

Eschatology

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Brief Introduction to Eschatology

“The term eschatology derives from two Greek words, *eschatos* – “last,” and *logos* – “speech, word, or discussion.” As a theological technical term eschatology carries the basic meaning of a “discussion of the last things or the last age.” It is used in a variety of different, yet related contexts such as the second coming of Christ, the final judgment, or the final days of human history. In another “timeless” sense, the term is used in regard to “significant” events which have “end time” significance. Thus the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, repentance, baptism, and matters relating to divine activity relating to the inauguration of the kingdom are referred to as eschatological events or matters having eschatological significance. In the context of genre such as apocalyptic or Revelation, significant events such as the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A. D. are often described in eschatological terminology. The intent is not to imply that such events inaugurate the final end time, but is intended to demonstrate that the event carries within it end time significance.

In the context of Revelation, the author relies heavily on both apocalyptic and eschatological genres. In one sense, much apocalyptic is eschatological in that it draws heavily on the transcendent intervention of God, and in the case of Revelation such intervention bears end time significance. Hence in Revelation much of the apocalyptic genre has eschatological implications. The use of the eschatology of Revelation is not intended to imply that the eschatological terminology describing an event is intended as a prophecy regarding some end time event. The intention is that the event being described in eschatological language simply bears end time significance.

Proleptic Eschatology

This concept derives from the word *prolepsis* which in turn derives from the Greek *prolepsis* or *prolambanein* which means to *take place beforehand*, *pro* – *before*, *lambanō* – *to take*. *Eschatology* (see above under eschatology) means a discussion of end time things. In the context of eschatology, proleptic means to describe, experience, or see something relating to the end time in advance of the end. The Lord’s Supper or communion is a proleptic eschatological experience in the sense that during this meal the Christian experiences in advance the benefits of the great eschatological banquet that all of the saints will experience around God’s table. Baptism is a proleptic eschatological experience in that in baptism one experiences in advance the resurrection to a new life in Christ. In Revelation John describes imminent judgment on Rome in terms of end of the world language. In this he is drawing on the concept of proleptic eschatological experience in that Rome is experiencing the final judgment in advance or that the judgment is expressed in advance in terms of end of the world language.¹

Discussion on Eschatology

These notes are from David E. Aune, Eschatology, Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary.

The article by David Aune in this Bible Dictionary is an extensive study of the topic Eschatology as it relates to Biblical Theology. The advanced reader, or student, is encouraged to survey the full article in the AYBD. The following “extract notes” under this section are all from David Aune’s AYBD article.

¹ Ian A. Fair, *Conquering With Christ*, A Commentary on Revelation, ACU, 2011.

“A. Introductory Issues

At least three things should be said as *part of the prologue* to a discussion of OT eschatology: (1) the term *eschatology* is used with widely differing meanings; (2) the term, as applied to OT literature, dates only to the 19th century; and (3) despite the previous point, the term sounds vaguely archaic today, reminiscent of overly systematic treatments of ancient Israelite thought. Of these observations, the first especially requires some discussion. The word *eschatology* derives from the Greek term *eschatos*, which has a variety of meanings depending upon the larger frame of reference: farthest extent in space, final element of time, and last piece of money. The term *eschatology* has been prominent in theological discourse as a reference to the last things in a worldwide and historical sense, e.g., an apocalyptic, cosmic cataclysm and a new age of conflict followed by utopian bliss ...

Another preliminary issue involves *the uniqueness of eschatological notion in ancient Israel*. Any discussion of eschatology in the OT must raise the question of whether or not ancient Israel, as reflected in the OT, possessed eschatological notions which serve to distinguish it from other ANE cultures. This particular issue has been important since the earliest discussions of the topic of OT eschatology ... for Herman Gunkel, (early 20th century CE) this larger environment involved perceptions of an *Urzeit* and *Endzeit*, *primal time* and *a return to such time in the final days*. Discussions of eschatology were often couched in this conceptual framework ... Now, many decades after the work of Gressmann, Gunkel, and Wellhausen, it seems appropriate to maintain that *no evidence from ANE civilization attests the level of eschatological expectation which we find in Israel ...*

A related but by no means identical issue is the relationship between two conceptual terms *eschatology* and *apocalypticism*. *At the outset it seems important to affirm that all apocalypticism involves eschatology, but not all eschatology involves apocalypticism.*

All apocalyptic literature in the OT, which may be conveniently subdivided into early (e.g., Isaiah 24–27; Zechariah 9–14; Joel 3–4—Eng 2:28–3:21) and developed (Daniel 7–12), involves some notion of a momentous time during which Yahweh will act decisively to create a time of weal for Israel. Nonetheless, not all literature which has been labeled as eschatological shares the characteristics of this aforementioned apocalyptic literature, whether early or developed. Further complicating the relationship of eschatology and apocalypticism is the fact that whereas one may readily speak of apocalyptic literature, it is much more difficult to use the term *eschatological literature*. The term *eschatological* is not in the first instance appropriate as a literary description. *Eschatological notions appear in prose and in poetic texts.* There is no constellation of characteristics for eschatology that allows regular *literary* classification; and this is in contradistinction to the use of the term *apocalyptic literature*, which refers to vision reports such as those found in Daniel 7–12. Nonetheless, it is rare to read a discussion of OT eschatology without finding reference to Amos 5:18–20, a text which is regularly termed eschatological.”

B. Sources of OT Eschatology

IAF. Because of the vast literary and historical “world” covered in this section, which is extremely important to understanding the background to biblical eschatology the following material referenced by Geroge Nickelsburg, AYBD, is due to space seriously edited.

“If by eschatology one means a form of radical orientation to the future, which may involve a sort of social and/or cosmic arrangement fundamentally different from that which currently exists, then it is possible to speak about the development of an eschatological tradition complex in ancient Israel ... The ingredients which make up the development of an eschatological tradition complex in Israel are several. These elements, in conjunction with the message of the Israelite prophets as well as the catalyst provided by the events surrounding the year 587, the year in which Jerusalem fell, configured the eschatological tradition in its most vigorous form.

1. Patriarchal Future Promise Traditions.

2. David-Zion Future Traditions.
3. Sinai Covenant Traditions.”

C. Prophetic Eschatology

1. Preexilic Prophets ... Early date Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Isaiah, Ezekiel

2. Postexilic Prophets. During the early restoration period Israel’s eschatological traditions, which by this time entailed language of both weal and woe, began to develop in new and decisive ways. With the rededication of the temple, the stage was set for the realization of the eschatology of weal proclaimed most prominently by *Deutero-Isaiah*. Such realization did not, however, occur. In a dimly understood process, the eschatologies of weal and woe were conjoined and became what some have termed “early apocalypticism.” This process in which the eschatological traditions intensified and coalesced was, no doubt, influenced by the frustrated expectations for restoration in the late 6th and the 5th centuries ...

From this coalescence of earlier Israelite traditions into the eschatological tradition complex which developed in the late monarchic period, and then from the development of the eschatological tradition complex into apocalyptic literature in the early restoration period, the further step of fully developed apocalyptic visions, which were inherently eschatological, was not a large one. Here, with the eschatological visions of Daniel, there is a specific form—the apocalyptic vision—for articulating the complex conceptual apparatus of a radically new future, that of apocalypticism. With the configuration of the eschatological tradition complex into apocalyptic literature, the history of the development of OT eschatology is at an end. Postbiblical eschatology is prominent in the OT apocryphal literature, in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and in the NT.”

D. Dynamics in OT Eschatology

1. Historical Development. At this point in the discussion it seems appropriate to make at least three fundamental observations. *First*, OT eschatology should be discussed within the context of historical development. Old Testament eschatology is best understood as a complex of traditions evolving out of earlier and discrete Israelite traditions. Old Testament eschatology is not essentially a systematic theological term, and therefore it is difficult to discuss eschatology as if one were describing one basic concept. Israel’s eschatological expectations changed considerably over time. In this regard it is important to note that much of OT eschatology during, for example, the 6th century, was an intra-Israelite development. To be sure, there were notions about kingship which were common to the larger ANE environment. However, the patriarchal promise tradition as well as the traditions about the Davidic heir and the Sinai covenant were Israel-specific. Israelite eschatology becomes therefore much different from future expectations discernible in other Syro-Palestinian or Mesopotamian cultures.

2. Social Context. *Second*, not all Israelites shared OT eschatological expectations. There were other circles in Israel which, especially during the time of the Exile and, even more so, during the time of the restoration, did not use eschatological or early apocalyptic language. For example, the wisdom circles, as these are preserved in the books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes, did not seem to share the notion of a radical historical judgment or a fundamentally different sort of future. Moreover, there were circles whose views are preserved in the book of Ezra-Nehemiah and also in the book of Chronicles, which perceive Israel’s existence during the Persian period in non-eschatological ways. The same may be said for the so-called Priestly circles associated with the P-source. Put another way, OT eschatology was not an all-Israelite phenomenon but was one important way of perceiving reality. In all likelihood the eschatological perception of reality was experienced by those who were not necessarily in charge of either Israel’s political or religious institutions.

3. Historical Period. *Third*, OT eschatology, namely, the development of a certain tradition complex, seemed to evolve and intensify in particular historical conditions, conditions in which all Israel or even certain groups in Israel were not flourishing. For example, the intensification and the integration of the

separate traditions during the time of the classical prophets occurred at a time during which Israel was under threat first by the Neo-Assyrian Empire and then secondly by the Neo-Babylonian Empire. This was a time of dire threat to the independence of Israel, and of course, eventuated in the demise of the nation-state. Then, too, the tradition complex of OT eschatology developed decisively in the Persian period. This too was a time in which the emergent identity of the restored Yahwistic community was under significant threat. Moreover, during this time there appeared to be fundamental dissensions occurring within the Yahwistic community, with various groups vying for leadership and authority. Threat to the community could come from without or from within. With this dual threat during the time of the Persian period, the specific historical contexts were set for the development of the eschatological tradition complex into apocalypticism and its literature configuration as apocalyptic literature.

E. OT Eschatological Expectations

Having described the development of the OT eschatology tradition complex, it is necessary to *highlight briefly some of the major features in the fully configured eschatological tradition complex. The eschatological expectation is heavily dependent upon the notion of Yahweh's divine kingship and rule. Yahweh is expected to arrive again and act decisively in the future so as to effect the institution of his realm ...*

With Yahweh enthroned, one expects a time of paradise or peace. Such good times may be understood in terms of the monarchic traditions, namely, through the expectations associated with a just and divine king on the throne. Such expectations include proper administration of justice, fertility for the land, and the lack of military confrontation. Although the emphasis in eschatological tradition is on Yahweh as king, there is on occasion a place for a "righteous David," one who will rule with equity and beneficence. This expectation gives rise to so-called messianic texts, literature which attests to the hope of a radically good Davidic ruler, Ps 18:50; Ezek 37:23–24. Yahweh remains, however, the ruler par excellence.

The future time may be described using the language of the covenant ... The eschatological future is a time in which the covenant will be obeyed, so Jeremiah 31, which means eo ipso that covenant blessings will ensue. The specifics of covenant blessing language are not dissimilar to the sorts of things foreseen as part of Yahweh's just rule. So too, the patriarchal promise traditions figure in the eschatological scenario by indicating that Yahweh's rule will center not on a heavenly throne, nor just in the city of divine residence, but throughout the land which had been promised to Israel's forebears. That Israel will be great in number, the other side of the patriarchal promise, seems to be presumed in much of the eschatological tradition.

By way of summary, two texts, one which predates the destruction of 587 B.C.E. and one which dates to the postexilic era, may serve to encapsulate critical emphases in the OT eschatological tradition complex—Ezek 7:2b–3a, "An end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land. Now the end is upon you ...;" Zech 14:9a, "Yahweh will become King over all the earth ..."

Introduction to Eschatological Expectations

Although the term *eschatology* does not occur in the ancient sources, its widespread use in modern criticism reflects the correct notion that the OT, the Jewish writings of the Greco-Roman period, and the NT frequently assert that God will act decisively in the future and that a different state of affairs will ensue. The term and its traditional use have been misleading, however, because they have often been governed by theological agendas that have attempted to extrapolate from the texts a unified and systematic doctrine about the "end of the world" or one's state and fate at the end of one's life. Also problematic is the implication that *all* the texts designated as "eschatological" envision a decisive end to the present order and the beginning of a new order.

Given the variety that contemporary scholarship has begun to discover in the sources, it is appropriate to hear the texts, each on its own terms, and to develop categories that reflect the differences and points

of continuity—synchronically among contemporaneous texts and diachronically from the oldest OT strata through the noncanonical Jewish texts to the NT and beyond. This task, which awaits doing, is substantial; in what follows it is possible only to sample typical texts from the Hebrew Scriptures and from the Jewish writings up to ca. 100 C.E. Crucial in the analysis is the assumption that expressions of religious thought must be interpreted with a view toward the specific situations and experiences that gave rise to them and influenced their formulation.

The OT

1. Pentateuch. Composing their traditions when Israel already lived in its land, the authors of the J and E strands of the Pentateuch created a narrative world in which God, of old, had made covenant promises that would be fulfilled in the future, when Israel would be a great nation and inhabit the land of Canaan. While the fulfilled promise of land may have been understood as vindicating Israel's covenantal status, the promises of innumerable progeny and a superior relationship to the nations may well have been seen at times to await fulfillment in the future.

The inseparable relationship between present and future is a basic structural component in the covenantal scheme of the Deuteronomist. As initiator and overseer of the covenant, Yahweh deals justly with Israel in the present, rewarding and punishing the people for past action; or Yahweh is expected to do so in the future because of their present actions. This causal relationship between past and present or present and future is explicated in detail in Deuteronomy 28–30, according to two scenarios in chaps. 28–30 and chap. 32. Chapter 28 describes the blessings and curses that will be dispensed alternatively when Israel obeys and disobeys. Chapter 30 posits the chronological succession of blessing and curse, the latter culminating in exile; and it predicts that Israel will repent and God will restore the people to their land. In the Song of Moses (chap. 32) sin is punished through oppression by the enemy, but deliverance is not triggered by repentance, which is never mentioned; the arrogance of the enemy provokes the divine judge to vindicate the blood of the people.

The Deuteronomic scheme, with and without the element of repentance, becomes paradigmatic for later writers; and Jewish texts from the Greco-Roman period explicitly refer to Moses and Deuteronomy to explain or speak to their present situation. The connection between past and present or present and future is cited in several ways. Present prosperity is evidence of Israel's faithfulness and God's blessing, and present calamity indicates a sinful condition that calls for repentance. Alternatively, in good times one may use the threat of punishment to effect repentance of perceived sin, while in bad times one may encourage the righteous to be faithful and await intervention by the vindicator of the covenant.

2. Eighth-Century Prophets. Although the 8th-century prophets (Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah) were not primarily predictors of the future, such prediction was essential to their role as critics of a society which they perceived to be violating the stipulations of the covenant. The sinful nation could expect divine punishment.

The time of that punishment is usually vague, but it is imminent enough to constitute a threat to the prophets' audiences. According to Isaiah God will shave Israel with a hired razor (Assyria) before a child soon to be born reaches the age of moral discrimination (7:14–16). Amos warns those who are anticipating salvation in “the day of the Yahweh” that they will experience terror and death (5:18–20); and in a rare usage, he warns of the “end” (*qēṣ*) that awaits the people (8:2).

Occasionally these prophets anticipate divine blessing when Israel's punishment is sufficient and the people have returned to Yahweh. An important aspect of such consolation is the idea that God's action in the future will replicate the past. For Hosea, after a return to the wilderness, Israel will be betrothed again to God, and this covenant will restore primordial peace on the earth (2:14–23). Although an “end” is not mentioned, a new beginning lies in the future.

3. Exilic and Postexilic Prophets. a. Jeremiah. Although the final literary form of Jeremiah interweaves oracles of the 6th-century prophet with Deuteronomistic interpretations, later writers treated it as the work of “Jeremiah.” Thus, Jeremiah decries the sins of Judah and Jerusalem and announces that in the imminent future [V 2, p 581](#) Judah’s leaders will be exiled, the temple and city will be destroyed, and the people will go into captivity.

The prophet also anticipates a restoration of the former state, when the dispersion of Israel and Judah will return to the land from which they had been exiled (23:1–8; 29:10–14), Jerusalem will be rebuilt (31:38–40), and the Davidic king will rule (23:5–6). Like Hosea, Jeremiah expects a replication of the past; but God’s new event will supersede the old. The God of the Exodus will be known as the God who has returned the dispersion (23:7–8). In the new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, the Torah will not have to be taught, because it will be written in human hearts (31:31–34). Different from the earlier prophetic books, Jeremiah specifies when the people will return from captivity—after 70 years are completed (29:10), when “you seek me with all your heart” (29:13; cf. Deut 30:2). Although, for Jeremiah, Yahweh is the executor of covenantal curses and blessings, the prophet also depicts this God as the universal judge of the whole human race (“all flesh;” 25:30–33).

b. Ezekiel. Prophesying in Babylon between 593 and 571 B.C.E., Ezekiel interprets the Exile as punishment primarily for idolatry and anticipates an end to that punishment and the return of God’s blessing. In his oracles about the future (chaps. 34–37), he elaborates motifs found in Jeremiah. The sheep of Israel, abused by their shepherds and devoured by the wild beasts (the nations), will be sought out by God and returned to the mountains of Israel. There God will make a covenant of peace with them, banish the beasts from the land, and nourish and lead them, placing them under the care of the Davidic shepherd (chap. 34). In 36:22–36 God’s restoration is described as a new creation. God will cleanse Israel of its sin, put a new spirit in its people, and replace their heart of stone with a new heart; the desolate land will be made like Eden. Chapter 37 extends the metaphor, describing the resurrection and re-creation of the dead nation. Then Israel and Judah will return to their land and be joined as one nation, governed by the prince and shepherd David in the presence of the God who makes an eternal covenant of peace with them and dwells among them in the sanctuary. The importance of the city and sanctuary are evident in chaps. 40–48, where Ezekiel records an extensive vision that balances chaps. 8–11. The old, polluted sanctuary from which God’s glory departed (chap. 10) will be replaced by a new temple to which the glory will return (43:1–9). Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel calculates the time when the punishment of Israel and Judah will be complete (4:5–6).

c. Isaiah 40–55. The oracles of this unnamed prophet of the Exile (usually called “Second Isaiah”) are devoted entirely to the good news of Israel’s deliverance and the punishment of its captor, Babylon. Different from Jeremiah and Ezekiel, this text does not mention the return of the N tribes; central are Mother Zion and her children (51:17–52:3) and the anticipated restoration of Jerusalem (54:11–12), to which God now returns (40:2–5, 10–11).

As in all the earlier texts, the Exile is punishment for sin—now paid in full, indeed doubly (40:2). Thus the return is an act of divine justice, in which Yahweh sets things right with Judah, having also recompensed Babylon, the arrogant and idolatrous conqueror (chaps. 46–47; cf. Deut 32:26–43).

The notion that God’s act of deliverance will replicate the past is elaborated as the essence of the text. Constitutive for Israel is the Exodus, which is described, however, in language that is at home in Genesis 1–2; God has “created,” “formed,” and “made” Israel. God’s creation of Israel in the past is the guarantee of the coming salvation, which is depicted in heavily mythical language as a new Exodus led by God (52:11–12; 40:3–5, 9–11) and as a new creation in which the old dragon is conquered (51:9–11), the world is reshaped (40:4; 45:2), and the wilderness is made fertile like Eden (51:3; see also Isaiah 34–35, which derives from this prophet or a disciple). The former things that God did and declared of old are contrasted with the new things God creates and declares (49:3–7). In another metaphor Israel’s vindication is

described as the servant's resurrection from death (52:13–53:12; cf. Ezekiel 37). As in Jer 23:7–8, Yahweh's new act of salvation will vastly overshadow the old (Isa 43:18–19). One may debate how literally to interpret the prophet's mythical language about re-creation; however, the use of this imagery about the past to color the picture of the future indicates that a new beginning is clearly envisioned.

Although Second Isaiah frequently refers to Yahweh as king—a staple in Israelite royal ideology—these chaps. give no hint that the prophet expects a restoration of the Davidic dynasty. To the contrary, Cyrus is identified as Yahweh's anointed one (45:1), David is demoted to “a witness to the people, a leader and commander for the people” (55:4), and the everlasting covenant with David is democratized and applied to the nation as a whole (55:3).

Whereas earlier prophets were vague about the time of God's future act of judgment and Jeremiah and Ezekiel specified the time of its consummation, Second Isaiah takes the radical step of identifying God's great act of deliverance with a historical event, the rise of Cyrus, the king of Persia. The future has broken into the present.

d. Isaiah 56–66. A disciple of Second Isaiah (called “Third Isaiah”) composed these oracles in Judea in the decades following the return from Babylon. The style, vocabulary, literary forms, and concerns of the master have been radically transformed by bitter disappointment; the oracles of hope and promise have not been fulfilled. In the place of Israel, God's “servant” and “chosen one,” we hear of the “servants” and “chosen ones,” who stand in opposition to the sinners (65:1–16), whose misdeeds in Jerusalem are catalogued at length (chaps. 56–59; 66:1–3). The situation is reflected in mixed oracles of salvation and judgment. In contrast to Second Isaiah's optimistic announcement of the imminent theophany and triumphant return to Jerusalem, this prophet confesses the sins of an impure people and desperately appeals for a theophany (63:15–64:11), in which Yahweh will come with fire and storm to execute judgment on “all flesh” (66:15–16; cf. Jer 25:30–33). This judgment is associated with God's creation of new heavens and a new earth (65:17; 66:22) and a new Jerusalem (65:18–25; see also chap. 60), in which the righteous will live to old age and enjoy the covenantal blessings in a world that will revert to the peace of Paradise (65:25). Like Second Isaiah there is no place [V 2, p 582](#) for a Davidic king in Israel's future; the prophet is the one who is anointed (61:1).

Essential to Third Isaiah's message is a sharp contrast between the present evil time, which will end in a universal judgment that will eradicate evil, and the creation of a new cosmos (heavens and earth) in which God's primordial intentions are realized. Although the prophet does not mention an “end” and a new “beginning,” the contrast between the present and a future that returns to primordial beginnings seems to justify the term *eschatology*. The term *apocalyptic eschatology* (Hanson 1975) seems problematic, however. Third Isaiah's situation and message have clear parallels in the early apocalypses (see below, C.1); but Isaiah's message is not embodied in the form of a mediated and interpreted revelation (apocalypse), as is the case in the later works. To preserve this distinction, which is an important fruit of recent scholarship (see the articles on APOCALYPSES AND APOCALYPTICISM), it seems better to define Third Isaiah's eschatology as “dualistic,” emphasizing the contrast and caesura between old and new, or as “mythical,” highlighting the appeal to primordial beginnings.

e. Isaiah 24–27 (“The Isaiah Apocalypse”). This text is actually not an apocalypse but is a collection of prophetic materials of disputed date, placed variously between 500 B.C.E. and the 3d century. Several features are of significance. The description of a broken and disintegrated cosmos exceeds the mythical language of Isaiah 34. Against this background the prophet anticipates a divine judgment that will replicate the Deluge and eventually punish the rebellious hosts of heaven and kings of the earth (24:17–23). The finality of this judgment and of the concomitant punishment and salvation is indicated in the prediction of a resurrection of the righteous in 26:19. Although this could be a metaphor for national restoration (as in Ezekiel 37), the promise that God will swallow up death, the great swallower (25:8), suggests a finality

that merits the term *eschatology*. In any case later authors will draw on these texts in Isaiah to inform their descriptions of a resurrection of those who are physically dead.

f. Haggai and Zechariah. These two Judean prophets agree and also significantly disagree with their contemporary, Third Isaiah. Haggai expresses his chagrin over the returnees' failure to rebuild the temple (1:2–6); and like Second and Third Isaiah he uses language of cosmic disturbance to describe the events that will attend its rebuilding (2:6–8), which he and Zechariah anticipate in the very near future. However, different from Second Isaiah and Third Isaiah, Haggai and Zechariah tie their hopes to the Davidide Zerubbabel, whom Zechariah identifies as “the Branch” predicted by Jeremiah (Zech 3:8; 6:12–13; cf. Jer 23:5) and whom Haggai identifies as God's servant and chosen one (2:23). Together with the anointed high priest Joshua, who will preside over the cult, Zerubbabel—like Solomon—will build the temple and sit on the royal throne (Zechariah 3; 6:9–14). Thus, different from Third Isaiah, both prophets see in the present situation and in known historical personages the imminent fulfillment of the exilic prophets' predictions of restoration and rebuilding.

4. The Legacy of Prophecy. The prophets of the 6th century created high expectations through their fantastic and sometimes highly mythicized scenarios of the future. Among the staples in these scenarios (although they are not always present) were the return of the N and S dispersions; the glorious rebuilding of Jerusalem and its temple; the restoration of the Davidic dynasty and the united kingdom; the universal sovereignty of Yahweh, Yahweh's anointed one, and Yahweh's people; and the gathering of the nations to worship the one God.

The rise of Cyrus and the beginning of a return to Judah were seen as the beginning of the fulfillment of these prophecies and hopes. But the historical experience of the returnees clashed with their expectations, as is evident, for example, in the differences between Second Isaiah and Third Isaiah. As time passed, moreover, it must have become painfully evident that specific predictions had not been fulfilled as expected. Zerubbabel the Davidic disappeared from the scene; much of Israel and Judah remained in dispersion; the scenarios of a new, sinless, and peaceful creation were not being played out. Much of the substance of the divine promises, as enunciated by the prophets, was held in abeyance.

Further evidence for this state of affairs is provided by the 5th-century writings of Malachi, Ezra, and Nehemiah. The contrast between the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah and the oracle of Malachi could scarcely be greater. In Malachi the restored temple, cult, and priesthood are seen to be polluted (chaps. 1–2), and the people violate the Torah (3:5). As a result, the nation suffers the curses of the covenant. The prophet appeals for the repentance that will restore the divine blessings promised in Deuteronomy (Mal 3:6–12). Additionally, the prophet anticipates the epiphany of God's messenger (Malachi, “my messenger,” 3:1; cf. Exod 23:20 for the angel of the Exodus), who will cleanse the priesthood, and then the appearance of Yahweh, who will judge between the righteous and the wicked (3:16–3:21). In a late appendix to the book, the messenger and preacher of repentance is identified as the ancient prophet Elijah (3:23–24).

The writings of Ezra and Nehemiah also reflect a critical assessment of the postexilic situation in Judah. The mixed marriages of priests and laity, as well as other sins, violate the Torah and have delayed a return of the covenantal blessing. Both books preserve extensive scenes and prayers of repentance and rededication to the Mosaic Torah (Ezra 9–10; Nehemiah 8–10). While this activity anticipates the return of God's favor, neither Ezra nor Nehemiah, nor indeed Malachi, suggests that the nation's future includes a place for the restored monarchy.

Although Malachi, Ezra, and Nehemiah did not appeal to prophetic scenarios as a source of hope, the optimistic promises of Israel's prophets were not lost and forgotten in the Persian period. To the contrary, the oracles were gathered and edited into written collections, which would emerge by ca. 200 B.C.E. as authoritative deposits of divinely inspired oracles. In the meantime the content of the promises was in the awareness of the collectors, although it is uncertain how these promises may have been mediated to the

people. The Psalms, on the other hand, were used in public worship; and in the case of the royal psalms, their ideology and references to the eternal Davidic covenant would have been repeatedly impressed on the minds of the worshipping community. In the absence of a royal V 2, p 583 incumbent, one would consider the promise to have been empty or to await fulfillment in the future.

Thus a substantial part of the texts that would eventually emerge as Israel's Scripture were considered to be a corpus that contained divine promises which provided a scenario that awaited fulfillment. *In the Torah* were the promises to the patriarchs and the future-oriented final chaps. of Deuteronomy; *in the prophets* there remained many specific unfulfilled prophecies; *in the psalms*, one found allusions to, or citations of, the royal oracles. The Jewish writings of the Greco-Roman period indicate that these texts were being read in this manner.

Jewish Writings of the Greco-Roman Period

Less than a century after the time of Ezra and Nehemiah other Jewish texts which would later be excluded from the Hebrew canon were being composed. The volume of apocalyptic/eschatological literature was profuse, to say the least! *Historically, we must consider their views about the future in continuity with texts that were later declared to be canonical.*

I am not discussing each of these literary storehouses of religious and theological importance but recommend that the interested reader pursue this information under the Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary which is the primary source of information used in this study.

Early Apocalyptic Writings. a. 1 Enoch 1–35 and 85–105. This is a primary source of early and late Jewish mysticism and apocalyptic/eschatological information.

Book of Jubilees.

Testament (Assumption) of Moses.

The Book of Daniel.

Parables of Enoch (1 Enoch 37–71).

Tobit, Sirach, and Baruch.

The Qumran Scrolls.

Structure of the Ages and God's Foreknowledge. God's foreknowledge of historical events and human deeds and God's foreordination of the structure of the ages are a common topic, expressed in stereotyped language, in at least five Qumran texts: 1QS 3–4; CD 2:3–10; 1QH 1:7–8, 23–25; 4Q180 1; and 1QpHab 7.

The Community's Place in the Last Times. The scrolls widely attest the belief that the Qumran Community was living in the last part of the ages that God had predetermined and created. This belief is reflected in the authors' terminology ("latter generation[s]," "latter days," "latter age," "the age is consummated"), and it is bound up with the conviction that the prophetic oracles described this latter time.

The Qumran Commentaries

The Damascus Document

The Rule of the Community.

The Community as the Present Locus of Eternal Life.

The Tension Between Present and Future.

The Future in Qumranic Eschatologies.

The War Scroll.

Messianic and Non-messianic Eschatological Figures.

The New Jerusalem.

1, 2 Maccabees.

Messianism and Resurrection (Psalms of Solomon).

Immortality in Heavily Hellenistic Texts.**The Wisdom of Solomon 1–6.***The Testament of Job.**Joseph and Aseneth.**4 Maccabees.***Writings Associated with the Destruction of Jerusalem.***2 Baruch.**4 Ezra.**The Book of Biblical Antiquities (Pseudo-Philo = L.A.B.).***Summary**

The Future as a Necessary Change. Israelite attitudes about the future are bound up with a negative appraisal of the present, in two ways. The expectation that things will change in the future may stem from the belief that God’s justice is absent in the present. Thus one awaits an act of divine judgment that will reverse present unjust conditions. Alternatively, one may believe that present calamities are the deserved punishment for the sins of the people or some group of them. In such a case one appeals for the repentance that will restore blessing from the just God of the covenant.

The description of the present that needs to be changed varies from text to text and is always colored by the author’s experience and appraisal of the current situation. Early texts cite the destruction or effective dismantling of significant social, political, and religious institutions (the monarchy and the temple, cult, and priesthood) and, preeminently, exile from the land. Some later texts continue to dwell variously on the absence of a Davidic king, the failed glory of Zion, the perceived ineffectiveness of the cult, and the continuation of the Diaspora. Other specific situations that call for adjudication or the repentance that leads to blessing include religious persecution and social and economic oppression by one’s compatriots; political domination by sinful foreigners; undeserved natural disasters; defilement of the temple; egregious disobedience of the Torah and, worse, the teaching of false interpretations of the Torah which leads others astray.

In the context of these (perceived) conditions, Israelite authors await the inevitable intervention of the righteous God, who will adjudicate these wrongs. The arrogant and disobedient will be punished, the righteous will be rewarded, and those who suffer unjustly will be vindicated. A new day will dawn, in which righteousness and abundant blessing will flourish.

Various Eschatological Topics. The 6th-century prophets addressed the disruption and chaos of their times by creating scenarios of the future that were basically restorationist: return from Exile and Diaspora; restoration of the Davidic monarchy over one nation; the glorious rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple; the revival of the cult. When judgment had been effected, sin had been paid for, and the people had repented, these were the ways in which God would restore the promised blessings to Israel.

Thus the prophetic texts provided a range of topics that reappeared in a wide variety of mixtures and with creative transformations and nuances in scenarios of the future that were, in turn, created by writers of the late Persian and Greco-Roman periods. This variety has tended to be obscured by synthetic and topically oriented handbooks—as valuable as these are for their collections of data. The scholarly investigation of Jewish eschatology needs to focus on individual texts and the specific ways in which their authors interpreted their circumstances and posited solutions to what they perceived to be the major problems that characterized their times.

Messianism. The issue of Jewish messianism is particularly knotty, and references to a future Davidic king are far less frequent than one might suppose. The texts posit a variety of figures and combinations of figures with a range of judicial and salvific functions: angels and human beings, a king, a priest, a prophet, an interpreter of the Torah. The term *messiah* should perhaps be reserved

for figures whose “anointing,” whether literal or figurative, places them in continuity with the anointed kings, priests, and prophets of old. Attention to such detail allows one to detect significant discontinuities and distinctions, e.g., between an anticipated Davidide (*Pss. Sol.* 17–18) and a transcendent savior who fills the role that others ascribed to such a royal figure. Similarly, one can track such tendencies as the absence of a Davidic king in texts that are strongly beholden to the traditions of Second Isaiah and Third Isaiah.

The Kingdom of God. The notion that God is king and exercises kingly rule even over the nations is a natural concomitant of royal messianism, as the biblical texts, and the psalms in particular, indicate. It is noteworthy therefore how seldom the term and the idea of the kingdom of God appear in texts of the Greco-Roman period. Significantly, however, this term does occur in contexts where no Davidic is evident but where the problem is a (potential) threat by gentile kings (*Daniel* 2; 7; *T. Moses* 10:1; *Wis* 6:4). These and other occurrences need to be studied with an eye toward understanding why the term does not appear in other contexts.

Resurrection and Eternal Life. While many of the texts of the Greco-Roman period posit God’s transcendence over death, their formulations differ widely. Other texts get along handily without any such idea, and texts like *Baruch* and *2 Maccabees 7* can employ the same Deutero-Isaianic traditions to describe a literal return from dispersion and a resurrection of the dead. Careful study of historical situation, social context, and literary form helps to explain these differences.

Development toward Eschatology. The term *eschatology* is problematic. The Hebrew and Aramaic roots *’hryt* and *’hrwn* (‘after,’ ‘latter’) need not, in themselves, denote a finality that involves a decisive break with the present. The emergence of the notion that the *latter* times will be the *last* times is difficult to track and is hardly the result of simple evolution. Linguistically it is perhaps most evident in texts—whether original or translations—where *eschatos* (‘last’) appears as the equivalent of the Semitic terms. More important indicators appear in the content and in the rhetoric or literary form of both Semitic and Greek texts.

Replication in a New Beginning. The writings of the 6th-century prophets emphasize with some consistency that the future will be characterized by the replication of a significant past event or situation. A new beginning will correspond to an earlier beginning. One envisions a new exodus, or a new covenant, or, more radically in Second Isaiah and Third Isaiah, a new creation. The repetition of the primordial sequence of judgment and new creation is central to *1 Enoch* and is suggested in *Isaiah* 24–27. To the extent that such new beginnings imply an *end* to the present order, one may appropriately use the term *eschatology*.

Qualitative Distinction Between the Present and the First Beginnings. Increasingly with time, scenarios of the future posit a sharp and qualitative distinction from the present, a caesura that brings closure to the evils that characterize the present time. The new age will be marked by the universal, permanent eradication of evil and the cosmic, eternal sovereignty of God. In its universality and permanency the new order qualitatively exceeds and transcends the first beginnings that have been replicated. Different from the Flood (*Gen* 9:11 notwithstanding), this judgment will be final because the world that follows it will live up to the Creator’s intentions, completely and forever. The distinction between the future and both the present and the first beginnings justifies the term *dualistic* or *mythic eschatology*. An increasing tendency toward such an eschatology is evident in *some* texts from Second and Third Isaiah onward.

Dualistic eschatologies are a function of their historical contexts and express a pessimistic appraisal of the present situation and severe skepticism about the possibility of redeeming the present order. Differences in the manner and locus of eschatological salvation are, functionally, not particularly significant. One may live an eternal life in a transformed and immortal body on a newly created earth. One’s soul or spirit may permanently ascend from earth to heaven, the realm of

immortality and incorruption, which may eventually be separated from earth, which becomes the place of damnation.

Alongside texts that reflect such dualistic eschatologies, others appear that express views of the future that do not differ significantly from their counterparts in the 6th-century prophets. It remains a task for scholarship to identify and seek to explain these differences.

Teleology. If one is justified in using “eschatological” to describe dualistic views of the future with their notions of end and new beginning, there is also another sense in which one may see an “end” in the future. When prophecy fails to reach its complete literal fulfillment, one may look for the *telos*, the moment when God’s infallible word finds its “goal” and reaches its fulfillment and culmination. This idea of end is clear in the Qumran commentaries on Scripture and, e.g., in Tobit and Sirach. It may be implicit when prophetic language is used to color new scenarios that describe the future (Baruch, as well as *1 Enoch*). It is evident in a different way when the Deuteronomic scheme is imposed on present and imminent events.

Time Frames and Their Implications. Jeremiah and Ezekiel are the earliest among the extant prophetic writings to indicate the specific time when a prophecy was to be fulfilled. Second Isaiah follows by identifying the time of salvation (also the end of the Exile) with a historical event that was in the process of happening. Third Isaiah, Haggai, and Zechariah saw God’s intervention as imminent. Although prophecy continues to fall short of its complete fulfillment, writers of the Greco-Roman period continue to announce God’s decisive intervention in the imminent future. In the case of the apocalypticists, this notion is expressed in sometimes lengthy reviews of history, attributed to figures of the past, which place the eschaton very close to the real authors’ own times. Precisely how these authors concluded that they were living in the end times is not clear. A comparison of these texts with non-apocalyptic writings may shed some light on the matter. Daniel 9 indicates a reinterpretation of Jeremiah; the *Damascus Document* (CD) cites Ezekiel’s prophecy, perhaps in revised form, and the Qumran commentaries explicitly point to the fulfillment of specific prophecies; the *Testament of Moses* is cast in the form of a paraphrase of Deuteronomy. However, the methods and mechanics of timing the fulfillment of prophecy and the arrival of the end remain obscure.

Two notions about the time of the end stand in tension with one another, although they sometimes appear in the same texts. The first is the relatively common idea that God foresees all of the future and, indeed, that God determined the structure of the ages before creation. This view is implied in historical apocalypses that “predict” events that cover centuries and even millennia; it is evident in Enoch’s claim to have seen the heavenly tablets; and it is explicit in a number of Qumranic texts. It may also be suggested in Tobit. Over against these kinds of determinism, one finds references to a variety of eschatological catalysts and deterrents. The end can be brought on by the prayers of the righteous, by conversion to a right understanding and observance of the Torah, and by the resolute deaths of the martyrs. Sin and its judgment can deter the coming of salvation and blessing; or for want of a better explanation, one may speak of the times being extended through the mysteries of God (1QpHab 7:7–11).

As the last cited passage indicates, claims that the end is imminent (and in some cases, to be dated) bring with them the problem that one must with time explain the evident fact that the end has not come. The more precise the prediction, the greater the subsequent necessity to explain. Such explanations in the form of revised calculations appear in Daniel 9 and Dan 12:12–13. In *T. Moses* 6 and *1 Enoch* 90 new material is interpolated to indicate a different time frame for an extant context.

In some cases eschatological awareness is so high that one can rightly speak about a “realized eschatology.” The events of the end have already begun to happen. Methodological rigor requires, however, that we employ the term with great caution, making appropriate distinctions between Second Isaiah, the Qumran hymns, and the Epistle of Enoch.

Eschatology and Genre. Certain literary genres seem more likely than others to express eschatological ideas. Two implications follow from this. The absence of detailed and significant references to the future may be a function of the purposes and limitations of the genre and need not indicate that the author placed no stock in a change in the future. Ben Sira's wisdom genres tend to obscure his eschatology. On the other hand, one should be careful not to posit belief in a certain eschatological topic in spite of its absence.

Eschatology is often linked with apocalyptic thought. Recent studies of apocalypticism have demonstrated, however, that apocalypses reveal the secrets of the cosmos, as well as the hidden events of the future—although the two may be related. The salutary distinction between the literary genre of apocalypse and the kind of eschatology that typifies some apocalypses needs to be maintained and investigated with greater precision. One blurs careful definition when one speaks of “apocalyptic eschatology” in texts that chronologically precede the documented rise of apocalyptic genres (e.g., Isaiah 24–27; 56–66; and Joel). Similar caution is necessary in the study of later texts that are contemporary with the writing of apocalypses. Do these authors (perhaps in their claims about the nearness of the end) presuppose notions of revelation present in apocalypses? Finally, why did apocalypticists employ new, revelatory genres to embody the mythic and dualistic eschatologies that the prophetic texts had expressed in other literary forms?

Social Matrices of Eschatological Thought. Relatively little attention has been given to the social contexts that gave rise to early Jewish eschatological speculation. Qumran is an exception, because the archaeological evidence and the genre of some of the texts provide information that is not available in other texts. These latter texts, however, should be pressed for the evidence they may provide. For example, *1 Enoch* suggests the notion of an eschatological community constituted by a belief that they are the possessors of eschatological revealed knowledge. Although we can know almost nothing about whatever communal structure may have existed, it is important to see in these texts and others like them how an eschatological belief may have created or influenced certain behaviors, ideologies, and social arrangements, or may have resulted from them.²

² All of the information cited in this section is from the *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*.