PARALLEL GUIDE 34
Wisdom & Apocalyptic Literature

Summary:

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first introduces the wisdom literature as a genre common to many Near and Middle Eastern cultures. It details Israel's rich contributions to the genre and then concentrates on the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job, the last of which not only represents wisdom literature at its finest, but also stands as one of world literature's great classics. The second section sets the historical context for the birth of apocalyptic literature. Alexander the Great's conquest of Persia brought Greek culture to Palestine. Known as Hellenism, it threatened Judaism with new ideas. The empire was subdivided after the death of Alexander, and Judah fell under the oppressive rule of Syria. When Syria defiled the temple, the Jews rebelled under the leadership of Judas Maccabeas. This tragic era gave rise to a different literary genre, the apocalyptic tradition.

Learning Objectives

• Read Proverbs 10:1-31, Job, Daniel 1-6

• Describe the two major types of wisdom literature

• Describe three kinds of poetic parallelism

• State the main message of Ecclesiastes

• State the two challenges to God found in the Book of Job

• State how Job's answer was given to him

• Contrast the worldview of Greek thinkers and the way in which the followers of YHWH interpret things

• Identify "the abomination that makes desolate" cited in Daniel 11:31

• Define eschatology

Assignments to Deepen Your Understanding

1. State the significance of the "wise man" and relate this to the function of the magician in ancient Egypt (cf. The Joseph Novel).

2. The Book of Job is a classic about human suffering and our relationship to God. What do you do when you suffer and do not have a rational explanation?

3. Apocalyptic literature is grist for various interpretations of the Christian message. Consider what use you may make of this kind of literature. What might it mean to those who are living in a situation that does not support one's faith or limits one's freedom? Has anything like this ever happened to you? If not, what would you do if it did?

4. How does apocalyptic literature help you understand the end of things?

Preparing for Your Seminar

You are coming to the end of the EfM cycle for Year One. Some in your group may be coming to the end of their EfM work as they complete Year Four. As you look over the past year, what in the wisdom literature speaks to you about the events that you have experienced (suffered) during the year? As you look to the future, what

does the apocalyptic literature suggest to you about what is to come and your understanding of your ministry in the future? Think about this and bring your thoughts to the discussion around Common Lesson 5.

Additional Sources

Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel*, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (InterVarsity, 1978).

J. L. Crenshaw, "Wisdom in the Old Testament," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, supplementary volume*, pp. 952-956.

Marvin H. Pope, *Job*, Anchor Bible Series, 3rd ed. (Doubleday, 1973).

J. F. Priest, "Ecclesiastes," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, supplementary volume*, pp. 249-250.

R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs-Ecclesiaste*s, Anchor Bible Series (Doubleday, 1965).

W. Sibley Towner, *Daniel*, The Interpretation Series (John Knox Press, 1984). This series is especially designed for teachers and preachers and so written at a level very accessible to the educated lay reader.

Gerhard von Rad, "Daniel and Apocalyptic," *Old Testament Theology, vol. II*, pp. 301-315 (Harper & Row, 1965).

Chapter 34
WISDOM AND APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

We mentioned the "wisdom" literature in connection with King Solomon and with the psalms. In this lesson we examine briefly three Old Testament books which are examples of this form of writing: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job. The Song of Solomon, also called the Song of Songs, is sometimes listed among the wisdom books because of the tradition that it came from King Solomon. It shows few of the characteristics of wisdom writing and is actually a composite of several erotic love songs. While valuable in allowing us to see the honestly earthy appreciation of sexuality which characterized the Hebrew outlook, the book would probably not have been included in the sacred canon had not Solomon's name been attached to it. Later Jews interpreted it as an allegory of the love between YHWH and Israel, and Christians have seen it as speaking of Jesus' love for his church. Neither meaning is found in the book itself; the love described therein is thoroughly human.

Daniel 1-6, which we consider later, is also sometimes classed as wisdom literature. In the Apocrypha the books of Sirach (also called Ecclesiasticus, not to be confused with the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes), the Wisdom of Solomon, and—according to some scholars—I Esdras, Tobit, Baruch, and additions to Daniel are further examples of wisdom literature.

We examine only the three Old Testament books. If you do not have time to read all of them, follow the

references made to the biblical text and sample some passages in each book.

Origins of Wisdom Literature

Between the 5th and the 3rd centuries BCE there was a flowering of human genius throughout the ancient world. This was the great age of the Greek philosophers. Socrates (470-399 BCE), Plato (428-348 BCE), and Aristotle (384-322 BCE) represent the pinnacle of this period. Far beyond the Mediterranean region, Confucius (557-479 BCE) in China and Gautama Buddha (born about 563 BCE) in India developed their great spiritual systems. Such giant figures did not arise in a vacuum; the times had to be right. Civilization had developed a sufficient specialization of labor to permit the emergence of a leisure class that could devote itself to the life of thought.

In the Mesopotamian region these circumstances produced the “sages”—expounders of wisdom and teachers of the young. They mingled practical teaching for a successful life with advice obtained from reading the patterns of the stars and planets. Astrology and worldly wisdom were combined in the forerunners of what Luke calls the “wise men of the East.” So widespread was the influence of these sages—and so rich the rewards that many of them received for their counsel—that many fraudulent sages joined their ranks. (“Chaldeans” came to mean not the residents of Chaldea—[or Babylon] one of the centers of wisdom—but the countless popular philosophers and soothsayers, many of them unscrupulous, who traveled throughout the ancient world.) Writing, at first probably developed for keeping records of commercial transactions,

provided the means of sharing ideas among people widely separated geographically and for preserving their thoughts throughout time. Increased trade brought distant cultures together so the wisdom of one was shared with the others.

Although this period saw the flowering of wisdom literature, its beginnings are in a much earlier time. For while Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job are part of the great literary achievements of the fifth to third centuries BCE, they rest on a tradition which reaches back into earlier times. Solomon’s fame as a writer of wisdom attests to the maturity of wisdom as a literary form as early as 900 BCE in Israel. I Kings 4:30-31 claims that Solomon’s wisdom surpassed that of the Egyptians and “all the people of the east.” The names of the sages whom he surpassed include one—Mahol—who was an Edomite. Thus wisdom, in Solomon’s time, was found at least in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Edom.

Samples of wisdom literature can be found from even earlier periods. The Sumerians, inventors of a precursor to our alphabet, wrote in the wisdom form, and texts have been discovered in Egypt which date from as early as 2500 BCE. At various times in its history, Israel was open to influence from other cultures. Egypt and Mesopotamia recurrently subjected Israel to their influences as each strove for supremacy. An Egyptian text, “The Instruction of Amen-em-ope”—which seems to be a source of Proverbs 22-24—probably dates from around 1200 BCE. Under a king such as Solomon, relations with far-off countries were deliberately sought. Thus we can expect to find wisdom at almost any period in Israelite history, and it should not pass unnoticed that the position of the sage was recognized as equal to that of the priest and the prophet in Jer. 18:18.

This sage—a person who could read and write and thereby become familiar with the thoughts of many people in many lands—was almost certainly a court official, often called a “scribe” in the Old Testament account. In the lists of the members of David’s and Solomon’s courts, “scribe” is a designation of one officer. The scribe seems to have been the one who took care of the king’s correspondence and bookkeeping. The importance of these tasks, along with the knowledge which literacy brought, made the scribe an extremely influential person at court. It was through this class of public officials that wisdom literature probably entered the mainstream of Israelite life. While learning to read and write, using proverbs as writing exercises,

scribes-to-be became recipients of an international body of wisdom and transmitted it in their own teaching within Israel.

The beginning of the wisdom tradition in Israel was neither at court nor in school. Before court wisdom or scribal wisdom, there was what J. L. Crenshaw calls “clan wisdom” (“Wisdom in the OT” in IDB, sup. vol.). The head of a family—in the authoritative position as head—sits down with the children to instruct them in the art of life.

This aspect of the wisdom “movement” did not disappear in the face of the more formal aspects, when wisdom literature became written in court and school. As R. B. Y. Scott points out, “Folk wisdom is a perennial phenomenon in coherent traditional

societies. It appears early, and continues alongside the developing sophistication of literate circles. Moreover, it underlies and supports that development” (Proverbs- Ecclesiastes, p. xxvi).

We have noted that Ezra has been called the “first scribe.” Obviously, this is not true in a strictly historical sense. Ezra seems to have held a position similar to that of the scribes in earlier royal administrations. He was in fact a royal official with an administrative post demanding scribal talents. At the same time Ezra “was a Jewish priest, learned in the sacred law he was called upon to establish in Judah.” Scott cites the occasion of Ezra’s reading the Law, assisted by the Levites, to indicate that he was a scribe in a new and special sense, the leader of a “school,” “chief of a group of scribes, professional students of and authorities on the law of Moses. Henceforward such scribes were to play a dominant role in the religion of Judaism. They were in fact an outgrowth of the Wisdom movement in its religious aspect . . .” (p. xxxvii). It is in this aspect that Israel made its own distinctive contribution to wisdom literature.

Israelite Contributions to Wisdom Literature

Wisdom, in its international form, dealt with universal human situations. It showed little or no connection with any particular cult and did not require the acceptance of any specific god. To call it “secular” would be to read modern distinctions back into antiquity, for ancient cultures did not make the distinction between “sacred” and “secular.” But the observations which wisdom writings make and the advice they give are centered around human concerns which are shared among people as people, whatever their culture, rather than around those which mark people off as adherents of a particular religion. In this sense, much wisdom literature can be called “secular.”

The Proverbs in the Old Testament show this secular characteristic. The morality they express may sometimes be couched in terms that reflect a knowledge of Israelite Yahwism, but this is virtually the only direct sign of Yahwism in the Proverbs. Except in a very few casual references there is no mention of the covenant, the salvation-history of Israel, or the cultus.

Indeed, to a reader accustomed to the message of the historical books and the prophets, wisdom literature may seem out of place in the Bible. If nothing is said of the covenant between YHWH and Israel, nor of the salvation-history which follows from it—if the temple and its cultus might as well not exist so far as the wisdom writings are concerned—why are they included? So “unbiblical” are the proverbs of the wisdom writers that many people today are not sure whether certain maxims they repeat come from the Bible, Shakespeare, or Ben Franklin! “Spare the rod and spoil the child” is an old saying well known to most people; “Those who spare the rod hate their children, but those who love them are diligent to discipline them” is found in Proverbs 13:24. “Even fools who keep silent are considered wise” (Prov. 17:28) is only another way of stating the modern quip, “Better to keep your mouth shut and be thought a fool than to open it and be known one.” “A child who gathers in summer is prudent, but a child who sleeps in harvest brings

shame” (Prov. 10:5) contains advice similar to that expressed in the old rhyme, “Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise,” or, “The early bird gets the worm.”

599

Israel’s major contribution lies in ascribing wisdom to YHWH alone. Solomon is depicted praying to YHWH for the gift of wisdom. As YHWH gave holiness to the priests and divulged YHWH’s will and plans for Israel to the prophets, so YHWH gave wisdom to the “wise.” Within the international community of “the wise,” human observation and reflection, stimulated by the thoughts of others, seem to be the sources of wisdom. But to the Israelite, wisdom must be from YHWH. The mind of the sage may perceive wisdom, but wisdom herself issues only from YHWH. “God [only] understands the way to it, and he [alone] knows its place” (Job 28:23).

The expression “wisdom herself,” the personification of wisdom, indicates another trend in Israelite thought. For the Israelite the wisdom sentence, like any utterance of “the Word,” had power and being in itself. As the prophetic word not only expressed God’s intent but also was a power in bringing it about, so the wisdom sentence had its own almost material existence. As time passed, wisdom came to be thought of particularly in personal terms. Wisdom speaks in Proverbs 8, going so far as to describe herself as the first creation of YHWH, “the first of his acts of long ago” (8:22b). Describing wisdom in this personal sense is not a statement of doctrine but a poetic expression—to the Israelite, the most natural way to describe reality.

Types of Wisdom

Wisdom literature tends to fall into two main categories. The first is represented in the Bible by most of the Book of Proverbs; the second is best represented by Job and Ecclesiastes.

The spirit of the former is conservative, practical, didactic, optimistic, and worldly wise. The latter type is critical, even radical, in its attitude toward conventional beliefs; it is speculative, individualistic, and (broadly speaking) pessimistic. The former expresses itself characteristically in brief rhythmic adages and maxims suited to instruction, as well as in longer admonitions; the latter, chiefly in soliloquy and dialogue (Scott, p. xix).

The short sayings of the first type can take many forms: simple sentences arising from everyday life; more polished proverbs, carefully constructed in the parallelism which is characteristic of Hebrew poetry; riddles, the answers to which impress a moral; and fables, in which trees and animals are used for teaching.

The Hebrew word mashal is used for such carefully constructed proverbs. But the same word can refer to folk sayings and even the longer type of wisdom writing. Even taunting songs are called by this word. The verb to which this noun is related means “to become like” or “to compare.” This would suggest that the mashal in its basic form is a figure of speech in which two otherwise dissimilar things are linked together to evoke still a third meaning. This form can be seen in many of the proverbs, such as “Like a gold ring in a swine’s snout is a beautiful woman without good sense” (Prov. 11:22); and, “Like vinegar to the teeth, and smoke to the eyes, so are the lazy to their employers” (Prov. 10:26). Other proverbs, without the directness of the simile, accomplish the same result by means of metaphor: “The wealth of the rich is their fortress; the poverty of the poor is their ruin” (Prov. 10:15); and, “The tongue of the righteous is choice silver; the mind of the wicked is of little worth.” (Prov. 10:20)

600

Most of the proverbs, however, do not follow this form, and the longer works do so hardly at all. In the Old Testament the term mashal, whatever its original meaning may have been, can be used for almost any literary form in which either wit or insight, and preferably both, are memorably expressed.

The longer forms of wisdom literature, of which Ecclesiastes and Job are biblical examples, are quite different in style. They tend to be philosophical in purpose. In them the writers wrestle with a perplexing problem or seek to find a deeper understanding of life's meaning. Both Job and Ecclesiastes could be said to be expansions on the psalmist's question: "What are human beings that you are mindful of them . . . ?" (Ps. 8:4)

The Book of Proverbs: Date of Compilation

The present Book of Proverbs was compiled from sources dating from many different centuries. Contrary to the opinion of scholars a generation ago, it is now believed that most of the material is pre-exilic in origin. Some of it, as tradition has claimed, may well have been written in the court of Solomon, even by Solomon himself, though the tradition that assigned all the wisdom books to him should be regarded in the same light as the claims that Moses wrote the Pentateuch and David the Psalms. Collections of ancient proverbs were assembled into the book's present form during the post-exilic period, probably at or near the time of Ezra (c. 400 BCE). The Psalter reveals the heart of post-exilic worship and the Law states the fundamental terms of Judaism's covenanted life under YHWH. The Book of Proverbs provides the basic textbook for the instruction of Jewish youth in the proper ways of life.

Proverbs 1-9 Introduction to the Book

These opening chapters set forth the purpose of the rest of the collection. The later chapters come from ancient sources, but the first nine chapters seem to have been composed specifically as an introduction. Some scholars have suggested a date in the third century BCE for its composition, but an earlier date is also possible. With what we know now, it is impossible to establish an exact date. We can do no more than say that the introduction was written between the fifth and third centuries. Proverbs 1:1, which claims Solomon as the author, is intended to be a title for the book as a whole. This should be seen as a conventional device. Verses 2-6 state the purpose of the book to be instruction for the young and increase of learning for adults. "Riddles" (v. 6) were, with proverbs, a form of wisdom writing: the challenge to the wit of the pupil no doubt made learning more enjoyable, while at the same time, because of the effort required to discover the point, the riddle imprinted the moral more firmly in the mind.

Verse 7 presents the religious context into which the compiler would have us set the book: "The fear of YHWH is the beginning of knowledge." This is repeated in 9:10, near the close of the introductory section. The word translated "fear" refers to an attitude of reverent awe, an awareness of oneself as standing in the presence of the transcendent and holy God. The word translated "beginning" means not simply the first item in a series, but the foundation or the source. Wisdom rests upon a continuing attitude of reverent awe. (R.B.Y. Scott's translation for the Anchor Bible captures well the sense of v. 7a: "The first principle of knowledge is to hold the LORD in awe.")

In Hebrew chapter 2 is one long sentence. In it the pupil—"my son"—is instructed to seek wisdom as a guard against waywardness and a deliverer from those who would lead one astray (vv. 1-15). Verses 16-19 introduce the "loose woman," the "adventuress." The Hebrew words literally mean "the strange woman" and "the foreign woman." In the remaining chapters the contrast is made repeatedly between wisdom, personified as a gracious and trustworthy woman, and her opposite. In chapter 9, for example, wisdom is portrayed as a hostess who invites the simple to come to her banquet table and learn "the way of insight" (vv. 1-6). After a few verses in which scoffers are contrasted to the wise, a "foolish woman" issues her invitation to the simple, but the reward of her banquet is death (vv. 13-18). Essentially, the verses present us with an allegory in which "Lady Wisdom" and "Dame Folly" are set in contrast.

The speech which "Lady Wisdom" makes in chapter 8 is of great interest to Christians. Verses 22-31, the

central passage in the chapter, portray her as the first of God's created works. She was created before "the depths" existed (v. 24) and was at God's side "like a master workman" (v. 30) as God fashioned the world. A variant reading for "master workman" is "little child," so it is not at all certain whether the author intends to picture Wisdom as an assistant in the work of creation or as an adoring witness to it. Take note of the footnote in the OAB which suggests that in either case Wisdom provides a link between the inhabited world and its Creator. Both John 1:1-3 and Col. 1:15-16 are to be read in connection with this chapter. They represent a Christian interpretation of Jesus as the incarnation (literally, the "en-fleshment" or embodiment) of "the Word" of God (in John) and "the firstborn of all creation" (in Colossians).

Verse 22 has also played an important part in the history of Christian doctrine. In the fourth century the theologian Arius contended that, since Christ was "the wisdom of God" (I Cor. 1:24), he must have been a created being. Although he was the first of creation, he nevertheless differs from God the Father in the sense that he is not Creator but has been created. He must be subordinate to God. Against Arius, Athanasius translated the crucial phrase of v. 8a as "constituted me as head of creation," and argued successfully that the Christ was coequal with God because he was the same as God.

The eighth chapter of Proverbs addresses neither the issues argued by Arius and Athanasius nor those raised in John or Colossians. The personification of wisdom presented in Proverbs should be seen as an allegory. Wisdom can best be understood as an attribute of God, described as having personal form. In the later apocryphal book, "The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach," a more literal meaning may be present (Sirach 1:9ff.). The OAB speaks of "her" as the first of God's creatures. This passage, while poetic in form, is not an allegory. Sirach 24:23 identifies "her" with the Law.

There is a gradual tendency in Jewish thought prior to the time of Christ to see wisdom as a hypostasis, a semi-independent being existing alongside God at creation. In Jewish thought, such a being is never equated with God—it is a creature. But this

way of speaking did later allow Christian thinkers to express a unique relationship between Jesus—the "Word made flesh"—and the Father.

Proverbs 10:1-22:16 The Proverbs of Solomon

This first collection of "Solomonic" proverbs is "so amorphous as to indicate that it is the result of a long process of accumulating such couplets . . ." (Scott, p. 17). The material is difficult to date accurately. Most of it seems to be pre-exilic—some is ageless—but Scott is probably correct to date the present form of the collection in the fifth or fourth century BCE.

Proverbs, like the rest of Hebrew poetry, are expressed in parallel couplets, in which each second (and sometimes third) line complements the first in meaning. There are no rhymes to speak of, but the sounds of the words are frequently important—there is punning and assonance, among other possibilities. Nevertheless, parallelism forms the basic structure of Hebrew poetry, and the three principal kinds of parallelism are found in:

1) the synonymous ("same meaning") statement in which the two halves of the couplet express similar thoughts, as in "Condemnation is ready for scoffers, and flogging for the backs of fools" (Prov. 19:29);

2) the antithetic ("opposite meaning") statement, when the second half of the proverb states the opposite of the first, as in "The righteous are delivered from trouble, and the wicked get into it instead" (Prov. 11:8);

3) the synthetic statement (from "synthesis," something which is "put together"), in which the second clause

completes the thought of the first clause, as in “Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established” (Prov. 16:3).

It is difficult to speak of this collection in general terms—as a collection—because of its diversity of subject matter. Among those treated are the relationship between child and parents (e.g., 10:1, 5); poverty and wealth (e.g., 10:2, 4); and work and idleness (12:11, 24, 27); wise people and foolish ones (10:8, 13, 14, 23); and the king and the people (16:10, 12, 13, 14, 15). (A complete list of subjects and occurrences may be found in Scott, pp. 130-131). The collection does illustrate the typical form of wisdom teaching. It offers common-sense advice on how to make one’s way through life. The regularity of the parallelism and the rhythm of these proverbs suggest their didactic function, being aids to memorization.

The best way to get a feel for this or any other of the collections of the Proverbs is to read selectively through them.

Proverbs 22:17-24:22 “The words of the wise”

This short collection is strikingly similar both in structure and content to the Egyptian book “The Instruction of Amen-em-ope,” a work which may have been “published” as early as 1200 BCE. Though the author does not seem to have had the ancient book nearby while writing—for it is not reproduced word for word—the author was obviously familiar with it; it is reproduced fairly accurately at the beginning of the section. “The Instruction of Amen-em-ope” was made up of thirty sayings, and the

author of this section follows the same pattern (22:20). “Some of his precepts are counsels on behavior in the Egyptian fashion, while the rest more closely resemble the admonitions of the Hebrew Wisdom teachers” (Scott, p. 21). The international flavor of wisdom literature is nowhere better illustrated than in this borrowing from Egypt.

Proverbs 24:23-34

This group of sayings, distinguished by its separate title, makes up an appendix to supplement the preceding thirty “words of the wise.”

In Hezekiah’s time Egyptian influence was strong. The result may have been that wisdom writing flourished in Judah then as it did during the time of Solomon. The title of this section may well mean that Hezekiah collected these proverbs and thereby provided a written source for the post-exilic compiler of the Book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 25-29

Chapters 25-27 contain proverbs that could have been composed in any of the nations in which the art of wisdom writing flourished; there is little in them to indicate the high moral standards of Israel.

The Hezekiah Collection

Chapters 28-29, however, though they treat many of the same subjects as chs. 25-27, reflect the reverence for the Law and belief in divine punishment for wickedness that is seen in the Deuteronomic and prophetic writings. Consider, for example, the concern for justice expressed in 28:5, and particularly the sense of YHWH as the final source of justice (29:26). Also note the continual distinction between righteous and wicked (e.g., 28:5; 29:6). (Yet it is Prov. 25:21-22, from the more “secular” section, that is quoted by Paul in Romans 12:20 as a model for Christian behavior.)

Proverbs 30:1-31:31
Appendix

Two short sections, attributed to Agur and Lemuel of Massa, and an acrostic poem on "the good wife" end the Book of Proverbs. It is not known who Agur and Lemuel were, nor is it certain that Massa is a place name. It may indicate a tribe that lived between Edom and Arabia. As we have seen, wisdom flourished in Edom—indeed the Book of Job is set in that locale. The word massa may also be a variant of mashal, the word which is used for "oracle" or "proverb."

The tone of 30:2-6 is similar to that found in the Book of Job: a skeptical view of the possibility of knowing the God who has created heaven and earth, and a reply of faith in the dependability of God's word.

A series of "numerical sayings" also occurs in chapter 30, similar in form to the oracles Amos uttered against the nations: "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment" (Amos 1:3). "Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a girl" (Prov. 30:18-19).

The acrostic poem, in which the first word of each verse begins with successive letters of the alphabet, was a popular form. This one describing the good wife shows an ideal of womanhood operating in a broader sphere than we usually assume for

ancient women, being both within the family circle and in the wider economic world (31:10-31).

The Book of Proverbs can be neither summarized nor appreciated in a brief space. It makes entertaining and always profitable reading for leisure moments, since it can be opened at almost any point without reference to preceding or following sections. Its influence on Jewish culture has been great. It presents a generally optimistic view of life, affirms the earthy pleasures of the world, and emphasizes a facet of Jewish religion that has been important throughout the centuries.

Ecclesiastes

The Book of Ecclesiastes presents a marked contrast to Proverbs—and indeed to almost all of the rest of the Old Testament. Its thoroughgoing pessimism has intrigued countless readers, and its tone of almost bored skepticism has provided a model for many an urbane and cynical observer of life. The puzzle is how it came to be included in the Hebrew canon; certainly the title verse (1:1), which claims Solomon as the author, is the main reason. It is also true that pious hands have been at work throughout the book, modifying thoughts which were originally too unorthodox.

The original form of the book was written sometime between the end of the fourth and the middle of the second century BCE. The author seems to have been middle aged or elderly, and to be looking back over a life spent seeking wisdom but failing to find a satisfactory answer to the question, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them?"

Perhaps there is no answer, because human life is nothing but emptiness. The message of the writer of Ecclesiastes is summed up at the outset of the book: "Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity" (Eccl. 1:2). "Vanity," in this context, does not mean an arrogant concern over one's own beauty; it means "emptiness" or "futility." All, all is emptiness and futility, says Qoheleth (koh-HELL-et).

This word, translated in the RSV as “Preacher” actually stems from the Hebrew for “a congregation.” The author seems to have been connected in some way with a congregation, a synagogue perhaps, or even the temple. But this work is not what we would normally call preaching. The author seems more likely to have been a teacher (note the NRSV translation), a wise man whose words would be listened to with respect. The Hebrew word is used in Ecclesiastes like a proper name, and in 12:9 an admirer, perhaps the preserver of the teacher’s words, describes Qoheleth “besides being wise” as one who “taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs. The Teacher sought to find pleasing words, and he wrote words of truth plainly.”

The Book of Ecclesiastes is not a book of proverbs, but a meandering discourse on the vanity of life. Only the mood, which is gloomy and somber, remains consistent throughout. But what other mood is possible in the face of Qoheleth’s discovery that life can only lead to death? “The fact of death overrides all proximate values [for Qoheleth]. . . . Wealth, wisdom, pleasure, and progeny are all swept away by the

immutable fact of death, which renders all human strivings, acquisitions, and even dreams empty and vacuous” (Priest, “Ecclesiastes” in IDB, supp. vol., p. 249). Even wisdom is of no ultimate value for Qoheleth the sage. Still, the Teacher does seem to hold onto life itself. Although life in the long run may not be much, it is all we have, and so it should be lived as fully as possible. “There is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in their toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God; for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? For to the one who pleases him God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy; but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and heaping, only to give to one who pleases God.” Even “this also is vanity and a chasing after wind” (2:24-26). The words of Ecclesiastes that celebrate the good things of life (cf. 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-10; 11:7) are thought by some scholars to be editorial additions, but they seem to express the view, if not of Qoheleth, then perhaps of a school of Qoheleth. The view is, as Priest points out, not simply “resigned hedonism; its basis was theological and existential. God existed, and man existed, and the purpose of religion is to bring these two existences into some meaningful relationship” (p. 249), however transitory the meaning.

The hand of an editor is certainly at work in the book’s close. The reader is warned—and Qoheleth would have approved of the warning—not to take the book too seriously: “Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. The end of the matter; all has been heard” (12:12b-13a). But the reader is also warned—and this is the piety of the editor—that there are things to be taken with deadly seriousness: “Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (12:13b-14). The teaching of Qoheleth is brought into the canon, but not without pious comment: whatever the Teacher says, the reader is to remember finally that orthodox teaching about the Law and about God’s judgment is the final truth.

Job

The Book of Job is one of the great classics of literature. Its theme is usually thought today to be “why do the innocent suffer?” The interpretation of the book has challenged the best minds of the ages. As poetry it is the equal of any of the world’s masterpieces.

The book is composed of an opening and closing prose narrative—a prologue and an epilogue—with a long poem at its center. The prologue and epilogue (Job 1:1-2:13 and 42:7-17) come from an ancient legend about a man named Job who was famous for his uprightness and his patience under suffering. He is mentioned in Ezek. 14:14ff. along with Noah and Daniel as one of the righteous persons of antiquity. His story is set in “the land of Uz” (Job 1:1), which is in Edom, a fact which has led many scholars to assume that the Job legend is Edomite in origin.

The poetic section set in the framework of the ancient legend seems to have been written around the fifth century BCE. The poet seems to have the ancient story at hand. He uses it to explore the problem of the suffering of the innocent. There

are several points at which the legend and the poetic section are inconsistent, so it is highly unlikely that they were written by the same person. Besides differences of style, the divine name YHWH is used frequently in the prose and rarely in the poem, and Job himself is portrayed as a man of patience in the prose prologue, and as vehemently impatient in the poem.

The story as a whole revolves around two challenges made to God: the first, in the prologue, is issued by "Satan" and the second, in the main poem, by Job. (Here "Satan" is not truly a proper name; this is not "the Devil" who appears in later Jewish writings as a personification of evil. In the Hebrew text the definite article is used, so we are concerned with "the satan," or "the adversary," a member of the heavenly court functioning as prosecutor of those who have sinned.)

Before proceeding, please read the OAB introduction to Job as well as the prologue (1:1-2:13), and epilogue (42:7-17). Keep the book itself at hand to look at various references made in this text.

Job 1:1-2:13 The Prologue

Job is described here as a man "blameless and upright, one who feared God, and turned away from evil" (1:1). Properly, according to orthodox thought, he has been rewarded with prosperity and many children. One day, during the assembly of YHWH's heavenly court—"the sons of God"—YHWH asks the satan if, during an inspection of the earth, he has taken notice of Job, the righteous. Satan then raises a question of profound religious significance: "Does Job fear God for nought? Have you not put a fence about him and his house and all that he has, on every side?" (1:9-10) Do people fear God and act righteously only to obtain blessing from God?—this is at the heart of the satan's question. Will a person remain loyal to God if there is no reward? This is a challenge that God cannot leave unanswered. If the entire structure of the relationship between humanity and God is based only on human desire for reward, then God is the victim of blackmail. YHWH has commanded unconditional worship and obedience. Any suggestion that YHWH must reward obedience injects a monstrous condition into the divine-human relationship.

Having been challenged, God must allow the satan to put the issue to the test. God permits the satan to smite Job with ill fortune, but forbids the adversary to lay a hand on Job himself. A series of calamities strikes Job (1:13-19). He, however, remains faithful. He says, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (1:2).

Certainly Job has passed a first test, but the satan insists that if Job is afflicted in his own flesh, he will curse God. God allows the satan to do his worst, provided that he not take Job's life. Stricken with boils from head to foot, Job comes to sit among ashes—symbolic of his misery (2:7-8). His wife does not have "the patience of Job"—she urges her husband to "curse God, and die" (2:9). Job refuses, clinging to traditional Israelite faith: "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" (2:10)

Job remains a person of faith. Now his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, come to comfort him. At this point the prose legend breaks off. The stage is set for the main drama.

Job 3:1-21:34 The First Two Cycles of Dialogue

Job will not curse God; but he does curse the day he was born. In a lengthy speech Job pours out his anguish and wishes that he had never been allowed to see life. In due course each of the friends tries to convince Job that his suffering is not meaningless. They express the customary orthodox conviction that suffering is administered by a just and righteous God. Job should be humble before his Maker. Surely he, or if not he then one of his children, must have sinned to bring down such a punishment. Job will not be satisfied by these answers. The "friends" appear to be much more interested in protecting their own orthodox faith than in helping Job. Job sees this, and his reply should be taken seriously by all who try to bring comfort: "You see my calamity, and are afraid" (6:21). When catastrophe strikes, whether in one's own life or in that of another, the structure of faith by which one makes sense of life is threatened. Like Job's friends, we are tempted by our fears to try to bolster our faith, rather than truly care about the pain of the other. The result may be that the sufferer's pain is increased.

Job 22:1-42:6 The Third Cycle of Dialogue

The orderly pattern of the dialogues is broken in the third cycle. It would seem that a later editor, shocked at Job's increasing insistence on his innocence and on the injustice he is receiving from the hands of God, has tried to soften the tone of the dialogues. Eliphaz speaks in 22:1-30 and Job replies in 23:1-24:17. Verses 24:18-25, which in the present form of the text are part of Job's reply, seem more likely to be part of Zophar's third speech. In it Job gives voice to the thought that God's justice eventually is carried out. The editor thus has Job affirm here precisely what he has been questioning.

Job's Challenge to God

Bildad's third speech is begun in chapter 25, and Job's reply (chapter 26) seems to have been edited to include part of what was originally the rest of Bildad's speech (26:5-14). Once again Job is made to express the thoughts of his friend rather than his own.

The most glaring disruption of the flow of the original version occurs in chapters 27-31. In 27:1-12 Job continues his reply to Bildad. It may have originally been a final reply to the third friend, Zophar. Verses 11-12 lead one to expect a startling message from Job. After hearing all that his friends have to say, Job announces that he will tell them "that which is with the Almighty"—he will speak the truth about God's justice; it is something that they themselves have seen but chosen to ignore. Verses 27:13-23 presents a traditional doctrine: the wicked suffer for their sin. Surely not Job but a "friend" is speaking here. Chapter 28 is a composition which is totally distinct from the rest of the book: it is a hymn about wisdom.

It is not until verses 29:1-31:40 that we are finally permitted to read Job's challenging summation, first addressed to his friends and then to God himself. Job describes his former condition "when the friendship of God was upon my tent" (29:4). He

was respected by all, even princes; he helped the poor and "broke the fangs of the unrighteous" (29:17). "But now they make sport of me, those who are younger than I, whose fathers I would have disdained to set with the dogs of my flock" (30:1). "He has cast me into the mire, and I have become like dust and ashes" (30:19).

At this point Job begins his address to God. "I cry to you and you do not answer me; I stand, and you merely look at me" (30:20). Job recounts his plight to God: all his troubles stem from God's cruelty (30:21), yet Job is innocent. "I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I look upon a virgin?" (31:1) Job has retained his integrity, an internal sense of morality—a "covenant with my eyes." With what can only be interpreted as bitter sarcasm, Job recites the traditional view of God's justice: "Does not calamity befall the

unrighteous, and disaster the workers of iniquity? Does he not see my ways, and number all my steps?” (31:3-4).

Against this protestation of his own innocence and God’s cruelty, Job issues his challenge. The challenge is framed in the legal form of accusation: the “oath of clearance.” Here, in a series of oaths, Job states all the possible offenses of which he could be guilty and names their consequent punishment. “If I have walked with falsehood, and my foot has hurried to deceit . . . then let me sow, and another eat; and let what grows for me be rooted out” (31:5-8). Sixteen such oaths are uttered. Now the challenge has been made. Let God come forward and prove the charges against Job! Let God justify the punishment inflicted!

God did not allow the satan’s challenge to go unanswered. If humankind can set conditions on obedience to God, then God is not truly God. Now, God does not refuse to speak to Job’s challenge. If God does not vindicate God’s actions, then Job will stand acquitted and God’s punishment be branded as unjust. Job has stated his case, and “the words of Job are ended” (31:40).

Chapters 32-37, the speeches of Elihu, are a later insertion into the text. They argue very well for the orthodox theology concerning God’s dealing with humankind—Elihu presents an intelligent and rational summary of the positions of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—but the speeches break the flow of the story of Job. Still, Elihu’s closing remarks (Job 37:21-24) may provide one important key to the book: we cannot know the transcendent deity (v. 23a), only the relational, immanent one (vv. 23-24). In chapter 38 YHWH’s reply to Job begins. Job has challenged God to answer the charge of injustice. Throughout the entire story Job has been calling upon God to answer him. Now, in the climax of the drama, God speaks. But God does not answer Job. Instead, God says, “I will question you, and you shall declare to me” (38:3). Job is not God’s equal. The human creature stands before God the Creator. In a soaring restatement of the creation faith, God challenges Job’s pretensions to wisdom and understanding. The grand mystery of creation is paraded before Job and reveals the incomprehensibility of the works of God. Then, in 40:8, God asks, “Will you condemn me that you may be justified?”

None of this answers the question Job has raised. This is not a theodicy—a justification of God’s ways. It is a reappraisal of who and what God is, and what kind of relationship is possible between God and human beings. Job’s friends—and Job himself—assumed that their relationship with God is like that which prevails in normal human commerce. For the payment of a price, a reward is expected. For a righteous deed, a divine blessing is expected. This is the “orthodoxy” of moralism. But such a view strips God of freedom; it places the Creator in the hands of the creatures, to be manipulated into calculated responses to their actions.

The answer Job receives is quite different from what he had expected. And his response sounds like a simple assertion of God’s power: “Then Job answered YHWH: ‘I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted’” (42:2). Or it sounds like an acknowledgment that the human mind cannot understand the ways of God: “I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know” (42:3). Such statements do not truly capture the message of the Book of Job. It is too easy to maintain the viewpoint of moralism, loudly asserting that God is just, and then—by appealing to the incomprehensibility of God—escape the dilemma of the apparent injustice posed by the suffering of the innocent. Thus the worst acts of cruelty can be shrugged off or attributed to an alien, arbitrary God and “justice” made into a word with no definable meaning.

The essence of the Book of Job is expressed in 42:5—“I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.” As a “second hand” affair, known only by hearsay, our relationship with God can be defined only in the terms that govern human commerce. Human logic can cope with causes and effects, with prices paid and rewards received. But truly personal relationships exceed the scope of such logic. Even on the strictly human level this is true. How much more true when God is involved! The love of one person for

another is not subject to the calculations of simple tit-for-tat justice, nor are such relationships definable by the standards of logical “meaning.”

Job has been granted a person-to-person encounter with his Creator. In the face of the calamities he has suffered, in spite of the absence of any logical meaning by which his sufferings can be justified, the vision of God suffices. It is a humbling experience; his vaunted pride is smashed—“therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (42:6). The whole issue has been set in a new context. The fundamental religious issue is not rigid obedience to every command with a corresponding reward of blessing from God. The result of that would be a simple—and simplistic—moralism. The issue is the creature’s trusting love of the Creator, and the Creator’s intimate personal concern.

The challenge of the satan and the challenge of Job are answered at the same time. Humankind cannot maintain an appropriate relationship with God on the basis of rewards or punishment. Nor is God’s concern for the creature to be measured by such standards. It is revealed in God’s willingness to respond to people so that they are not left to hear of God “by the hearing of the ear,” but are allowed to know God firsthand.

The Book of Job, then, does not give a simple answer to the suffering of the innocent. One is not left with a changed doctrine concerning righteousness, sin, or judgment. The acts of God which the prophets had interpreted as divine judgment on the sins of Israel are not reinterpreted by this book. But the scope of the divine-human relationship is enlarged. Justice and obedience are still issues with which humankind must wrestle—ethics and religion are still bound up together. But religion is much larger than ethics, and the relationship between humankind and God includes much more than moralistic bookkeeping.

There are some who believe that the fundamental question of the book is not the “why” of suffering, but rather the issue of whether or not it is possible—or even desirable!—to be faithful to God in such a world. We do not know why suffering happens; we know unambiguously that innocent suffering does occur, with heart wrenching regularity. At the conclusion Job does not have an intellectual answer but something more satisfying: an experience of the grace-filled presence of God, a God who has been with him throughout the ordeal, who has heard him, and who desires to be in relationship with him.

Job 42: 7-17 The Epilogue

In 42:7-17 the old legend is picked up again, and the story is given the happy ending which it must have had in the ancient account—Job’s fortune changes, his wealth is restored, he is given many children, and eventually he dies, “old, and full of days.” But the old ending to the story has taken on a new and different coloration. Formerly, in the ancient legend, Job’s righteousness and patience are rewards, but in the present context, the happy ending is the result of something much more mysterious and profound: a changed relationship with God.

APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

The Maccabean Revolt

Post-exilic Judaism was born under Persian rule. Nevertheless, the Jewish people were allowed to develop their own style of life within fairly broad limits. Judaism did not become a beacon of light to the rest of the nations of the world as Second Isaiah hoped, but Yahwism did survive a drastic change in political life—the absence of a king from the house of David.

This state of affairs lasted from 538 BCE, when Cyrus permitted the Jews to return from Babylon, until 333 BCE, when Alexander of Macedonia (“the Great”) defeated the Persians at the battle of Issus. For the first

time a European power controlled the Near East, and it brought with it a new culture. “Hellenism,” the culture of the triumphant Greeks, came into an area which, for all its diversities, was Semitic in language and custom. Yahwism was a Semitic religion, and the people of YHWH had learned to preserve their covenant-faith in the face of the temptations that other forms of Semitic religion and culture presented. Hellenism, however, presented new challenges. Its appeal was more subtle, and the battle lines on which to fight for the defense of Yahwism were less clearly drawn.

In 167 BCE when the Syrian ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes committed the outrage of desecrating the temple, the conservative elements of Judaism rose to revolt. They

fought under the family known by the nickname of its most dominant member, Judas Maccabeus. Under the Maccabeus Judaism gained a century of independence, ended as much by the decay of its native leadership as by the conquering armies of imperial Rome.

During the apparently hopeless times just before and during the Maccabean wars, apocalyptic literature flourished. In this section we review the Greek conquest of the Persian Empire and the subsequent division of Alexander’s world into two major areas under the rule of his successors. We sketch some of the characteristics of Hellenism and examine parts of the Book of Daniel as an example of Jewish apocalyptic in the late post-exilic period.

Macedonia is part of the Greek peninsula. The Greek city-states, principally Athens, Corinth, and Sparta, were proud and independent centers of advanced culture. Generally they seem to have regarded Macedonia as a rustic outpost.

Historical Background
Alexander of Macedonia

The Persians, who under Cyrus had swept as far as the western end of Asia Minor, tried several times to conquer the Greeks across the Aegean Sea. Under the threat of foreign invasion, the city-states formed temporary alliances, but it was not until Philip of Macedonia, backed by the force of a mighty army, claimed sovereignty over them that anything like a national unity began to exist. Under Philip’s son, Alexander—who was soon to be called “the Great”—Greece became a world empire.

Alexander was a man of many talents. In his youth he was instructed by the great philosopher Aristotle and came to admire the thought and culture of the cities he would rule. A military genius, he developed tactics that eventually allowed him to defeat the massed might of the Persian armies. When he was only twenty years old, he inherited his father’s kingdom and almost immediately set out to spread Greek ways over the civilized world. He launched an attack on the Persians in Asia Minor and drove them across the entire peninsula. In 333 BCE at the city of Issus he won a decisive victory and broke the power of Persia. He then swept down the Mediterranean coast of Palestine and invaded Egypt, establishing his rule in a series of city-states along the way. In Egypt he built the city of Alexandria on an island in the delta of the Nile and started it on its way to becoming a center of Greek thought and culture. For centuries Alexandria was noted as the most cosmopolitan city in the world, and it became the home of one of the greatest libraries of ancient times. Returning from Egypt, Alexander turned eastward, eventually penetrating as far as the Indus River in India. In a mere ten years Alexander had risen from being the warlord of a few Greek cities to being the ruler of the largest empire the world had known until that time. After he died in 323 BCE, his empire, except for Greece itself, was divided between two generals, Ptolemy and Seleucus. Ptolemy controlled Egypt; Seleucus ruled Syria and the Mesopotamian area to the east. The land in between, Palestine, again fell victim to a series of imperial wars between Syria and Egypt, for each sought to control strategic highways and seaports.

Hellenism

The effects of Alexander's conquest were more cultural than political. A new way of looking at life invaded the Semitic lands along with the invasion of the Greek

armies. "Hellenism" (from Hellas, which is what the Greeks call~~ed~~ their land) is a term that refers to the entire cultural outlook which characterized the Greeks. It presented many contrasts to the Semitic cultures and to Judaism.

By the time of Alexander, thinkers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle had constructed magnificent philosophical systems in their attempts to reach intellectual understanding of the world in which they lived. At the core of these systems was the view that the countless and constantly changing parts of reality must participate in an overall changeless unity. In spite of many apparent contradictions and of the ever-present facts of change and decay, to the Greek the world was "rational." It was considered the highest human activity to contemplate the changeless pattern behind the changes and imperfections of the world in which humans lived.

Each thing in the world which our senses perceive was understood to have an essence—also called a "form" or an "Idea." The thing—a dog, a human being, a house—was temporary and imperfect, but its essence was eternal and complete. Beyond these essences, moreover, lay a supreme essence, which encompassed them all. Aristotle called this supreme essence "Being Itself." We might call it "God," but it would be a god who had no name or specific cultus.

YHWH and this "God" of the Greek philosophers had few things in common. Yahwism approached the world in a completely different manner. It made sense out of the world by seeing it as YHWH's creation, directed by God's will. Obedience to YHWH, rather than contemplation of "Being Itself," was the Israelite way of life. This must have seemed very primitive to the conquering Greeks. To them YHWH—anthropomorphic and constantly involved in the activities of humankind—must have seemed like the ancient gods of the Greek myths. Still, YHWH (and the people who worshiped YHWH) could easily be tolerated among the many gods—all of whom were given a certain dutiful credit but none of whom were taken very seriously. Hellenism could accept the pluralism of gods as easily as it could accept all the rest of the manifold world—for behind all lay the external unity of the real world of essences, of "Being Itself."

Hellenism should not be understood as simply an intellectual exercise in other-worldly contemplation. It had its this-worldly dimension. Humankind was considered to be the supreme example of the beauty and grandeur of this world. The human mind was the highest glory, and the human body was accorded only slightly less esteem. The statues that ancient Greek sculptors created show us the perfect human form, the ideal man or woman—at the same time the human form is depicted with anatomical precision, the muscles and the flesh about to come alive. Every town had its gymnasium, where the development of a sound body was an obligation—almost a religious obligation—and the games in which bodily perfection was demonstrated were more than entertainment.

Hellenistic ethics sought to conform human deeds to the orderly harmony of the universe. Balance and moderation were keys to virtuous living. Justice was the proper balance between obligations and rewards—giving to each his or her due. Courage

was the moderating impulse lying between fear and foolhardiness. The goal was the good life, defined as the

life which brings happiness. In whatever particular form it took, Hellenistic ethics was eudaemonistic (u-day-mon-ISS-tic, pertaining to a system of ethics in which the measure of an act is its ability to produce happiness). A code of duty ethics may have been necessary for the masses of people, but the principles which informed the code were informed by the assumption that knowledge of the good would result in doing good, since the good leads to happiness—which everyone must desire. The stern ethics of Yahwism, in which the will of God is the duty of the people, could hardly be further removed from this. The two systems 3 lie at opposite poles.

The Hellenistic Threat to Judaism

Judaism had met temptations to change its way of life before. The pre-exilic prophets continuously fought against syncretism with Canaanite nature religions, and during the Exile, measures were taken to counter the allures of Babylonian culture. Post-exilic Judaism drew itself in to preserve Yahwism from dilution by Samaritan, Edomite, and other cultural threats to its purity. In each case the threat was clear. The gods of the nations were plainly labeled and easily could be seen as rivals to YHWH.

Hellenism's appeal was much more subtle. The Greeks had their gods, but they usually did not impose them on the peoples they subjugated. Hellenistic moderation would not allow it. It was, indeed, the Greeks' reasonable tolerance itself that posed the greatest threat: it made the stubborn insistence of Judaism on the supremacy and jealousy of an old tribal deity look naive, like primitive superstition. Moreover, Hellenism seemed to offer the best of Judaic values without the strenuous demands of the Law and the cult. The ethical standards of Hellenism and Judaism may have been derived by different processes but the results often seemed to look alike. Whether it was to attain the good life or to be obedient to YHWH, justice in either case meant much the same thing.

The cosmopolitan character of Hellenism was also attractive to many Jews. Taking the best from the many cultures to which Greek victories exposed it, Hellenism allowed each ethnic group to find its own values affirmed in the world culture that was gradually being created. One could still be a Jew and yet be a citizen of the world. No one demanded that Judaism be left behind—simply that it not be taken too seriously.

The former ways of preserving Yahwism were not very effective weapons against Hellenism. The more they were tried, the more archaic and provincial Judaism appeared to those who were attracted to the new way of life. Large numbers of Jews became "hellenized," to the indignation and horror of the dwindling number who remained orthodox.

Syrian Domination

As long as Judah remained under the control of the Ptolemaic Empire of Egypt, the tolerant policies that characterized Hellenism prevailed. After many failures, however, the Seleucid forces of Syria under Antiochus III finally wrested the Palestinian territory from Egypt in 198 BCE. At first, this change in rulers brought no significant changes in Palestinian Jewish life. Syria, however, was constantly in need of money and used the sale of political offices as one means of raising it. Time after time the

office of high priest at the Jerusalem temple was sold to the highest bidder. This policy finally created the crisis which led to Jewish revolt.

Antiochus IV, who called himself Epiphanes (e-PIH-fa-neez, the "appearance" or "manifestation" of god), tried to appoint a hellenized Jew named Menelaus as high priest. (Jews with Greek names, such as Menelaus, are encountered frequently during this period.) Menelaus was not of a priestly family, and the Jews would not accept him. Antiochus Epiphanes was enraged at what he regarded as treasonable stubbornness and attempted to force on the Jews conformity to the general religious customs of the empire; in other words, he began the effort to wipe out Judaism.

In 167 BCE an altar to Zeus, chief among the Greek gods, was placed in the temple. This sacrilege, an outrage to orthodox Jews, came to be called “the abomination that makes desolate” (Dan. 11:31). All temple sacrifices to YHWH were commanded to cease. The Sabbath was not to be observed, and circumcision was prohibited. The death penalty was imposed on resisters. So, history’s first major pogrom was conducted. (The term pogrom originated in Czarist Russia as a name for deliberate attempts to liquidate the Jewish people, but the practice itself began with Antiochus Epiphanes.) Understandably, the Jews tailored the title “Epiphanes” to one they thought fit Antiochus, dubbing him “Epimanes”—“madman.”

In a small village in the hills west of Jerusalem, the king’s agents met resistance when they tried to force the Jewish villagers to perform sacrifices on a heathen altar. Mattathias, of a priestly family, the Hasmoneans, refused to perform the sacrifice. When a Jew came forward to do the deed, Mattathias killed him and the commander of the king’s force. He called out to his fellow Jews to join him, and they fled into the mountains to conduct guerrilla warfare against the oppressors.

The Hasmonians Under Judas Maccabeas

The family of Mattathias (the Hasmoneans) formed the leadership of the revolutionary movement. Mattathias himself was too old to head the guerrilla force and just before his death appointed his son Judas as commander. Judas the “Maccabee” (or the “Hammer,” usually put in the hellenized form, “Maccabeus”) waged his campaign as much against the hellenized Jews, who sided with the Seleucids against him, as against the imperial army. In December of 164 BCE Judas Maccabeus defeated the Syrian force at Jerusalem and rededicated the temple. The feast of Chanukkah (Hanukkah) is celebrated by Jews to this day in memory of this event. (When Hebrew words are written in Roman letters, the hard “h,” a guttural sound—like the German ch—is indicated in our text by ch, though elsewhere you may see it as h.)

The war against the Syrian Seleucids continued for generations, and Syria never regained full control over Judah. Though it was never recognized by a treaty, Judah did win a century of political independence from foreign control (165 to 63 BCE). Then the Roman general Pompey claimed it as a Roman province.

The Chasidim

Behind the success of the Maccabean revolution stood the influence of a group called the chasidim. The name means “the pious ones,” or the “godly ones.” In some of the psalms chasidim is translated “saints.” These were Jews who held fast to the

old ways of Judaism, keeping the commandments of the torah and preserving the old customs. At first they refused to join in the violence which marked the guerrilla warfare. They observed the Law so strictly that, even after they had reluctantly joined the Maccabeans, they refused to offer resistance on the Sabbath. The Syrians, knowing this, often chose that day for combat and entire Jewish communities were massacred. Eventually the chasidim came to acknowledge that resistance was allowable even on the Sabbath, but in the face of all the violence they still clung to the hope of peace.

As time passed, chasidism was to develop into three distinguishable strands: a) those who retained the quiet piety that marked the movement at its outset;

b) a group who devoted themselves primarily to interpretation of the torah; and c) the apocalyptic writers.

These groups were not at first sharply distinguished. As the chasidim were drawn more and more into the violence of the wars, however, the “quietists” among them, those who were attempting to hold fast to the

ways of pacifism and the devout life, became more pronounced in their differences from the others. The historian Josephus mentions the Essenes as a religious party within Judaism, and some scholars think that this "separatist" movement sprang from the quietist wing of the chasidim.

After the struggles of the Maccabean wars ended, the term "chasidim" fell into disuse. The Pharisees are very likely a continuation of that element among the chasidim that concentrated on the preservation of a way of life in strict conformity with the torah. The Pharisees developed a complex oral tradition of interpretations of the Law. The name "Pharisee" comes from a word which means "to separate"; in religious usage "separate" (the adjective) and "holy" have essentially the same meaning. As the Holy One, YHWH was separate from all other beings, and those who were YHWH's holy people were called to separate themselves and belong only to YHWH. Thus "Pharisee" and "chasidim," though verbally different, have important points of contact. Later the Pharisees, with their expanded oral tradition of interpretation of the torah, were opposed by the Sadducees, a group made up of the priestly circle, often closely allied with the hellenizing elements of Judaism and against any interpretation of the torah other than a literal one.

We are most concerned in this section with the apocalyptic writers among the chasidim. The Book of Daniel is the principal Old Testament product of this group, although some of the psalms and part of the Book of Zechariah also show their influence.

The Apocalyptists

The word "apocalyptic" comes from a Greek word meaning "to uncover" or "to reveal." Apocalyptic writing claims to impart a revelation that has been given to the writer. (The last book of the New Testament, Revelation, is called the Apokalypsis in Greek.) The apocalyptists were not in any sense a party, as the Essenes and the Pharisees were. Earlier writings, such as the visions in Zechariah, have many of the literary characteristics of apocalyptic writing, and apparently some of the chasidim

used and developed an apocalyptic style from these in order to express their messages. These messages, which the writers believed were inspired revelations from God, spoke to the troubled conditions of the time.

Conditions in Judah (now called Judea, the hellenized form of the name) during the Maccabean wars and the subsequent period of her relative independence were enough to produce pessimism in even the most devout Jews. Syrian attempts to wipe out Judaism could have been only slightly more damaging than the incessant internal warfare among the Jews, particularly between the hellenizers and the orthodox. The Hasmoneans, the family from which Judas Maccabeas came, were eventually recognized as the official high priestly family, and the Hasmonean high priests functioned virtually as kings. But corruption and internal rivalries caused such erosion of the prestige of the office of the high priest that by 63 BCE, Pompey's Roman army was almost welcomed.

War, foreign and domestic oppression, and corruption at the heart of Judaism must have made the times seem close to hopeless. To revive hope and instill a sense of courage in the hearts of faithful Jews the apocalyptists delivered their divinely sent revelations. They taught that the present age marked the end of the former pattern of world history and that a new and final age, one in which God would rule throughout all the world, was about to happen. The reign of God's era was to be accompanied by the rule of "the Son of man." Uncertainty exists about the interpretation of this figure and it does not appear in every apocalyptic work. "Son of Man" is an expression often used by Jesus, and its use in Judaic apocalyptic writing must be understood to interpret the New Testament.

In the Book of Daniel, the apocalyptists' recounting of history uses symbols to refer to the foreign powers whose rise and fall mark the different ages of world history. The symbols were undoubtedly clear to the readers of the time, and many of them can be readily interpreted by present-day scholars of ancient history. Many modern readers of the Bible misinterpret the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament and Revelation in

the New Testament, using the symbols in them to predict in particular ways the course of events in our own future. Such was not the intent of the apocalyptists, and no warrant for such use can be found in the scriptures. The apocalyptists were speaking in their own way to their own times, not trying to unveil the future of the twentieth or twenty-first centuries. This is not to say that the literature they produced cannot speak to us. The message of apocalyptic can speak to every era.

The Book of Daniel

The Book of Daniel is in two major sections: chapters 1-6, a collection of legends about Daniel and his three friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; and chapters 7-12, visions concerning the end of the age. The first section takes the reader into a foreign world, "of kings and harems and eunuchs, of bawdy pagan rituals and drunken orgies, of bizarre methods of capital punishment involving fiery furnaces and pits full of lions, and of strange experiences with dreams and visions" (Towner, Daniel, p. 1). But, given that the world of the first section is foreign, how do we describe the world of the second, full of angels and other heavenly beings, symbolic beasts with symbolic horns, divine intervention in the end of history, judgment, and the resurrection of the dead?

We have assumed here that the authors of the book come from the group known as the chasidim, whose successors would include both the later Pharisees and Essenes. The two major sections of the book and its bilingual character (Dan. 2:4b-7:28 is written in Aramaic, the rest in Hebrew) indicate that there is more than one author. The chasidim probably embraced both the wisdom traditions that stand behind the first part of the book and (later) the apocalyptic tradition of the second half. According to Gerhard von Rad, apocalyptic should be seen as an outgrowth of the wisdom tradition. The relationships between the two movements are many, according to von Rad: a similar philosophy of history—history seen not so much as fluid but as ordered according to a predetermined plan; a resulting concern for that order—common interest in "science" and "natural history," particularly as expressed in the geography of earth and heavens; and interest also in the interpretation of dream and vision. This does not mean that the writers of apocalyptic were uninfluenced by the prophets, but by the time of the composition of Daniel, prophecy was no longer given to YHWH's people. Since the renewal of the covenant under Ezra, Judaism had become largely a "religion of the book." The writers of Daniel "probably only encountered [the prophets] as literature—the prophetic books were studied and interpreted like the others of the ancient tradition" (Old Testament Theology, vol. II, p. 308).

This brings us back to the Book of Daniel itself. Clearly the two sections of the book must originate in different epochs; the first half reflects "a much more peaceful time than that of the Maccabean revolt" (von Rad, p. 309), perhaps late in the time of the Persian diaspora (538-332 BCE), or more likely early in the rule of Alexander. Nevertheless they are closely related. The Daniel of the legendary stories in chs. 1-6, a courtier with great skill in administration and dream interpretation, a new Joseph and a sage, is a suitable figure to speak the apocalyptic messages of chs. 7-12. This Daniel seems to have an origin in the legendary figure mentioned along with Noah and Job by Ezekiel (14:14, 20, cf. 28:3) and known in Canaanite lore by the name Dan'el. The stories recounted in the first six chapters of the Book of Daniel were probably in circulation before their compiler gathered them. They portray Daniel as a Jew living in Babylon during the Exile. As we have said, they are written mostly in Aramaic, a Semitic language closely related to Hebrew. Aramaic had become the spoken language of the Persian Empire, and it was to remain the language of the Jews in Palestine through New Testament times.

The author(s) of the last six chapters wrote during the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, probably around 164 BCE. The apocalypses of this section were written to encourage faithful Jews during a time of persecution, a persecution—according to the apocalyptists' view—intent on destroying Judaism itself. The message of this section of Daniel is that this time of suffering is the end of the history of oppression, and that God, in final control of all things, will soon begin a glorious reign.

The first half of the book may have been attached to the second in order to answer the question, "What is to

be done in the meanwhile?” As Towner puts it, “To those who ask the apocalyptists, ‘What shall we do while we wait for God’s victory to

take place?’ chapters 1-6 provide answers through the medium of hero tales. The apocalypses of Daniel 7-12 endorse the future of the saints who keep the faith as they do in Daniel 1-6” (p. 10).

Read Daniel 1-6

Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, are among the newly arrived exiles in Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar selects them for training as royal scribes. The young men are given Babylonian names — Daniel becomes Belteshazzar and his friends are given the names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They are to be taught “the literature and language of the Chaldeans” (v. 4). This phrase may be intended literally, or it may be—as many scholars have contended—a technical term for the “wisdom” of the Babylonian sages. The four young men are also to be provided with food from the king’s own table.

Daniel 1
Upholding the Dietary Laws

While he does not refuse the free education on behalf of himself and his friends, Daniel refuses the rich food and wine, preferring vegetables and water. Why? Scholars have assumed that the refusal had to do with kosher laws. They argued that along with circumcision and the Sabbath observance, the Jews maintained a traditional diet while in exile. The kosher rules forbade ritually unclean foods, one more sign of the Jewishness of the exiles. So Daniel and his friends reject the rich food offered to them from the king’s table, for it was not kosher. This interpretation is under increasing challenge for several reasons. There is no indication in the story that Daniel refuses the king’s food out of obedience to any law—much less a food law that many scholars have come to believe did not even exist at the time. Furthermore, there is no reason to believe that any of the food in the palace—vegetables included—was “clean.” It has been suggested, however, that to eat from the king’s table would be to enter into covenant with him (Baldwin, Daniel, pp. 82-83). To refuse his board is, at any rate, to separate oneself from the king and established the identity of Daniel and his friends with their fellow students.

Whatever the lads’ reasons for refusing the royal fare, the eunuch under whom they work is willing for them to maintain their custom, but he is afraid they will become undernourished and the king will come to know that they have refused his food. A ten-day trial during which the Jewish lads eat little—only vegetables and water—leaves them in better physical condition than the other “students” who have dined on the rich food. And after the three years of instruction, the four young men are wiser and better able to interpret the mysteries of life than all the sages of the king’s court!

Finally, the story in Daniel 1 says something about God and how God’s people are to live. First, the story promises that God is faithful to the people. Even in the difficult circumstances of exile, in a pagan place far from the promised land, God’s people can hope in God. It is YHWH who gives Daniel “favor and compassion from the palace master” (v. 9).

In Daniel we have an example of how to live under God in difficult circumstances, particularly in the kind of circumstances addressed in chs. 7-12 of the book. “Live vigorously, carry your trust into the very heartland of your oppressors, with God’s

help beat them at their own games of wisdom and understanding, contribute significantly to the safety of your people, and glorify God in your faithfulness. Above all, remember that in order to say "Yes" to this great challenge, you will have to say "No" to all the compromises that would blur your focus, co-opt you, and destroy a little bit of your true identity" (Towner, p. 28).

Daniel 2 Interpreting the King's Dream

The king of Babylon has a disturbing dream for which he seeks an interpretation. For whatever reason, perhaps because he is skeptical of the abilities of his sages—"the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans" (2:2)—Nebuchadnezzar demands that they interpret his dream and also that they first tell him what it was. The penalty for failure is death. The sages temporize but finally admit that this is impossible. No one can know another person's dream except the god or gods who sent it.

At this the king "flew into a violent rage," ordering "that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed" (v. 12). This would include Daniel and his friends, now that they have completed their education in "the letters and language of the Chaldeans" (1:4; cf. 2:18). When the captain of the king's guard finds the lads, Daniel goes before the king to ask for an appointment that he might "tell the king the interpretation" (2:16). Daniel does not have the interpretation yet. He asks his friends "to seek mercy from the God of heaven" that he might reveal Nebuchadnezzar's dream to him. The ability to solve the mystery lies not with Daniel—as he is quick to point out when he is brought back before the king—but with the "God in heaven who reveals mysteries" (v. 28).

Before we look at Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the interpretation Daniel gives it, let us pause to note the similarities this story has to the Joseph story in Genesis 37-50. As Towner, among others, has pointed out, the parallels between the stories go beyond setting—the royal court of the most powerful ruler on the earth—and character—where there are a number of correspondences: Pharaoh-Nebuchadnezzar, Potiphar-Arioch, magicians-sages, and of course Joseph-Daniel. The parallels extend even to details of plot: the interpretation of a dream by the God of heaven, the God of the Israelites; the resultant elevation of God's servant to a position of power; the earthly ruler paying homage to the God of all the earth.

God reveals Nebuchadnezzar's dream to Daniel, and he in turn interprets it for the king. The dream and the interpretation illustrate one of the characteristics of apocalyptic—the presentation of world history as a succession of ages, in this case represented by four kingdoms.

The scheme of interpreting history in terms of a succession of kingdoms may have begun in Persia. Persian accounts depict the history of the world as consisting of three great empires—the Assyrian, the Median, and the Persian. You will remember that Media, Elam, and Persis (Persia) were the three kingdoms to the east of Babylon at the time of the Exile, and that Media was the one which, until Cyrus, controlled the other two. Cyrus, the Persian, was to wrest power from the Medes as the first step of his campaign of conquest.

To the Persians, this sequence of world kingdoms made a satisfactory interpretation of history, for it left the Persians as the final inheritors of world power. When Jewish apocalyptic used the general scheme of interpreting history in terms of world empires, it changed the Assyrian empire to the Babylonian and added a fourth which succeeded the Persians—the Greeks under Alexander.

The king's dream carries a fairly specific apocalyptic message. Daniel tells the king his dream: it is of a huge statue with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, and feet partly of iron and partly of clay. According to Daniel's subsequent interpretation, these are the four empires: the Babylonian is best—it is the head and is made of gold; the next two kingdoms, unnamed here but certainly intended to refer to the Medes and the Persians, are inferior; finally, the fourth kingdom is powerful and destructive. This

fourth kingdom, the Greek, will be a divided kingdom—part iron and part clay. The Ptolemaic Empire, under which Judea lived in relative ease, may be the iron; the Seleucid, which produced the despised Antiochus Epiphanes, the clay.

This is the apocalyptic message for the Jews of second-century Judea: God will smash the kingdoms of this world and set up a new kingdom that will last forever. This kingdom will not be of human making—the rock which smashes the image in the king's dream has not been cut by human hands—but will be the work of God himself, and it will fill the world.

There is a message of comfort for the oppressed Jews in the apocalyptic. This message is expanded in chs. 7-12, leading some scholars to suggest that the dream narrative was inserted here by the later author(s). Jews may now live under the heel of an oppressor, but the feet of the oppressor are clay. God will smash the kingdom of oppression and usher in an era of everlasting fulfillment—the fifth age of world history. This will not be a kingdom which arises from history, but one which comes by the supernatural power of God.

The king falls down before Daniel and acknowledges the greatness of Daniel's God. The homage of the sixth-century king is not simply incidental to the story. At the center of the court story as well as at the center of Nebuchadnezzar's dream is God's sovereignty—over the entire world. Nebuchadnezzar's words of praise are the goal of the story as a whole: "Truly, your God is God of gods and LORD of kings . . ." (2:47). The dream shows that God cares for the king of Babylon and has a place, even if an imperfect place, for him in God's plan for history.

Daniel 3-6

The story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace is one of the most famous in the Bible. Certainly it demonstrates the power of God to defend those who are faithful, but there are other issues as well. Once again, Nebuchadnezzar is moved to praise the God of Israel (v. 28), even to acknowledge the transcendent power of one who is sovereign in Babylon as well, "for there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way" (v. 29). The king rewards the servants of the delivering God.

God is faithful to the three young men, who, for their part, trust in God's faithfulness. This does not mean that God delivers them precisely because they are faithful. Nebuchadnezzar understands that (v. 28), when—in his very carefully worded statement—he does not make God's act of deliverance dependent on the lads' faith but puts the two acts as parallel. Moreover, the lads do not act in direct expectation of deliverance (vv. 16-18) but strictly for the sake of faithfulness to God. God will be vindicated—because God is faithful—the story tells us. In the meantime, as we wait for vindication, we must act always in good faith. "This story encourages us to be about our tasks of faithfulness and our great refusals, so that we do as little as possible to participate in the destructive tendency of human against human and so that we do as much as we can to demonstrate that those who are clear about their own identity as disciples can stand up against the glowering powers which require our allegiance to false and demonic claims" (Towner, p. 58).

In chapter 4, a dream of a tree that reaches to heaven ends in a frightening manner for the king. The tree is ordered cut down by some heavenly "watchers"—angelic beings who carry out God's work on the earth. The strange tree, which has a human mind (4:16), is given the mind of a beast and lives as an animal for seven years. Only the stump of the tree is allowed to remain.

Daniel's interpretation of this dream is that Nebuchadnezzar will go mad, behaving like a wild animal for seven years, after which time he will regain his sanity. The prediction comes true, and when it is over and the king regains his senses, he once again praises the Jewish God who has demonstrated power in this manner.

The point of the story has once again to do with God's sovereignty. God is king over every earthly king, lord over every earthly lord. No one on earth can hold unaccountable power; all are accountable for use of power to the greater power of God. For the community oppressed by Antiochus Epiphanes, this must come as a word of hope. God can bring down those who misuse the power God has given them, and God does so that those who rightly use God's power will emerge.

A different king appears in the story told in chapter 5. Actually this is not a king at all but the regent during the long absence of Nebuchadnezzar's successor, Nabonidus (556-539 BCE). Belshazzar is in the midst of a great feast when a human hand appears and writes on the wall. Understandably, the "king" is terrified and calls for someone to interpret it. Daniel comes and does so, concluding that the king is doomed. He has profaned the sacred vessels from the Jerusalem temple by frivolous use. Apparently Belshazzar has learned nothing from the fate of Nebuchadnezzar. At least he has not learned to revere YHWH, and he will perish for his failure.

The text gives the words written on the wall as "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN" (5:25). The interpretation contains only one "Mene" (MAY-nay)—the second is likely the result of a scribal error. The interpretation depends on a play on words. In the writing of the time the words would have been written as the consonants MN, TKL, and PRSN. With the vowel sounds added to make "mene," "tekel," and "parsin"

the words are nouns which designate certain weights. A mene is the greatest weight, a tekel is a lesser weight, and a parsin is half a tekel. In the interpretation, Daniel reads the words as passive participles of the verbs which have the same consonants, changing the vowel sounds where necessary: then they mean respectively, "numbered," "weighed," and "divided in two." Thus, "MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; TEKEL, you have been weighed in the scales and found wanting; PERES [the final N is dropped in the participle form], your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians" (5:26-28).

As Daniel has predicted, Belshazzar is killed, "And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old" (5:31). The storyteller, living several centuries after the Babylonian period being described, gets confused about the history of the empires and their kings. It was not the Medes who conquered Babylon—and there is no record of "Darius the Mede"—but in the mind of the writer the Medes were the second of the four world empires: Babylonians, Medes, Persians, and Greeks. "Darius the Mede" may have been Cyrus' general, who was in fact sixty-two years old when he entered the city of Babylon.

At any rate, the historical accuracy of the story has no bearing on its theological thrust. That has once again to do with the sovereignty of the God of Israel, who is able to act in foreign lands. Here Daniel acts as God's prophet, and, as prophet, Daniel's words are proved true.

Read Daniel 7 and 12

The final story in the first half of the book, Daniel in the lions' den, needs no extensive comment. God prevails and saves God's servant from death, whatever the odds. That leads us into the second half of the book, where God is seen able to overcome all odds and all enemies, even death itself.

Daniel 7 The Apocalyptic Vision

The remainder of Daniel was written by an apocalyptist during the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. The writer or writers follow the format of the earlier legends. The message is in the form of a dream of Daniel and "visions of his head as he lay in bed" (7:1). The scheme of the four world empires, first presented in chapter 2, is expanded in chapter 7.

The empires are depicted as beasts and the individual rulers as horns growing on the beasts. The beasts are described in 7:4-7. It has been suggested that a scribal error has transposed certain lines in vv. 4-5 in the text as it now stands. If the text of these verses is emended in the following way, a complete description of the four kingdoms is presented:

The first was like a lion with eagles' wings. It had three fangs in its mouth and was commanded thus: Rise, eat much flesh. As I looked on, its wings were plucked and it vanished from the earth, and behold, another, a second beast resembling a bear which raised one side. It was set up on feet like a man, and given a man's heart. . . .

With this change, the first kingdom—the lion with the eagles' wings—is the kingdom of Babylon. Jeremiah 5:17 associates Babylon with gluttony—"They shall eat up your harvest and your food; they shall eat up your sons and your daughters; they shall eat up your flocks and your herds; they shall eat up your vines and your fig trees." The number of "fangs"—changed from "ribs"—symbolizes the number of kings, as numbers in apocalyptic writing usually do. The author does not have a historically accurate list, but seems to depend for knowledge of the history of the ancient empire on what is contained in the biblical account, which mentions only three kings of the Babylonian Empire.

According to the apocalyptist, the second kingdom is that of the Medes. Apparently using the reference in Dan. 6—which, since it was written before the last chapters of Daniel, would have been one of the apocalyptist's sources—there is one king of the Medes: "Darius the Mede." Therefore the kingdom which is likened to a bear has one side raised up. This kingdom fares well in the writer's evaluation. It is like a bear, an animal which can be trained to stand up and walk like a human. Isaiah 13:17ff. had prophesied that God would stir up the Medes to punish the Babylonians; that is, God uses the Medes much as one would a trained bear.

The third beast is "like a leopard"—the next fiercest animal to the lion. It is the Persian kingdom, and it has four heads—the biblical record mentions Cyrus, Ahasuerus (Xerxes), Artaxerxes, and Darius the Persian as kings. There were more kings than that, several of whom had the same name. But these four are all that the apocalyptist knows (or needs to know). The Medes and the Persians, though successive kingdoms in the apocalyptist's scheme, were, as the apocalyptist seems to have known, coexisting empires. Perhaps this is the reason the leopard does not destroy the bear, though in actuality, Cyrus incorporated the Medes, the Elamites, and the Persians into his one kingdom.

The animal of the fourth kingdom, that of the Greeks, is unidentified. The author simply says that the fourth animal is "terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth and was devouring, breaking in pieces, and stamping what was left with its feet" (7:7). That is, it completely destroys the bear and the leopard. The fourth beast has ten horns—ten kings—and while the apocalyptist is looking at the horns, another horn grows to pluck up three of the horns by their roots. The eleventh horn— Antiochus Epiphanes —acquired his throne over the bodies of three rivals. When the arch-villain Epiphanes appears in the vision, the scene shifts to the heavenly court. God sits upon the judgment seat attended by innumerable courtiers. God is described as the "Ancient One," the one who has ruled the earth from its foundations. God is the great patriarch, in whose hands rest the life and death of the clan. In the terrible judgment of the "Ancient One" the "horn"—Epiphanes—is destroyed, though the Greek kingdom itself is allowed to survive for a while (7:11-12).

The vision continues, and in vv. 13-14 "one like a human being" comes in the clouds of heaven. "To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples,

nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed." Verses 15-18, as well as 23-27, give an interpretation of Daniel's vision. As the four beasts stood for four kingdoms, so also the "one like a human being" represents a kingdom. It is the kingdom of "the holy ones of the Most High." Does this mean that the "one like a human being" is a corporate personality representing faithful Israel—the "saints"—or is he a supernatural being who is to come bringing in the "kingdom of the saints"?

In both Hebrew and Aramaic the phrase "Son of Man" which is translated in the NRSV as "one like a human being" usually means simply "a human." God addresses Ezekiel in this way—meaning particularly "you who are merely human"—in the vision of the valley of the dry bones (Ezek. 37). But in the Dan. 7 vision it is "one like a human being," and this indirect manner of speech is often employed when speaking of an angel—a supernatural being, a member of the heavenly court.

Influenced by Persian thought, Judaism had by the time of the apocalyptist developed the notion of angels far beyond what we encounter in the Pentateuch narratives. There, the writers used angels to speak indirectly of God's activity in the world—but it is nevertheless God himself who is meant. By the time of the apocalyptist angels had acquired personal names and were portrayed as definite beings. In Dan. 8:15 the writer describes a vision in which "one having the appearance of a man" appears before him. It is the angel Gabriel (v. 16), whose role it is to make clear the meaning of the vision. (Note that in 8:17 "mortal" refers to the author; it means simply "human," as in Ezek. 37.)

In Dan. 10:10ff. Gabriel speaks of "Michael, one of the chief princes," who had helped Gabriel in a heavenly war against "the prince of the kingdom of Persia" (v. 13). These "princes" are the patron angels of the various nations, Michael being the angel of the Jews.

Moreover, behind this increasingly complex angelology stands the notion of a heavenly counterpart to the earthly world. This is a characteristic of many ancient religions and is described by Mircea Eliade in The Sacred and the Profane. The myths of the ancient religions describe life in the heavenly world, and cultic reenactment of the myths was intended to bring the affairs of this earthly world into conformity with their heavenly counterpart. The warfare in heaven, in which the angel of Persia and the angel Gabriel—with the help of Michael, the angel of the Jews—engage in combat, represents then the counterpart of the earthly struggle in which the Persian Empire was brought to an end.

The Old Testament myths in Genesis show marked restraint in the use of this notion of two worlds. The account of the lives of the gods and struggles for supremacy among them which is found in the Mesopotamian creation myth is eliminated in the P story, and what is left is only the theological assertion of the origin of the world

from the creative power of God. By the time of the apocalyptist, as the angelology developed in late post-exilic Judaism indicates, this restraint has weakened. The "one like a human being" in Dan. 7:13 may, then, be an angelic being, not Michael but one who is superior to him—the angel of the kingdom of "saints." Or he could simply stand for the faithful nation. He is, in any case, portrayed in transcendent tones. The coming kingdom will be established on a supernatural basis. It is not simply a fifth kingdom among the kingdoms of the world.

The Son of Man, though associated with the final age, is not depicted as a messiah. He is understood neither as a king, nor as a member of the house of David, but as an unearthly, transcendent figure. In late post- exilic

thought, both images—“messiah” and “son of man”— seem to have become part of the growing expectation of a divine fulfillment to human history. The term “messianic expectations” refers more properly, however, to Jewish hopes for their historic future; strictly speaking, the “messiah” refers only to a coming Davidic king.

When the apocalyptists looked to the future they expected divine intervention to result in the “end of history.” Theologians use a specific word when speaking of the end of history: eschatology (ess-kah-TAH-loh-jee). The word, which comes from the Greek word eschaton, “last things,” means “the study of the last things.” The apocalyptic writings of Daniel are eschatological throughout. (Apocalyptic is a species of eschatology.) Moreover, the vision of the judgment scene (Dan. 7:9ff.), at which the “Ancient One” determines the destiny of peoples and the “one like a human being” comes “with the clouds of heaven,” becomes a pattern for many later apocalyptic works.

Chapters 8 and 9 contain other visions in which the history of the world empires is described in symbolic terms. Chapter 10 begins a longer vision in which all the events known to the writer are rehearsed, including the desecration of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes—the “abomination that makes desolate” (11:31). Finally, in chapter 12 the divine answer to history is stated. Michael, the angel of the Jews, shall arise. “There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since a nation first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name is found written in the book” (12:1). The sufferings of the Jews are not futile; they are part of the eschatological fulfillment that the apocalyptist is revealing. “Everyone whose name is found written in the book”—the book which will be opened when the “Ancient One” sits in judgment (7:10c)—shall be delivered. Therefore the Jews should remain faithful, willing to endure death as Daniel did during the Exile in Babylon. They, like him, will be delivered.

Of course, death has already occurred for many of the faithful. So the writer goes on: “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (12:2). This is the first clear statement of a belief in the resurrection of the dead. Ezekiel 37, the vision of the valley of dry bones, speaks of life being restored to the nation, not of the resurrection of individual people. Sheol, the place of the dead, has never been understood as a place

of life after life: the “shades” of the departed have no real life there, and the notion of Sheol would play no role as part of an idea of immortality. Hellenism, as an offshoot of the view that the human mind was akin to the rationality that governed the universe, thought of the “soul”—roughly equivalent to mind or consciousness—as immortal. The message of the apocalyptist that the day of judgment would see some of the Jews raised to everlasting life and others to everlasting contempt was not based on an assumption that part of the human being was immortal. Resurrection was not thought of as an “automatic” consequence of death, nor was it offered to all. Only those who were to take part in the coming kingdom of the saints—for blessing or for curse—would participate in the resurrection.

All the general features of apocalyptic may be found in Daniel. Other apocalyptic works were to follow. Some would contain all the features found there, others only a few. These features include the following:

1) The pattern of successive world ages. The eschaton is the final age of world history, and though (in most cases) it will come on this earth, it will be qualitatively different from the other ages—it will be the time of the reign of God. 2) The figure of the “one like a human being” or a mortal. The reign of God—what the New Testament calls the kingdom of God—will come from on high, and its chief agent, God’s representative, will come with the power and the authority of the Almighty.

3) The use of symbolism involving numbers and beasts. The beasts tend to refer to particular world empires, and the numbers—often in connection with the symbol of “horns”—usually stand for rulers. Days, weeks,

and years are also numbered to indicate the length of time a particular age has to run.

4) The expectation of a supernaturally determined future. The ancient prophets had looked to the future for God's judgment and redemption, but in the prophets' view the deeds of people and nations in the present played a large role in determining that future. God could use Assyria as the "rod of his anger" and Cyrus as his "anointed." For the apocalyptists, the present was too much under the domination of evil for this. Empires were obstructions to God's purposes, in no way capable of being used by God. Therefore, the world empires —the entire present state of affairs—must be brought to an end. God is to purge away all evil; only after all seeds of human corruption are rooted out will it be possible for the new "kingdom of the saints" to be begun.

5) The woes of the time immediately preceding the end. Running through apocalyptic literature is the theme that history will be darkest just before the glorious dawn. The idea of "messianic woes," which appears so extremely pessimistic and devastatingly gloomy to us, actually is intended to allow those experiencing persecution and the immediate possibility of death to face their times with hope.

 6) The last judgment and the resurrection. The resurrection hope comes as part of the assurance that those who are faithful in the difficult times preceding the end will see the fulfillment in the "kingdom of saints." Even if they die they will be raised at the day of judgment. But (again) the belief in the resurrection is based on confidence in God's promise of the eschatological kingdom, not on any assumption about the immortality of some aspect of human nature. 7) A developing angelology. The figures of Gabriel and Michael appear in Daniel. Other angels will be introduced in the later apocalyptic tradition, the chief among them being Satan. This figure, who in Job is simply "the satan"—the adversary or prosecutor—eventually will become Satan, the adversary or enemy of God, the "prince of darkness."

The effect of the rise of apocalyptic on the formation of the New Testament can hardly be overstated. The apocalyptic writings, as bizarre as they may seem and as far removed as they are from conventional modern thought, provide an important part of the framework within which Jesus was first acknowledged as the fulfillment of the hopes of Israel.

End of chapter