Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World

A Comprehensive Introduction

Frederick J. Murphy

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

© 2012 by Frederick J. Murphy

Published by Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakeracademic.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Murphy, Frederick James.
Apocalypticism in the Bible and its world : a comprehensive introduction / Frederick J. Murphy.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references (p.) and indexes.
ISBN 978-0-8010-3978-2 (pbk.)
1. Apocalyptic literature—History and criticism. 2. Eschatology—Biblical teaching. 3. Bible—Criticism, interpretation, etc. I. Title.
BS646.M87 2012
220′.046—dc23 2012007216

12 13 14 15 16 17 18 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is composed in part of post-consumer waste.

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

With deep gratitude

I dedicate this book
to the many medical professionals
who have generously given me their time,
compassion, and expertise
over the past five years.
They spend their lives in helping others.

"No one has greater love than this,
to lay down one's life for one's friends."
(John 15:13)

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Contents

Illustrations ix
Foreword by William Reiser, SJ, Alan Avery-Peck, and Alice L. Laffey xi
Acknowledgments xiii
Introduction xv

1. Definitions and Origins 1
2. Proto-Apocalyptic Biblical Texts 27
3. Daniel and the *Animal Apocalypse* 67
4. The Book of Revelation 93
5. Ancient Jewish Apocalypses 125
6. Ancient Jewish Literature Related to Apocalypticism 171
7. The Dead Sea Scrolls 197
8. The Gospels, Q, and Acts of the Apostles 227
9. Jesus the Apocalyptic Prophet 281
10. The Apostle Paul 307
11. The Rest of the New Testament 355
12. The Ongoing Legacy of Apocalypticism 379

Works Cited 387
Glossary 403
Subject Index 409
Author Index 417
Index of Ancient Sources 420

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Illustrations

Figure 1. Sphinx and pyramid 18
Figure 2. Ruins of Megiddo 39
Figure 3. Ampitheater 73
Figure 4. Restored synagogue at Sardis 105
Figure 5. Jewish tombs on the Mount of Olives 132
Figure 6. Antonia, Roman fortress 151
Figure 7. Aqueduct 176
Figure 8. Qumran Cave 4 198
Figure 9. Ruins at Qumran 211
Figure 10. Jerusalem temple 244
Figure 11. Mountain in Galilee 292
Figure 12. Pauline theology 314
Figure 13. Ruins of Corinth 345
Figure 14. Bust of the Emperor Trajan 366

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Foreword

On September 13, 2011, our esteemed colleague and friend Dr. Frederick J. Murphy succumbed to complications of multiple myeloma, a devastating disease he had fought heroically and with dignity since his diagnosis five years before. As this book, written entirely during his illness, attests, Rick's death is a true loss not only to his family and friends but also to all who esteem learning and the advancement of knowledge.

Rick was a singular person. As a husband and father, colleague and scholar, teacher and mentor, he embodied qualities of honesty, fidelity, good humor, and compassion that drew people to him and made them glad to count him their friend. The psalmist may have asked, "What is man, O God, that you should be mindful of him? A human being, that you should pay him heed?" Yet we know there are people who embody characteristics that, by even the toughest standards, earn our deepest respect and merit God's attention as well. Rick was just such a person.

Rick was born and raised in the College Hill neighborhood of Worcester, Massachusetts, just a few streets away from the College of the Holy Cross, where he ultimately would spend twenty-eight years teaching. After graduating as a mathematics major from Harvard University in 1971, Rick joined the Society of Jesus and spent seven years as a Jesuit, learning about the Society's educational vision and becoming formed by its spirituality. He graduated again from Harvard in 1984, now with a doctorate in New Testament and Christian Origins.

No longer a Jesuit, Rick joined the Department of Religious Studies at Holy Cross in 1983. During his tenure at the College, he exemplified what it means to teach, to do research, to mentor, and to serve wholeheartedly at a liberal arts school that is both Catholic and Jesuit. Alongside his research, he became a significant though unassuming presence on campus, motivated always by his commitment to fairness and justice. In recognition of his scholarly

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

and campus accomplishments, in 2007 Rick was appointed the College's first Class of 1956 Professor of New Testament.

Rick Murphy was the author of numerous scholarly articles and seven books, including *The Religious World of Jesus: An Introduction to Second Temple Palestinian Judaism*, which received the Alpha Sigma Nu Book Award in 1991, and *Early Judaism: The Exile to the Time of Jesus*. But as much as his scholarship meant to him, Rick also knew and loved politics, and (in good Jesuit fashion!) he was passionate about a faith that does justice. His next book, after the present one, would have been about the contemporary political landscape in the United States. For him, no study of history or ancient texts could be complete without thoroughly thinking about what events and ideas mean, how they change the lives of those who live them, and what they teach us about how we might better live our own lives.

Scripture in particular captured Rick's mind and imagination. Scripture: texts to be studied and treasured; not artifacts of a bygone age but life-giving pages that guide and sustain communities of faith, generation after generation. Rick was fascinated by the way ancient texts and ideas shaped human horizons, and he relished the chance to think and talk about how the world gets to be the way that it is. This, his last book, shows how much politics and religion were of enduring interest to him.

It is not surprising that some thirteen years ago Rick published a commentary on the Book of Revelation. The reality of empire and the scars it left made an ancient writer—a seer—wonder about the world and its history. If the "new heavens and the new earth" of which Revelation speaks, as Isaiah spoke centuries earlier—if that vision were to vanish like a pool in the desert, then the dragon wins. But the seer saw a different ending to the human story. And so did Rick.

William Reiser, SJ
Alan Avery-Peck
Alice L. Laffey

Department of Religious Studies
College of the Holy Cross

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Acknowledgments

Many people helped me during the writing of this book. The project was initially to cover the entire period from the ancient Near East to American life today. That project was unwieldy, and, following the wise advice of the editors at Baker Academic, I wrote just about the ancient period. I did, however, do extensive research and writing on the later period, which I hope will eventually be published. In that work I was helped substantially by two colleagues at Holy Cross, Prof. Mathew N. Schmalz and Prof. Anthony J. Kuzniewski. They read and critiqued several chapters, and I was fortunate to benefit from their wide knowledge, sharp analysis, and personal encouragement.

My reliance on many who study apocalypticism today will be obvious both from my citations and from the centrality of their ideas to this presentation. I am especially indebted to the work of John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins. I did not consult them during the writing, but I resorted to their vast array of studies constantly. Other scholars who have especially influenced my work are George W. E. Nickelsburg, James C. VanderKam, Richard J. Clifford, and Richard A. Horsley. Many other wonderful scholars are also due thanks, and there is no way I could possibly list them all here. I refer the reader to my long list of works cited.

Holy Cross has been my professional home for almost thirty years. It continues to be an extraordinary place to work. It combines in an exemplary way focus on the students and excellent teaching with generous support for faculty research. I am especially grateful for the support of the Dean, Timothy R. Austin, PhD, and the president, Rev. Michael C. McFarland, SJ, for their support. The Department of Religious Studies is made up of accomplished, dedicated scholars. Their support has been invaluable and is deeply appreciated.

The Holy Cross class of 1956 did me the honor, on the occasion of their fiftieth anniversary, of awarding me an endowed chair: the Class of 1956

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Professor of New Testament. Their financial and moral support has helped me tremendously over the past five years.

I feel privileged to teach the students of Holy Cross. They are an impressive group of people, to whom I dedicated my previous book. Relating to them has been fulfilling to me in countless ways, and they are the real reason that I do what I do.

I dedicate this book to those in the medical profession who have given tirelessly of themselves to help me not only survive, but live a happy and productive life, despite having been diagnosed with multiple myeloma in August, 2006. I am especially grateful to my primary care physician, Dr. Putcha Murthy, my oncologist in Worcester, Dr. Tony Samaha, my nurse in Worcester, Yen Araquel, as well as Dawn Cosby and Diane Blanchard. At Dana Farber, I thank Dr. Paul Richardson, a world-renowned researcher in multiple myeloma, as well as my nurses: Mary McKenney, Deborah Doss, Kathy Colson, Culleen Murphy, Kathy Finn, Kelley Bisset, and so many others. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Danny Johnson and Yelena Zakon. Finally, I thank my dentist, Dr. William Pollack, as well as Gail Morton and Beth Clark.

My family is my rock. My wife, Leslie, supports me as do all spouses in good marriages, but with the added burden of my health. I don't know how she manages it all, but she does. I could not carry on without her. My children, Rebecca and Jeremy, each read portions of the manuscript. Rebecca graduated with a major in Religious Studies from Holy Cross in 2006. Jeremy graduated in 2009 from NYU with a student-designed major including a large component of creative writing. Both made substantive, constructive critiques. It is a real turning point in life when your children become two of your main intellectual conversation partners.

Finally, I thank my friend and editor James Ernest. Without his interest and professional knowledge, this book would never have appeared. He is unfailingly helpful, responsive, knowledgeable, and a sure guide to scholarship and publishing. It is a pleasure for me to work with him again.

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Introduction

> Few phenomena in the history of Western religious traditions have been so important, or so controversial, as apocalyptic eschatology.
>
> Bernard McGinn

We are about to enter the strange world of apocalypses and apocalypticism. It abounds in weird creatures; columns of fire tumbling in bottomless abysses; angels and demons; visions of heaven, hell, and distant cosmic regions; fierce battles between awe-inspiring forces; odd mathematical calculations that disclose the end of the world; and countless other features bound to confuse the modern mind. How can citizens of the twenty-first century begin to understand such a world? Even more, how can we encounter it so that it actually means something to us and perhaps even tells us something about ourselves?

Most readers of this book probably do not subscribe to an apocalyptic worldview, but there are many millions of people around the globe who do, especially in the United States. How can apocalyptic believers and those who do not share their beliefs communicate? How can they understand one another? Study of the ancient roots of Jewish and Christian apocalypticism can provide both information for self-understanding and common ground for mutual understanding, as every Jew and Christian to some degree has an apocalyptic heritage. For those who are nonbelievers but are intellectually curious and engaged in the world around them, this study can bring some order into what might seem to them like the chaos of apocalyptic thought. The aim of this book is to provide such a study.

If apocalypticism and the questions it raises do not make sense to us, then we do not belong to the millions of Americans who are what Paul Boyer calls

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

"prophecy believers" (Boyer 1992). They include fundamentalists, but they also include conservative evangelicals, and they have advocates in less likely groups, such as Catholics, as well. Such beliefs have influenced American culture in general throughout its history. Understanding American culture and history requires knowledge of apocalypticism. Even today, apocalyptic convictions about biblical inerrancy, the imminent second coming of Jesus Christ, and the fate of the universe are accepted well beyond the boundaries of apocalyptic sects and churches. For the more fundamentalistic, the apocalyptic worldview is relevant to their everyday lives. It influences their religion, political judgment, social attitudes, and relationships with others. It shapes how they encounter and interpret the world as a whole. But members of much less apocalyptic religious groups are also heir to beliefs that ultimately spring from apocalypticism, beliefs such as the end of the world, resurrection, afterlife, last judgment, and rewards and punishments after death.

This book examines apocalypticism in ancient Judaism and Christianity. The two religions are both very similar and very different today. In the ancient world, they were not always clearly distinguishable. A nexus between the two religions is the collection of sacred texts that Jews call the Tanak, or Bible, and that Christians call the Old Testament, or the Hebrew Bible. The books contained in the Tanak and in the Protestant Old Testament are the same. Roman Catholics include an additional seven books in their Old Testament and have additions to some other books, such as Daniel. Those additional works are called the Apocrypha, or, acknowledging their place in Catholicism, deuterocanonical.

We can grasp the main difference in the way Jews and Christians read the Bible simply by noting that Christians traditionally refer to the Hebrew Bible as the Old Testament. For there to be an "old" there must be a "new." The word "testament" is more helpfully translated "covenant," which means an agreement between two parties, in this case between God and God's people. For Christians, there is a new covenant, that is, a new agreement between God and humanity. For Jews, there is no need for a new covenant because the Sinai covenant is divinely ordained and completely adequate. Although Christianity began as an apocalyptic movement within Judaism, it evolved into a separate religion (Dunn 1991). But that was a long and complex process. Some New Testament texts, such as the book of Hebrews, see the two religions as separate and incompatible. Others, like Matthew, are far less clear on this point.

Another important difference between how Jews and Christians read their shared Hebrew Bible is that they order the books differently. The Jewish Bible, the Tanak, ends with the ideal situation—the temple operating in Jerusalem, surrounded by worshipers, a Jewish community serving the God of Israel and of all creation, and a Davidic monarchy whose main purpose is to support worship in the sanctuary. This is depicted in Ezra–Nehemiah, and 1–2 Chronicles. In contrast, the Christian order of Old Testament books ends

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

with the prophet Malachi, who predicts the coming of Elijah to warn of God's coming in judgment. This orients the reader to the future, to eschatological events—those having to do with the end of the world's present state—events that will change the world as we know it forever. It emphasizes the apocalyptic strand in Second Temple Judaism. It was an aspect of Jewish religion at the time of Jesus through which Jesus himself, his followers, and the early church experienced life and interpreted their own situation. The first three Gospels held that John the Baptist was Elijah returned, so there is a firm connection between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New. For the most part, rabbinic Judaism downplayed the apocalyptic strand in Judaism (Saldarini 1975, 1977, 1979). In Christianity it remained crucial.

One cannot study Second Temple Judaism and the beginnings of Christianity without giving full consideration to the prevalence of apocalypticism in both religions during this period. There are only two apocalypses in the Bible—Daniel in the Hebrew Bible and Revelation in the New Testament—but the New Testament is heavily influenced by apocalypticism throughout, and the Hebrew Bible ends just as apocalypticism is becoming an important aspect of Jewish thought. For late Second Temple Jewish belief, we must go beyond the Bible to works like *1 Enoch*, a collection of at least five apocalypses, two of which date to the third century BCE and another contemporary with Daniel (around 165 BCE). Much of Jewish literature from this time is either in the form of an apocalypse or has substantial apocalyptic elements. It is often said that one must know the Old Testament to understand the New. But there is a gap between the last written Hebrew Bible document, Daniel, and the first written New Testament text, 1 Thessalonians, one of Paul's letters. That has sometimes been called the intertestamental period. Judaism was not static between the last books of the Hebrew Bible and the beginnings of Christianity; it was a living culture and religion that continued to develop. In that development, apocalypticism played an important role.

In teaching at Holy Cross and elsewhere, I have found it necessary in almost every class to provide a description of apocalypticism. Whether one studies the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, the historical Jesus, Second Temple Judaism, or related subjects, one cannot ignore the topic. A very large number of Jewish and Christian literary works from 300 BCE to 200 CE are in the form of apocalypses or have apocalyptic elements. Jesus thought in apocalyptic terms. So did Paul. The Gospels are loaded with apocalyptic features. Early Christianity and contemporary Judaism continued to produce apocalypses after the time of Jesus and the fall of Jerusalem, at least up until the end of the second century BCE.

Until recent decades, scholars have been ambivalent toward apocalypticism. A measure of this is the role apocalypticism has played in the study of the historical Jesus. During the first flowering of study of apocalypticism (beginning with the work of F. Lücke in 1832), writers tended to denigrate apocalypticism

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

and to separate Jesus from it (Lücke 1832). In 1892, Johannes Weiss argued that Jesus's concept of the kingdom was apocalyptic and firmly grounded in contemporary Jewish ideas (Weiss 1971). In 1906, Albert Schweitzer made much the same point (Schweitzer 2000).

Scholars are much more comfortable with apocalypticism today. Exciting work on apocalypticism has been done in recent decades, and it is the aim of this book to bring much of it to the fore in a form accessible to a wide audience.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Boyer, Paul. *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Dunn, James D. G. *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity*. Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1991.

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

1

Definitions and Origins

The Advent of Apocalypticism in Ancient Judaism

The history of ancient Israel, like that of all peoples, is marked by key events and periods that define or redefine its identity. Many of those watershed moments are so important to the people's self-conception that they become enshrined in a sacred story that changes over time, as does the people itself. History and legend intermingle and often become indistinguishable. This is especially true in the ancient world, when civic life and religious life were not separate realms. A change in the political or economic life of a people resulted in a change in its religion as well.

Israel's sacred story is embodied in the Hebrew Bible, roughly what Christians call the Old Testament. Since all Jews and Christians whom we will study in this book take for granted at least the main lines of this story, it is well for us to begin by briefly outlining a few aspects of it that affect our study.

Discouraged with trying to deal with humanity as a whole, God called Abraham and told him that he would make of him a great people and would give him a land (Gen. 12). Abraham traveled from Mesopotamia to Canaan, the land God chose to give to Abraham's posterity. Abraham and his descendants were to practice circumcision as a sign of their special relationship with God and their separateness from other nations (Gen. 17). Abraham's son Isaac had a son Jacob. Jacob and eleven of his twelve sons traveled with their families to Egypt, where the twelfth son, Joseph, had assumed political power and could protect them. After spending about four centuries there, they escaped the clutches of an oppressive Pharaoh (an Egyptian king). God split the Red Sea

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

to allow them, under Moses's leadership, to cross and escape the Egyptians. God then brought the sea back onto their Egyptian pursuers, drowning them. This was the exodus, to which later generations would look back as the basis for their relationship with Yahweh, Israel's own God.

Moses and Israel traveled to Mount Sinai in the desert where they made a covenant (an agreement) with the God who had just saved them. God promised to be their God if they obeyed his commands. He gave them the Ten Commandments, along with many other statutes. Central to those commands was how God was to be worshiped in the cult (Israel's religion as it concerned temple, altar, sacrifice, priests, and priestly liturgy), as well as instructions for keeping the major feasts (weekly Sabbath, the Day of Atonement, Passover and Unleavened Bread, Weeks, Tabernacles, New Year). Other rules concerned food, ritual purity, sexual practices, and civil law. The totality was Torah, literally "instruction," but usually translated "law." It was Israel's road map to God's will. Although "Torah" can be used more widely, it comes to mean primarily the first five books of the Bible—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—also known as the books of Moses.

After wandering for forty years in the desert as punishment for not trusting God, the Israelites entered Canaan under Joshua's leadership and took possession of it. Joshua distributed the land among the twelve tribes. After several centuries of rule by tribal heroes called judges, a monarchy was established. The first king, Saul, failed to establish a lasting dynasty, so he was succeeded by David and then by David's son Solomon. After Solomon's death, the kingdom split into a northern kingdom called Israel and a southern realm called Judah (922 BCE).

In 721 BCE, the north was swallowed up by the expanding Assyrian Empire, and the northern tribes were not heard from again. Legend believes that the ten lost tribes still exist somewhere in the world. Ultimately, these tribes must be restored. This restoration plays a role in many "eschatological" scenarios—pictures of the end of history as we know it, involving a radical change in current conditions.

In 586 BCE, the southern kingdom, Judah, was destroyed by the Babylonians, and Jerusalem and its temple were torn down. The most important members of the Judahite community were exiled to Babylonia, so this period is called the Babylonian exile.

The Persian Cyrus the Great conquered the Babylonian Empire in 539 BCE; he allowed the Judahites to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their city and temple. This is the Restoration. The temple was rebuilt in 520–515 BCE, and it stood until the Romans destroyed it in 70 CE. This defines the Second Temple period. Differences in the historical situation and in Israel's religion before and after the exile have led to the use of the adjective "Israelite" for the preexilic period and "Jewish" for the postexilic period. Cyrus did not allow the reinstitution of the monarchy. Eschatological scenarios often anticipated

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

a renewal of the monarchy. Since the king was anointed, he was a *māšîyaḥ*, a messiah, Hebrew for "anointed one."

In the next century, the Jewish Nehemiah was sent by the Persian crown to be governor of Judah, to rebuild Jerusalem's walls, and to institute certain reforms, especially ones that supported the temple's operations and the observance of the Sabbath (his initial trip occurred in 445 BCE). Around the same time (perhaps 458 BCE, perhaps later), Ezra, another Jew well trusted by the Persians, was sent to Judah to bring the written Torah, assembled and edited by the Babylonian Jewish community, to become the law of the land, along with applicable Persian law. The introduction of a written Torah helped make Judaism a religion of the book, as well as one centered on temple sacrifice and residence in a particular God-given land. Ezra was a Jewish priest of the line of Zadok (Solomon's high priest) and a scribe, one of the few in the ancient world who could read and write and who was therefore qualified to know Israel's traditions in depth (Hezser 2001; Harris 1989).

The conquests of Alexander the Great (333–323 BCE) initiated the Hellenistic period. "Hellenistic" comes from the Greek word *hellas*, meaning Greece. This was a long period of intense interaction between Greek culture and local culture, and it met with mixed reactions by the Jews. Some welcomed the changes, and some resisted. Conflict between parties in Jewish Palestine was ideological and sometimes violent.

At this time, Jewish apocalypticism makes its appearance. It is at least partly a reaction to momentous changes taking place in the world as a consequence of Alexander's conquests. Those changes were political, economic, religious, social, and cultural. Apocalypticism was one way to resist the inroads of empire in Israel (Horsley 2010b; Portier-Young 2011). Apocalyptic ideas and literature are attested in Persia, Israel's former overlord and still the residence of many Jews, and in Egypt, which had a considerable Jewish population. The earliest extant Jewish apocalypses are two sections of *1 Enoch*—the *Book of the Watchers* (*1 Enoch* 1–36) and the *Astronomical Book* (*1 Enoch* 72–82), both written sometime in the third century BCE, shortly after the imposition of Hellenistic imperial rule. The book of Daniel, the only apocalypse in the Jewish Bible, was written in the following century (165 BCE). It was written in response to the attempts of the Hellenistic king Antiochus IV to impose Hellenism and annihilate Judaism.

Apocalypticism changed Israel's view of the world and history. Information about God, history, Israel, and the world was now available through direct revelation to a seer (one who "sees" visions). History was viewed as a whole, from beginning to an inevitable end. Death was not the end for individuals; there were rewards and punishments after death. Corresponding beliefs in a last judgment, cosmic dissolution, resurrection, heaven and hell, and a restored Israel became common. The unseen world of angels and demons became a subject of intense interest and speculation.

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Christianity began as an apocalyptic sect within Judaism. When the temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, Judaism redefined itself with the Torah at its core, and apocalyptic beliefs became less important for Jews. Christianity's identity was tied up with apocalypticism, so as it emerged as a religion separate from Judaism, it preserved its apocalyptic foundations and has done so to the present day.

The Problem of Definition

Scholars have spilled a lot of ink trying to define the terms that head this chapter. Why is it so hard to define apocalypses, apocalypticism, and millenarianism? One obstacle is the difference between scholarly and popular usage. Although there were many ancient Jewish and Christian apocalypses, the most popular has always been the book of Revelation. It is the only apocalypse included in the New Testament.

Revelation gives us only one version of an apocalyptic worldview. It describes divine direction of eschatological events; foresees a great battle at Armageddon in which God, Satan, and their allies wage the final battle; expects the defeat of Satan and his angelic and human supporters by Jesus and his angelic forces; and anticipates cosmic disaster, resurrection, last judgment, postmortem (after death) rewards and punishments, and a new heaven and a new earth. It culminates in the descent of the new Jerusalem onto earth, the dwelling place of God and Christ. Popular views of apocalypticism are heavily influenced by Revelation. Cosmic disaster is central, so that the very word "apocalypse," which literally means simply "revelation" and which scholars use to designate the literary genre, has come to mean that disaster itself. It can designate any such catastrophe or any situation that puts the existence of the world at risk. The movie *Apocalypse Now*, concerning the chaos and destruction of the Vietnam War, is typical in that regard.

There are problems with using our terms this way. One objection is that we cannot rest with Revelation as our sole source for determining what an apocalypse is or what an apocalyptic worldview entails. We must use all the evidence at our disposal, which means examining at least a healthy selection of extant apocalypses. We also will not use "apocalypse" to mean the end of the world or a situation that puts the world at risk. For that, we will use the word "eschaton," which comes from the Greek word *eschaton* meaning "end." "Eschatology," commonly used in this context, means knowledge about the end of things as we know them, often involving the sorts of events mentioned above with respect to Revelation, but sometimes involving things that differ from that book. In any case, eschatological events are end-time happenings. We reserve "apocalypse" to refer to a literary work of a particular genre.

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Another issue in defining apocalypticism is that it has assumed many different forms and has played a variety of functions. It was once common to include all sorts of phenomena under the term "apocalyptic," including literary genres, social movements, religious ideas, and eschatological expectations. Daniel and Revelation have always been influential in such definitions, but each scholar decided what other texts and phenomena to use. This produced imprecise usage. Eventually, many grew uncomfortable with the vagueness of it all and tried to sharpen the definitions.

In this book we use the following terminology: "apocalypse" is a literary genre; "apocalypticism" is a worldview; the adjective "apocalyptic" designates imagery, concepts, worldview, themes, literary forms, and social manifestations associated with apocalypses (Koch 1972; Hanson 1976a, 1976b). When speaking of a social movement, we make that clear. We discuss the term "millenarianism" later in this chapter.

Apocalypse: The Apocalyptic Genre

A major contribution to defining apocalypses and apocalypticism came through a study group of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). They reasoned that genre was the place to begin the project of clarification, since everything posited about apocalypticism ultimately originates in literary texts deemed apocalyptic. Apocalypticism is the worldview shared by apocalypses.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, scholars began to attend closely to a collection of literary works from the ancient world, both Jewish and Christian, that resembled each other in form and content. Interest was originally spurred by the publication in 1821 of *1 Enoch*, which had been brought back to England from Ethiopia (Collins 1997, 2). The works that caught scholarly notice all bore some resemblance to the canonical texts of Daniel and Revelation. ("Canonical" means belonging to the Bible; the "canon," those books deemed authoritative by Judaism or Christianity.) At the same time, they manifested variety in form and content.

In 1832, Lücke used the apocalyptic texts then available to him (Daniel, *4 Ezra*, *1 Enoch*, the *Sibylline Oracles*) to illuminate Revelation (Lücke 1832). As the century progressed, more texts came to light that belonged to the same genre (*2 Baruch*; *3 Baruch*; *2 Enoch*; *Apocalypse of Abraham*) (Collins 1997, 2). Scholars began to call such texts "apocalypses," because they resembled Revelation, whose first words are "the revelation [*apocalypsis*] of Jesus Christ." The ancient texts predating Revelation did not explicitly call themselves apocalypses, but many written afterward did (Morton Smith 1983).

In 1979, the SBL group published its results. It had developed a definition for "apocalypse" and had classified ancient texts accordingly. The definition it produced is the following:

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

> A genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world. (Collins 1998)

The group judged that every apocalypse had these characteristics. In a later article, Collins characterized content of apocalypses in other words: "The mysteries they disclose involve a view of human affairs in which major importance is attached to the influence of the supernatural world and the expectation of eschatological judgment" (Collins 1991, 16).

Some advocate including social function in the definition of genre. Determining function is a slippery process, however. A given genre might serve a variety of functions. A novel should entertain, but it might also instruct. The instruction might be a moral lesson, or it might also give the reader a taste of a given historical period or a different culture. To determine function accurately, we would have to know a good deal about how a specific culture operates. Such knowledge is not always available. Despite these reservations, trying to determine the function of a genre can be informative. In the case of apocalypses, another study group of the SBL tackled the problem and produced the following statement:

> [Apocalypses are] intended to interpret the present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behavior of the audience by means of divine authority. (Yarbro Collins 1986, 7)

What do modern readers expect when they pick up an apocalypse? One answer is "nothing." How would they know what to expect? Little in our modern literary experience prepares us to read one. Christians with an apocalyptic worldview do have such experience. But even they are likely to be familiar only with Daniel and Revelation, and not with noncanonical (nonbiblical) apocalypses such as *1 Enoch*.

The SBL group on genre found that apocalypses are of two main types, one containing a heavenly journey and the other a review of history. Those with a heavenly journey demonstrate greater interest in cosmological knowledge, and those with a review of history focus on history itself—its course, the cosmic forces behind it, and its goal. The distinction is not absolute. The *Apocalypse of Abraham*, written around the turn of the second century CE, has both a heavenly journey and a review of history. Nonetheless, the two types of apocalypses alert us to variety within the genre.

Apocalypses are usually pseudonymous, written under a false (*pseudos*) name (*onoma*). Exceptions to this rule are the book of Revelation and the second-century Christian *Shepherd of Hermas*. All Jewish apocalypses are

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

pseudonymous. Apocalypses are attributed to ancient heroes, such as Moses, Abraham, Ezra, and Enoch, who play the role of seer (one who sees visions). The attribution of an apocalypse to an ancient hero lends legitimacy and status to the work. It is impressive when apocalypses show an ancient hero receiving revelation relevant to present times. When the apocalypse contains a "prediction" of events between the era of the fictional writer (Enoch, for example) and that of the real writer, those predictions will, of course, be accurate, to the degree that the author knows history. Therefore ancient readers will trust real predictions made by the writer. We can sometimes date a work by determining the point at which the review of history switches from being accurate to being inaccurate (Clifford 1975). "Prediction" after the fact is called by the technical term *vaticinium ex eventu*, a Latin phrase meaning "prophecy from the event."

To a modern mind, pseudonymity might seem like simple deception. It is less clear how to judge this issue in antiquity. Surely in their ordinary lives the authors of apocalypses would know that they were not the ancient seers in whose names they wrote, although if they received visions in a trance, they might not distinguish between themselves and their fictive seers. It is likely that readers would have taken attribution to an ancient seer seriously.

Ideas of authorship were different in the ancient world than in the modern one. The five books of Torah and all the historical books in the Bible are anonymous. Those who added oracles to the prophetic books did so anonymously, but they meant for them to be taken as part of the prophetic heritage of the original prophet whose name appears in the book. Perhaps these later prophets thought of themselves as being in the tradition of the named prophet or having his spirit. If we admit the possibility of spiritual possession into the discussion, we could imagine that prophets or apocalyptic seers actually went into trances and "became" the seer or prophet in question (Stone 1990, 119–25).

Both the prophets of Israel and the apocalyptic writers concerned themselves with eschatology. For Israel's prophets, the expected future remained this-worldly. For apocalypses, there is an element of postmortem rewards and punishments. This accounts for the most fundamental difference between prophetic and apocalyptic eschatology (Collins 1974a).

In 1982, Christopher Rowland argued that the eschatological element of apocalypses had been overplayed and that the focus should be on revelation itself as the essential element of apocalypses (1982). Apocalypses are as likely to be interested in cosmological knowledge as in eschatology. Rowland had been anticipated by Michael Stone, who wrote a seminal article entitled "Lists of Revealed Things in the Apocalyptic Literature" (1976). His lists demonstrate that eschatology is one of many things revealed in apocalypses. However, although apocalyptic literature demonstrates a wide range of interests, eschatology is always present in some form and is often central.

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Collins (1997) recently offered a restatement of the definition of apocalypses that makes even clearer than the one in 1979 that eschatology and judgment are integral to apocalypses:

> They [both types of apocalypses—historical and cosmological] are presented as supernatural revelations, mediated by an angel or some heavenly being, and they invariably focus on the final end of life and history. This final end usually entails the transformation of this world (the new creation of the book of Revelation) but it also involves the judgment of the individual dead and their assignment to eternal bliss or damnation. (Collins 1997, 3)

Apocalypticism

It is more difficult to define apocalypticism than apocalypse. Most simply, it is the worldview contained in apocalypses. But apocalypses vary widely. Even traits widely attested in many apocalypses may not be present in every one of them. If we restrict ourselves to elements present in every apocalypse, we end up with a list too limited to do justice to the broader worldview. If we are too broad, the designation loses focus and meaning. Here we start with elements common to all apocalypses and then proceed to important elements that might not be universal.

The Unseen World

Every apocalypse assumes an unseen world. The unseen world affects and even determines the visible world. The unseen world is not accessible to humans by ordinary means. No matter how diligently a member of Israel studies Torah, for example, he or she cannot access the knowledge conveyed in apocalypses. Human reason cannot arrive at this knowledge, either. Revelation is necessary and comes through visions, auditions, and visits to normally inaccessible places like heaven, hell, and remote parts of the earth (Himmelfarb 1983; 1993). The seer sees and interacts with the inhabitants of that world—angels, demons, strange monsters, God, and gods. The interaction results in special, esoteric knowledge being given to the seer.

The word "supernatural" is not entirely appropriate here because modern conceptions of nature differ greatly from how the ancients thought of it (D. Martin 2004, 13–16). For the ancients, heaven and hell are part of a single, continuous universe, not "spiritual" places or places in another dimension. Earth and heaven together can come into or pass out of existence, or be renewed. A seer can travel to heaven and hell and come back, and hell is often localized at the ends of the earth or beneath it. Similarly, demons, angels, and gods are not really "supernatural," for they are all part of nature. "Unseen" is not a perfect substitute for "supernatural," since

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

that world is indeed seen by the seer, as granted by God. We are left with inadequate terminology.

The Future

Apocalypses reveal not just the unseen world but also the future. For some apocalypses, this aspect is dominant. For others, it is less prominent than other things, such as cosmological knowledge. Apocalypses often anticipate an end to the present order that is cosmic in scope. Radical change is always in sight. Sometimes this means the end of the world, but more frequently it means its transformation. A few texts are mainly interested in the fate of the individual. But in all cases, postmortem rewards and punishments are present. This can mean that resurrection is envisaged, but not necessarily. Another common form of survival of death has been termed "astral immortality," meaning immortality in company with the stars, who are heavenly beings.

Divine Sovereignty

God's sovereignty is at issue in apocalypticism, particularly that of the historical variety. God will eventually rule all, but presently divine sovereignty is challenged by figures opposed to God, human and superhuman, and the universe is therefore not as God intended. God's ultimate victory is certain, but conflict in the present is real and will intensify as the end approaches. Recent scholarship stresses the role of apocalypticism in resisting empire, first the Hellenistic empires and then Rome (Portier-Young 2011; Horsley 2010b). Political circumstances are closely associated with cosmic realities.

Dualism

Dualism is common in apocalypses. It sees things in terms of polar opposites. Socially, that means that humanity consists of the righteous and the wicked, with no middle group. Temporally, it means that there are two worlds, present and future. Cosmically, it means that there are forces arrayed on God's side and forces against him—angels against demons, or good angels against bad angels. In terms of belief, it means that the in-group has the truth, and no one else does. Behaviorally, it means strict regulation of behavior as either compatible or incompatible with community rules and norms. Apocalypses generally leave little or no middle ground in any of these categories (Gammie 1974).

Eschatological Timetables

Other features often appear in apocalypses, even if they are not present in all. One concerns the timing of the end, the eschaton. It is common for apocalypses to give some sort of indication of how close the end is, but it is

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

almost always vague. The end is usually imminent. The book of Revelation, for example, repeatedly says that the end is coming "soon" (the word appears ten times in the book) but does not say exactly when. Daniel is unusual in that it tries to be more precise about when the end will come. It preserves two self-contradictory efforts to calculate the end down to the day: "From the time that the regular burnt-offering is taken away and the abomination that desolates is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred ninety days. Happy are those who persevere and attain the thousand three hundred thirty-five days" (Dan. 12:11–12). These may have been added shortly after the failure of Daniel's prediction that the end would come in three and a half years.

The Eschaton

The eschaton is the end of the world as we know it. The eschaton is cosmic in scope in most apocalypses. It involves more than just humanity. It affects all of creation. Sun, moon, and stars are changed. Mountains melt, the earth trembles, and the heavens are ripped open. The eschaton comes in a great variety of versions, although many elements are frequently repeated across texts, times, and places.

The World to Come

Apocalypses consider the world to come as ideal. The wicked, human and superhuman, are eternally punished or go out of existence. Those who remain fully accept God's will. Sin is gone, so what sin brought—death, suffering, sickness, warfare, famine, and so on—also disappears. What follows varies from apocalypse to apocalypse. Most expect a renewed earth on which humans will live, but others see rather the translation of righteous humans to fellowship with the stars in the heavens.

Dissatisfaction with the Present

Apocalypses usually display dissatisfaction with the state of the world. That is why they envisage a better world to come. When that vision entails a renewal of this world, it is sometimes conceptualized in terms of a return to the original state of creation. The famous German dictum for this is that the *Endzeit* becomes the *Urzeit*. That is, the end time is a return to origins. Elements such as the conquest of death, which according to Genesis came into the world through sin, and almost limitless fertility of the earth, which according to Genesis became much less fertile because of sin, show that the end time reverses the changes effected by a primeval rebellion against God. Central to the changes are also what we think of as political and economic concerns. Power relations—political, economic, social, and even religious—in the present are perverted, with the wicked ruling and

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

oppressing the righteous. This will be reversed. God is intimately concerned with the world's injustice.

End-Time Conflict and Tribulation

The end does not come without resistance. It is common to read of a final battle between God's forces and those of God's enemies. The final struggle sometimes entails the participation of humans and sometimes not. Earthly war can be part of the end time, but not necessarily. Humans may remain passive as God accomplishes the divine purpose, alone or with angelic aid. Although we might expect a messiah as part of the end time, he is not always present. Apocalypses may expect the end to be preceded by a period of unprecedented suffering, known in Revelation as the "tribulation" (*thlipsis*).

Periodization of History and Determinism

Periodization of history and determinism are widespread in historical apocalypses. History has a set course to which it must adhere. God plans and knows all in advance. It is fixed. While the prophets normally offer repentance as a way to avoid punishments to come, in apocalypses one cannot alter the course of history. People have free will to the extent that they can choose one side or another in the eschatological struggle. But one cannot prevent or forestall what is to come. Since the readers live in the last period or in a time just prior to that, the decision to live according to the views of the apocalyptic writer is pressing.

Angelology and Demonology

Apocalypses often contain developed angelology and demonology, especially the former. Angels and an occasional demon appear in the Hebrew Bible, but they are few, relatively undifferentiated, and function primarily as a substitute for God's presence. Through apocalypses, angels and demons enter the Jewish world in numbers and detail. Many receive names—some familiar, such as Michael, Raphael, and Gabriel; others not so familiar, such as Shemyaza, Azazel, and Uriel. Angels have various tasks to perform, helping God to govern the universe in all its complexity. Individual demons are not often named nor their functions specified, but their leader assumes a variety of names. Satan is the name most familiar to modern readers, but the demonic leader is also called other things, including Belial, Beliar, Beelzebul, and Mastema.

Apocalyptic Language

Apocalyptic language is a world unto itself, although it borrows heavily from many sources. "Language" here means the full array of rhetoric, imagery,

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

motifs, metaphor, and narrative at work in apocalypses. Apocalypticism is heavily mythological and owes a debt to some of the great myths of the ancient Near East and the Hellenistic world. This language is simultaneously metaphorical and literal, even though these terms are usually thought to be mutually exclusive (Lincoln 1999). We commonly think of metaphor as ornamental and dispensable, and suggestive rather than literal. It differs from scientific thought and philosophical inquiry. It is "artsy" rather than metaphysical. But the case has been made persuasively that metaphor is at the core of human experience and intelligence (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Through metaphor humans assimilate new knowledge and arrive at an understanding of the world. Metaphor even underlies science and philosophy. If we take this approach to metaphor, seeing it as to some extent literal is less surprising. This needs fuller explanation.

Apocalypses abound in strange creatures from an unseen world that interact with other superhuman creatures and with humans. They are both like and unlike creatures on earth. For example, they may have the characteristics of earthly beasts such as lions, bears, and leopards, but they combine features that are found together in no earthly animals. Apocalypses also tell of angels, demons, and other cosmic beings. Some represent the awesome power of earthly empires, and some form part of God's heavenly army. They fight one another, receive God's approval or endure God's wrath, and interfere in human history. Do apocalyptic writers and their ancient readers or hearers actually believe in such creatures? Are we to take apocalyptic scenarios of the end literally? Will mountains really melt? Will stars actually fall from the skies? How are we to construe this language?

Apocalyptic language is simultaneously literal and figurative. Apocalyptic metaphors do relate to real places, creatures, and events, but not always in a simple one-to-one, referential way. All apocalypses have allegorical features, some more than others. But to push every detail for its referent in the "real" world is to reduce the entirety to allegory. Similarly, an overly literalistic reading can push their referentiality too far. It can miss their mythological, even poetic nature. It is unhelpful to insist either that the seer of Revelation thinks that there is a literal beast with seven heads and ten horns that has arisen out of the sea (Rev. 13) or that this is a "mere" symbol. For this seer, the beast is real, but it also operates as a metaphor and can mean more than a single thing. Collins calls this "multivalence" (1984a, 51–52). This accords with the fact that many apocalypses use recapitulation; that is, they record or predict the same events in various ways, all of which are to some degree literal and to some degree not (Murphy 1998, 51–53). We cannot always restrict apocalyptic referents to one of two or more contrasting choices. One might say that apocalyptic language has more in common with poetry than prose, but that feeds into modern misconceptions of poetry, such that it is flowery, decorative, even sentimental, and not to be taken literally. Poetry, and truth, are far more complicated.

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Apocalyptic language invites us to experience the world it creates, with all its fluidity and complexity and contradictions. It appeals to our deepest emotions, fears, and desires, much as do mythology and poetry. Truth here is not only a question of verisimilitude or historical accuracy. It has more to do with basic ways of experiencing the world. Do the writers believe in the unseen worlds they depict? They do. Do they believe that seers are granted visions into and tours of the unseen world? Yes. Do they believe that the specifics of that world are accurate as described? Yes and no. Remember that these are often visions that need interpretation. They symbolize things, such as empires and kings. At the same time, even if an empire can be symbolized by a beast, it can be symbolized in other ways as well. And both are true and revelatory. The superhuman power of empires, angels, and demons is real. How it is presented can change.

Apocalyptic Language

- Draws heavily on mythology
- Is both literal and metaphorical
- Has allegorical features and concrete referents
- Evokes deep emotions
- Brings the reader into an unseen world
- Relates to social groups and movements

This is a version of the age-old problem of how to talk about God. Thomas Aquinas, the Dominican theologian of the thirteenth century, can help us, even though he himself had little use for apocalypticism as such. Much of his theology is strictly logical and sounds almost scientific. At the same time, he warns that we can speak of God only by analogy. God, ultimately unknowable, can be spoken of only in terms of things that we know and understand. This is the way of analogy, the *cognitio analogica*. A degree of anthropomorphism (portraying God in human terms) is unavoidable. Still, God is totally other, so everything we say about God must simultaneously be negated. This is known as the *via negativa*, the "negative way." God must at least be able to speak, for we speak, but God does not really speak as humans do. God must love, since humans love and God is greater than we, but God does not love as do humans. By combining analogy and the *via negativa* in his theology, Aquinas comes close to what we mean by saying that apocalyptic language is both metaphorical and literal. What can be taken to be "mere" analogies and figurative language is at the same time literal to some degree.

We leave this difficult but fascinating topic here, hoping that the experience of reading apocalyptic literature will do more to illuminate the nature of apocalyptic language than this abstract discussion can do.

Social Movements

It is difficult to determine whether a given ancient apocalypse is the product of a social movement. We usually do not have enough evidence to judge. But we are lucky to have two groups that were apocalyptic in their worldview—the

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Elements of an Apocalyptic Worldview

- An unseen world affects or even determines this one.
- The unseen world is accessible only through revelation.
- After death, humans are judged and rewarded or punished.
- There is often a future world that entails a renewal of the present one or its replacement with a better one.
- God's sovereignty is at issue. Humans and/or angels have rebelled against God's rule, but divine rule will soon be reasserted. Resistance to the coming of God's rule is common. God sometimes accomplishes the reestablishment of divine rule alone, sometimes with angelic aid, and sometimes with human aid. God's sovereignty is contrary to earth's empires, especially those that oppress Israel or Christians.
- Dualism pervades apocalypses—humanity is divided into the righteous and the unrighteous; time is divided into the present world and the one to come; cosmic powers are seen to be either for or against God.
- There is dissatisfaction with the present world.
- The coming of the eschaton is often accompanied by cosmic disturbances, as well as by social upheaval.
- The coming of a messiah is not present in every apocalypse but is not uncommon.
- The apocalyptic worldview is deterministic. At least on the macro level, things happen according to God's plans, regardless of human action. Individuals and groups can affect their own fate by aligning with or against God.
- The apocalyptic worldview has a developed angelology and demonology.
- Apocalyptic language is used to communicate the apocalyptic worldview.

community of the Dead Sea Scrolls and early Christianity. We could go further and include the earliest Jesus movement, the group of people who followed Jesus, but we have less certitude in that case.

Origins of Apocalypses and Apocalypticism

Did this new way of looking at the world and this new literary genre evolve out of what had gone before within Israel's religion and culture, or was it imported from outside? Most take the position that apocalypticism developed in Israel under both external and internal influences. Exposure to other civilizations, particularly that of the Persians, was important, as was development of elements from within Israel, drawing on both prophecy and wisdom, all of which gained special impetus from the new Hellenistic world set in motion by the conquests of Alexander and a new situation determined by oppressive empires.

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

External Influences

The religion of ancient Israel was not a pure, self-contained, unchanging religion that at times was jeopardized by its contact with outsiders. No major religion has ever been a static, pure entity, immune from external influence and internal change. Preexilic Israelite religion and postexilic Judaism are no exceptions. Careful reading of the Bible discloses that before the Babylonian exile, it was more the rule than the exception that the Israelites were open to religious influences from their neighbors and that they worshiped multiple gods and goddesses. They were especially open to Canaanite influence (Collins 2004, 188–89; M. S. Smith 2002).

During the Babylonian exile, Israel experienced Mesopotamian influences. The Persian king Cyrus the Great conquered the Babylonian Empire in 539 BCE, thereby subjecting the Jews to Persian influence. Persian religion was Zoroastrianism, and it contained elements that fed into apocalypticism. These included dualism, periodization of history, heaven and hell, postmortem rewards and punishments, resurrection, angels and demons, the clash of superhuman forces of good and evil, eschatological battles with attendant suffering, and ascent of the soul. Apocalypses also have much in common with political prophecy from Mesopotamia (Babylonia, Sumeria, Akkadia), as well as with mantic wisdom from the same area, that is, wisdom that comes from decoding enigmatic visions.

Here we depend on the work of Richard Clifford, who provides the following list of elements and topics from ancient mythology that were influential on the apocalyptic genre:

> The divine assembly under the high god responding to a major threat, cosmic enemies portrayed as monsters, various heavenly beings, divine decrees or secret knowledge, and a sage-mediator of heavenly knowledge. Among the topics are explorations of the nature of evil and new creation or restoration of the original order. (Clifford 1998, 4–5)

Clifford also points to three Mesopotamian genres that helped shape the apocalyptic genre, which we will look at in detail: combat myths, *vaticinia ex eventu* (Latin for "prophecies after the fact"), and dream visions (visions seen by a seer while asleep), both from Akkadian sources.

Combat myths. In 1895, Hermann Gunkel showed that Gen. 1 and Rev. 12 were heavily influenced by an ancient Near Eastern narrative called the "combat myth" (Gunkel 2006). It depicts a battle between gods. At stake is the sovereignty of specific gods as well as the integrity of creation. The combat myth contains much that is central to apocalypticism: "the *Urzeit* ('primal time') *Endzeit* ('end-time') equation, creation and new creation, the monster symbolizing evil, and divine kingship" (Clifford 1998, 4). The combat myth is one of the most important influences of the ancient Near East on apocalypses.

Frederick J. Murphy, Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)