocalypse (see above) and may utilize other literary forms. Examples: Daniel 7-12; the War Scroll (Qumran)

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Elements of Apocalyptic Literature

- ◆ Includes otherworldly accounts of events **happening in heaven**
- ◆ Deeply symbolic visions (utilizes poetic and mythological language) of the end given by **God** through **angels** to a human recipient who records
- ◆ The **present time is evil** and is controlled by some face of evil (Satan; Mastema; Beliar)
- ◆ **God destroys forces of evil** to bring about his kingdom
- ◆ Written during and for a **time of crisis**; the present difficulties of the righteous are part of a cosmic battle

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Elements continued

- ◆ Supernatural events and **transcendent realities impinge on history** of our world
- ◆ Sense of **dualism**- all things are aligned with good or evil (God vs. Satan; the righteous vs. the wicked; angels vs. demons)
- ◆ The **future** time, the age to come, is **controlled by God; events have been determined**
- ◆ **Judgment of the living and dead** takes place
- ◆ In the end, **God will prevail** and triumph over evil.

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Origins of Jewish Apocalypticism

- ◆ Jewish roots of apocalypticism are in Israel's wisdom and prophetic traditions (though apocalypticism does appear outside Judaism in the Hellenistic era)
- ◆ **Wisdom literature:** like wisdom, apocalypticism sees the structure of the universe as intimately related to human life. The two traditions share the idea that right understanding is required for right action. But in the wisdom literature understanding is accessible to human reason; while in apocalyptic literature, special revelation is necessary. The two traditions also share a preoccupation with cosmology (not found in prophecy).
- ◆ **Prophecy:** Prophetic literature and apocalyptic literature both describe their messages as coming through direct revelation. Like Prophecy, apocalyptic literature expresses the conviction that God is about to make an appearance on the stage of human history. But prophecy does not describe an expected cosmic transformation, nor does it speak of the transcendence of death.

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Origins of Jewish Apocalypticism

- ◆ Jewish and Persian apocalyptic writings offer an explanation for, and a solution to, the **foreign domination** typical of the Hellenistic period.
- ◆ **Apocalyptic uses ancient traditions and mythologies** in a symbolically expressive way. Apocalypses do not just supply new data; they reveal patterns in events, patterns with deep cultural roots, so as to provide a new way of experiencing the world.
- ◆ **Fundamental themes** such as the opposition of good and evil, struggles for order against chaos, renewal of the cosmos, and return to a primeval state are central in many apocalypses.

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Eschatology

- ◆ **Eschatology:** study or teaching about the last (*eschaton*) things
- ◆ Eschatology concerns how God will bring about God's purposes for the universe and suggests that God is in control of history and has a plan for humans.
- ◆ Eschatology can refer to the end of an era / world or end of life matters for the individual.

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Apocalyptic Eschatology

- ◆ Negative assessment of *this* world and *this* age. God does not employ ordinary means, but rather supernatural means to bring about God's plan for the world. There will be **resolution in a future time**. This may take the form of God **bringing to an end this present evil age or transforming it with a new beginning**. The resolution may concern post-mortem judgment (rewards and punishments).

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Value of Apocalyptic Literature

- ◆ **Religious value for modern readers:** apocalyptic literature continues to **challenge** and **comfort** us. People of God should be motivated to work to make visions of freedom, peace, and justice a reality; the world as it is now is not the way it should be. People of God should challenge "beasts" in modern society that dehumanize and oppress people of the world.

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