

God, ReTAlIation, and the Apocalyptic Scenario

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The apocalyptic scenario is one strand of the history of Western civilization that haunts Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The larger ethical question is, why is justice in the Western tradition commonly taken to mean revenge, “getting even,” quite literally, retaliation¹ against the Other? More specifically, why is the apocalyptic version of eschatology so dominant in Christianity that, on the one hand, Jesus and Paul are often (mis)interpreted as apocalyptic prophets and, on the other, a pervasive influence (millenarianism) in modern Protestantism can claim that the entire Bible is end-time prophecy?

I began to question Albert Schweitzer’s claim that Jesus saw himself as an end-time apocalyptic prophet when major NT scholars in the 1960s and 1970s were debating Jesus’ view of the future. In his contribution to an issue of the *Journal for Theology and the Church* on apocalypticism, Robert Funk argued that apocalypticism was not Jesus’ view of the future, but the default mode of thought in first-century Palestine linked to the war against Rome: “Jesus’ peculiar understanding of temporality got leveled in the subsequent history of the tradition, that is, . . . the process of handing the Jesus tradition around and on made inevitable the assimilation of his understanding to the everyday, and presumably apocalyptic, notion of time.”² One version of this leveling is the fallacious argument that, since John the Baptist before Jesus and Paul after Jesus

1. The capitalized root of “reTAlIation” in the paper’s title calls attention to its Latin etymology: *lex talionis* is the Latin phrase for retributive justice that is often paraphrased as the “eye for an eye” rule cited in Exod 21:23–25. This rule is frequently invoked in support of the tribal view that one is obligated to avenge a wrong by inflicting comparable revenge on the perpetrator. The rule goes back to second-millennium Mesopotamian law codes, long before it was quoted in Exodus: “If a seignior has destroyed the eye of a member of the aristocracy, they shall destroy his eye. If he has broken a(nother) seignior’s bone, they shall break his bone” (Pritchard, ed., *ANET*, 175). There is no evidence this rule was ever utilized, so ancient historians assume its purpose was the reverse: to limit retribution, since excessive retaliation was often carried out (blood-feuds tend to escalate in violence). From the beginning Mesopotamian law codes listed the monetary value of body parts and property, so fines were substituted for actual punishments in kind.

2. Funk, “Apocalyptic as an Historical and Theological Problem in Current New Testament Scholarship,” 177. Since time in apocalyptic thought is linear, Jesus’ “peculiar” notion that present and future coinhere imply, for Funk and others, that Jesus was not an apocalypticist. In a recent study of Jesus’ temporal view, the Japanese NT scholar Takashi Onuki, *Jesus’ Time: The Image Network of the Historical Jesus*, argues that Jesus viewed the future kingdom of God as a present renewal of creation, not a future exodus from this world.

were apocalypticists, Jesus must have been one too.³ The hyperbolic claim that “everyone” believes or does something does not prove that individual X also believes or does it!⁴

What follows is a retelling of the story of the ancient world that locates apocalypticism in a history of traditions context, both in terms of the timeless myth that produced it and its timely appropriation during seminal historical moments.

Cultural Categories: Kinship-based vs. Story-formed Communities

At the broadest level anthropologists divide societies into “story-formed” and “kinship-based” communities. Kinship-based communities are genetically linked, endogamous groups, often called tribes or clans, since members claim descent from a common ancestor. Tribal religion thus includes some form of ancestor worship and ethics is based on unquestioned loyalty to other members of one’s tribe. Such “blood ties” entail the fundamental obligation to retaliate against members of another tribe to avenge a perceived wrong, whether the retaliation is justified or not. This produces an endless cycle of escalating vendettas (“blood feuds”) in which each tribe cites a prior offense from the other tribe as the cause of the feud, thus rationalizing the perpetuation of the cycle of violence.⁵

Story-formed communities, on the other hand, are ethnically and linguistically diverse social groups that are bound together by a shared foundation myth.⁶ In effect, the charter myth creates the community, and it will survive as long as the myth is taken to be true; in political terms, as long as the story can sustain a viable community. Those who join story-formed communities do so because the myth inspires them to embrace the values of the founding vision and invites them to live into its possibilities. In theory, such is the case with world religions like Christianity that transcend and replace tribal boundaries.⁷

3. E. P. Sanders is one of the current proponents of Schweitzer’s view that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet. His basic argument is contextual: that Jesus was the middle term between John the Baptist and post-Easter Christianity. See Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 91–95.

4. Social scientists describe typical patterns of behavior, what the demographic majority believes or does, based on statistics and polls. Historians, on the other hand, focus on the unique behavior of individuals, how they stand out from the crowd, and thus employ some version of Norman Perrin’s criterion of dissimilarity.

5. Herodotus famously begins his account of the war between the Persians and the Greeks with a litany of prior affronts that came to a head with the Persian invasion of Greece in 490 BCE.

6. Stanley Hauerwas uses the various communities in Richard Adams’s novel, *Watership Down*, to illustrate the narrative basis of non-kinship based societies. See Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 9–35.

7. The literal meaning of the Latin word root *(re)LIQ(are)* indicates that the foundation myth “re-binds” or “re-connects” individuals who have become alienated from prior social units and their gods.

Complications for a story-formed community's identity arise when it imitates kinship groups by claiming to be an extended (fictive) family, embracing the family-like values of tribes and imposing them on the disparate members of the community. This end is pursued through family-like institutional structures and practices that create walls around the community and replace the diversity of its origins with insider-outsider distinctions. Community members often come to view themselves as under siege and thus as victims. This contrived tribal mentality expresses itself either in terms of a martyrdom narrative (suffering as proof of one's loyalty to the embattled community) or a revenge narrative (we will triumph over our persecutors either here or in the hereafter).

The thesis of this paper is that apocalypticism is a revenge narrative going back to the tribal, "blood-feud" roots of Western civilization. Despite being a story-formed community, Christianity is conflicted over its communal identity as the heirs of Jesus' message about the "realm of God:" Is Christianity an exclusive tribe with a retributive ethics or an inclusive community with an "open table" (distributive ethics)?⁸ Is the community one of borders or hospitality, punishment or forgiveness?

Step I: In the Beginning, Dueling Cultures

When our grandparents were students, it was assumed that history started with Homer and the Hebrew Bible in the early first millennium BCE. Discoveries of ancient cuneiform documents in the past two centuries, however, have pushed back the beginnings of Near Eastern history two millennia to c. 3200 BCE. There was such widespread destruction and trauma at the end of the Bronze Age that a three-century "dark age" (1200–900 BCE) eclipsed the achievements of ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece, turning them into faded memories and etiological myths. Awareness of the history of the Bronze Age was lost until textual discoveries at sites like Ashurbanipal's library in Nineveh enabled scholars to reconstruct history from 900 BCE back to 3200 BCE, dramatically transforming our understanding of the roots of Western civilization.

The earliest extant literary text in Western civilization, *The Gilgamesh Epic*,⁹ was discovered in 1872 and narrates the adventures of the king of Uruk (biblical Erech), c. 2600 BCE. Its two themes are (1) the tension between urban and rural lifestyles and values and (2) the elusive quest for immortality. From the beginning issues of social formation and human mortality have shaped Western consciousness.

8. For a current discussion of retributive versus distributive ethics, see Crossan, *How to Read the Bible and Still Be a Christian*.

9. *Gilgamesh: A Verse Narrative*.

Prior to the invention of writing (cuneiform) and the creation of cities (Ur, Umma, Lagash, Uruk, Shurupak, and Nippur) at the beginning of the Bronze Age in Mesopotamia, hunters and gatherers were nomadic and assumed that this was the “natural” way the gods intended for humans to live. The creation of cities, monumental architecture, writing, and new artistic forms were viewed as human inventions that, from the point of view of the nomads, defied the will of the gods. Hence, ancient texts like *The Gilgamesh Epic* address this conflict between nature and culture (“culture wars”) that has been a major thread of Western civilization for the past five thousand years.

What is important to note is that the hero of these conflict narratives depends on which side produces the text. In *Dumuzi and Enkimdu: the Dispute between the Shepherd-God and the Farmer-God*,¹⁰ a Sumerian poem, the goddess Inanna chooses to marry the farmer-god (the personification of culture) instead of the shepherd-god (the nomadic persona). On the other hand, in the story of Cain and Abel, composed by the nomadic Hebrews, the nomad (Abel) is the hero:

Now Abel was a keeper of sheep [seasonal nomad], and Cain a tiller of the ground [a farmer represents culture in ancient texts]. In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering [the LORD] had no regard. (Gen 4:2b–5a NRSV)

The J [Judean] source depicts Yahweh as endorsing the nomadic lifestyle (Abel) and rejecting the urban one (Cain). The antagonism between urban and nomadic lifestyles is explicitly noted in the composite JE source in Gen 46:34c: “all shepherds [= nomads] are abhorrent to the Egyptians.”

The inscriptional evidence confirms that a perennial feud between nomads and urbanites continued throughout the Bronze Age (3200–1200 BCE). The indigenous Semitic-speaking tribes of the ancient Near East were seasonal nomads (long-range nomadism did not exist before the domestication of the camel c. 1000 BCE). At the beginning of the Bronze Age non-Semitic speaking peoples (Subartu in the north and Sumerians in the south) invaded Mesopotamia and launched civilization (invented bronze and cuneiform writing, built walled cities and monumental structures).¹¹ The history of ancient Mesopotamia oscillated between Sumerian (urban) and Semitic (nomadic) domination (see chart 1).

10. Pritchard, ed., *ANET*, 41–42.

11. Among the many surveys of Bronze Age history and culture, I would mention two: Bottéro, Cassin, and Vercoutter, eds., *The Near East*, and Hallo and Simpson, *The Ancient Near East*.

Chart 1: Bronze Age Near Eastern Empires**Sumerian Dynasties**

I. 3000–2350: Sumerian City-States

III. 2110–1900: Sumerian Dynasties

2110–2003: Third Dynasty of Ur

2003–c. 1900: Isin-Larsa Period

Semitic Empires

II. 2350–2109

A. 2340–2198: Agade/Akkad (Sargon the Great, 2340–2284)

B. 2198–2110 Gutians (N) and Second Dynasty of Lagash (S)

IV. c. 1900–1594: Old Babylonian Period

(Mari archive, 1810–1760;

Hammurapi, 1792–1750)

c. 1500: Kassite invasions and decline of Bronze Age culture in Mesopotamia

The response of the nomadic tribes to the arrival of the Sumerians after 3000 BCE was one of fascination: both *attraction* to the novelties of urban culture and *repulsion* from its temptations. *The Gilgamesh Epic* begins with the citizens of Uruk using a prostitute (a symbol of the benefits of civilization!) to domesticate the innocent nomad Enkidu. Many of the nomads were seduced by the appeals of urban life or were hired as laborers or mercenaries and gradually were assimilated to the sedentary lifestyle, culminating in the old Akkadian empire of Sargon the Great.¹² Other nomadic groups remained convinced that the gods intended for humans to live as nomads, since that was the “natural” lifestyle of their ancestors, and so resisted assimilation. They believed that abandoning the values of the nomadic lifestyle was a rejection of one’s tribal gods. Ancient Near Eastern nomads believed that god wanted humans to dwell in the wilderness, not in cities made by humans.

Like other nomadic groups in the region, the Hebrews were not immune to the fascination of culture. The earliest narratives in Genesis contain allusions to the cultural practices of ancient Mesopotamia.¹³ The ancient Hebrews were fascinated by large-scale architecture such as the ziqqurat in Babylon, though they condemned human innovations as contrary to the divine will: “And the LORD said, ‘. . . this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them’” (Gen 11:6 NRSV).

12. Sumerian texts refer to nomads as the *Martu*. In Akkadian texts they are called *Amurru*. Since these Amorites spoke a Semitic dialect from the “Canaanite” or Northwest Semitic language family, ancient Near Eastern nomads are often identified as Semites. But the Bronze Age conflict is between urban and rural, not Sumerian and Semite.

13. For legal parallels to Pentateuchal customs in the Nuzi texts, see Pritchard, ed., *ANET*, 219–20.

Beginning with the Joseph cycle (Genesis 37–50), the cultural threat to the nomadic values of the Hebrews shifts to ancient Egypt. The story of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife (Genesis 39), for example, closely parallels the Egyptian “Tale of Two Brothers.”¹⁴ Soon after the creation of Sumerian civilization in Mesopotamia, a similar cultural lurch forward from Neolithic hunters to the unified monarchy of the Old Kingdom occurred with the invention of writing (hieroglyphics) and the large-scale architecture of the Fourth Dynasty pyramids of Gizeh. Surrounded by deserts, ancient Egypt was protected from foreign invasions for 1500 years. When nomads (called Hyksos in the Egyptian records) successfully invaded Egypt in the Second Intermediate Period, the sense of Egyptian superiority and security was shattered. The subsequent uprising against the Hyksos rulers was led by military pharaohs. These warriors were brutal in their retaliation against the Hyksos and expanded the New Kingdom into the first Egyptian empire with forays into Asia. If the Hyksos are identified with or included the Hebrews, then the story of the Hebrew exodus from Egypt is linked to the Egyptian expulsion of the Hyksos beginning with the reign of Ah-mose I in the Eighteenth Dynasty.¹⁵ Pottery and other physical evidence show that the Hyksos were composed of a variety of ethnic groups. This suggests that those who escaped or were expelled from the Egyptian Delta constituted a “story-formed community,” a collection of peoples who embraced the Exodus narrative as the bond that united them in following the dream of freedom announced by Moses in the name of Yahweh.

The First Crisis: Charismatic vs. Institutional Authority

The first crisis among the nascent Hebrew people after their arrival in Palestine occurred when those who were attracted to the benefits of urban culture proposed that the tribal amphictyony, led by charismatic judges/prophets, be replaced by a centralized monarchy. The simmering tension between nomadic roots and the urban centralization of her neighbors finally came to a head when the Philistines invaded from the south.¹⁶ The war between the Philistines and Israelites lasted for two centuries during which the Israelites were loosely organized into a tribal confederation (an amphictyony) under the leadership of charismatic figures called judges. The last judge of Israel before the establishment

14. Pritchard, ed., *ANET*, 23–25.

15. See “The Expulsion of the Hyksos,” in Pritchard, ed., *ANET*, 233–34.

16. The Philistines, also called Pelasgians, were Achaeans who fled when the Dorians invaded Greece at the end of the Bronze Age. Archaeological evidence indicates that many Achaean settlements were destroyed, likely by the Dorians in this period. Some Achaeans fled east to Asia Minor and established Ionia. They also destroyed the Hittite empire of eastern Anatolia and the city of Ugarit. Still others continued south to the Egyptian delta during the reign of Ramses III (1195–1164 BCE), but these invading “sea-peoples” were repelled by the Egyptians. They retreated up the coastal plain to Gaza and threatened the Hebrews with their iron weaponry (1 Sam 13:19–22). See Edwards, et al., *The Cambridge Ancient History*, chapters XXVIII and XXXIII.

of the monarchy was Samuel who at first resisted pressure to appoint a king in order to defeat the Philistines: "Then all the elders of Israel . . . came to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, ' . . . appoint for us . . . a king to govern us like other nations.' But the thing displeased Samuel. . . ." (1 Sam 8:4–6 NRSV). As the Hebrews moved from their nomadic lifestyle and its basis in the covenant that pledges allegiance to Yahweh as their only king (Joshua 24) to the establishment of the Davidic monarchy, Samuel represented nomadic opposition to the negative aspects of urban civilization (1 Sam 8:10–18). As a prophet, Samuel is what we would call "a culture critic." He responded to the allure of culture with a keen analysis of its potential evils. It is not surprising that whenever Israelite kings strayed from Yahweh or oppressed the people that a prophet like Samuel would harangue them with the cry: "To your tents, O Israel!" (1 Kgs 12:16c).

Step II: Ancient Mesopotamian Religion, Dueling Gods

The religion of ancient Mesopotamia is a direct reflection of Sumerian and Akkadian cultural values and structures. The independent, competitive city-states of ancient Sumer were not secular cities like Athens, but temple-states. The function of the *lugal* ("big man" or "king") or *en* ("priestly lord") was to administer the god's estate on earth. He was both a political and religious leader. The "temple" (*ziquarat*) was located in the city center, with homes and commercial areas surrounding it. The temple owned most of the land and, according to Thorkild Jacobsen, most inhabitants survived as "sharecroppers, serfs, or servants of the gods."¹⁷ It is therefore not surprising that the pyramidal economy of the temple state is duplicated in the celestial realm:

<i>Anu</i> : chief sky god	// <i>lugal</i> or <i>en</i>
<i>Annunaki</i> : council of fifty "great gods" personal gods	// council of elders // assembly of "men of the city" (<i>Gilgamesh and Agga</i>) ¹⁸

The Sumerians mapped their social structure on the cosmic canvas and then reversed the causal direction: "After kingship had descended from heaven. . . ." (beginning of *The Sumerian King List*, c. 2125 BCE).¹⁹ The autocratic rule of Sumerian and Akkadian kings is based on their role as the earthly representatives of the high god Anu. Jacobsen argues that the relative peacefulness of the fourth millennium BCE quickly gave way to constant warfare and conquest following the creation of monarchy and the appearance of fortified cities in the early Dynastic period of third millennium Sumer.²⁰

17. Jacobsen, "Mesopotamia," in Frankfort, *Before Philosophy*, 201.

18. Pritchard, ed., *ANET*, 44–47.

19. Pritchard, ed., *ANET*, 265.

20. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, 77.

A. The Mesopotamian Creation Epic (the symbol of the Dragon)

The dramatic shift at the beginning of the Bronze Age to warrior kings is reflected in the ancient Mesopotamian creation epic, the *Enuma Elish*.²¹ According to the Akkadian epic, the creation of the world is the result of a violent duel between two divine champions, one representing chaos, the other order.

1. Premise of the epic: before the world was created, there was no cosmic order and, moreover, this chaos was lifeless (= no motion or activity).
2. Genesis of the gods (theogony) from watery chaos: Apsu (male/fresh waters) and Tiamat (female/salt waters) mingle creating the alluvial delta, followed by the birth of other gods.
3. The activity of the newer gods (they like to dance) disturbs the rest (inactivity) of the older gods, so Apsu plots against them.
4. Marduk (Sumerian Enlil), grandson of Anu, agrees to champion the newer gods if they give him all powers (they acknowledge his power: "Marduk is king!").
5. Marduk (god of the winds) defeats Tí'amat (depicted as a fire-breathing dragon) in a violent duel:

Tí'amat and the champion of the gods, Marduk, engaged,
 were tangled in single combat, joined in battle.
 The lord spread his net, encompassing her;
 the tempest, following after, he loosed in her face.
 Tí'amat opened her mouth as far as she could;
 he drove in the tempest lest she close her lips.
 The fierce winds filled her belly,
 her insides congested and (retching) she opened wide her mouth:
 He let fly an arrow, it split her belly,
 cut through her inward parts and gashed the heart.
 He held her fast, extinguished her.²²

6. Lord Marduk's creative actions:
 - a. He creates the cosmos from Tí'amat's dead body (the ordering of chaos as a gift to the newer gods).
 - b. He creates humans from the blood of Tí'amat's second husband, Kingu, to relieve the gods of their tasks.
 - c. He oversees the construction of his house (*ziggurat*) in Babylon.

The *Enuma Elish* provides the template for all subsequent creation epics in the ancient Near East: creation is the result of a war between primordial chaos (anarchy) and cosmic order. It is a myth of conquest and domination. Secondly, since order is not primary, but derivative, it is contingent on human piety. The creator God will punish disobedience by withdrawing the gift of order and

21. For a translation and exposition, see Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness*, chapter 6.

22. Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness*, 178.

plunging the world back into chaos and anarchy.²³ The threat of catastrophe is always lurking in the wings.²⁴

B. The Canaanite Creation Epic (the symbol of the Whale)

Two other influential versions of the Mesopotamian creation epic are the Ugaritic myth of Ba'al and Yam and the Mithraic *tauroktonos*. In the Ugaritic (Amorite) *Ba'al Epic* discovered at Ras Shamra in 1929ff. by Claude F. A. Schaeffer and a French team is embedded an account of Lord Ba'al's (like Marduk, a weather god) defeat of Yam (Pardee: Yammu), god of the salt waters.²⁵ As a maritime people, these predecessors of the Phoenicians symbolized chaos as a sea-monster (whale), rather than as a dragon.²⁶

C. The Mithraic Creation Epic (the symbol of the Bull)

Mithraic monuments suggest a third version of the ancient Near Eastern creation epic as a duel between the gods of chaos and order, but the symbol for chaos is now a raging bull. The apses of Mithraea (Mithraic churches) are usually decorated with the scene of the god Mithras slaying a bull (*tauroktonos*). Franz Cumont interpreted this image as a repetition of the primeval fight between Mithras and Ormazd's first creation, a bull. When the bull reappears at the end of the age, Mithras will again slay it and its sacrificed body and blood will become the food and drink of immortality.²⁷

23. Since created order is not constitutive of the cosmos but a gift of the high gods, the flood story soon follows to emphasize this fragility. Utnapishtim tells the story of the flood in the Gilgamesh Epic. Since he has survived the flood and become immortal, Gilgamesh seeks to learn the secret of eternal life from him. In another version of the flood story the hero is named Ziusudra (Pritchard, ed., *ANET*, 42–44), he is called Atrahasis in a Babylonian version (Beyerlin, ed., *Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 90–93), and in the later Hebrew version Noah is the hero's name. It is this belief that order is transitory, despite the covenant with Noah (Gen 9:8–17), that is the backdrop for the fear that God will once again destroy cosmic order in the apocalyptic scenario.

24. This explains why Western civilization focuses on "law and order." Civilized order cannot be taken for granted in the Western tradition; it must constantly be defended from "barbarians at the gates."

25. Beyerlin, *Near Eastern Religious Texts*, 203–6; Hallo, ed., *The Context of Scripture*, 1.246–47.

26. In Isa 27:1 the two images are combined: "In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea." Psalm 29 seems to be an enthronement hymn to Ba'al as the storm god, though now ascribed to Yahweh. In Job 41:1 the sea-monster is called "Leviathan," which may refer to a crocodile, rather than a whale. In Ps 74:14 God defeats a sea-monster, whereas in Ps 104:26 the Leviathan is reduced to a tame sea-creature.

27. Since there are very few literary sources, Cumont's interpretation of this tableau has been challenged by others, including David Ulansey, who contends that the cult-relief is part of an astronomical code. See Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithra*, and Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries*. Manfred Clauss, *The Roman Cult of Mithras*, focuses on growing archaeological evidence and avoids the speculative theories of previous monographs.

D. The Hebrew Creation Epic (the symbol of Water)

The Priestly version of creation (Gen 1:1–2:4) draws directly upon the Ancient Near Eastern creation myth, but with one major exception: the symbol of chaos is demythologized. The dragon/whale/bull is replaced by water, a rationalized image of the formlessness of primeval chaos. But creation is still imagined as a contest in which God conquers Chaos: “In the beginning when God (*Elohim*) began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters” (Gen 1:1–2 NRSV, see note a). Note that order is still derivative, a gift from God, and that God, like Marduk and Ba’al, is the lord of the winds.

As in ancient Mesopotamia, so two millennia later in ancient Israel, the creation epic is used to justify monarchy as a reflection of the divine conquest of chaos. This autocratic ideology is reflected in enthronement Psalms like Psalm 29, 47, 93, 95–99: “The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever” (Ps 29:10 NRSV).

Despite the gradual rationalization of ancient myths beginning with Homer and the Hebrew Bible, Mircea Eliade and others have noted that their traces continue throughout the history of Western consciousness. Marduk’s battle with Tīamat is echoed in the legend of St. George slaying a fire-breathing dragon that captivated the imagination of medieval crusaders. Baal’s battle with the whale Yam generated stories like that of Jonah and Herman Melville’s American classic, *Moby Dick*. And the rituals of bull fights in Spain and bull riding in American rodeos are distant traces of the Mithraic *tauroktonos*.

Step III: Apocalyptic Poetics, From *Urzeit* to *Endzeit*

Apocalyptic texts (apocalypses) combine two literary forms: (1) prophecies *ex eventu* and (2) visions of seers about the catastrophic end of history. The end-time war between God and Satan is based on the conquest narrative of ancient Near Eastern creation epics and events leading up to the end-time war are cast as prophecies *ex eventu*. Paraphrasing Martin Kähler’s remark that, for some, “the gospels are passion stories with extended introductions,”²⁸ one might observe that an apocalypse is an account of the end-time war, prefixed by a list of penultimate disasters.

A. The End-time War as a Reprise of the Primeval Duel (Visions)

Many scholars have noticed that seers’ descriptions of the catastrophic end of history are based on creation narratives: descriptions of the *Endzeit* are mirror images of the *Urzeit*. An example of this is the “Unholy Trinity” of Revelation

28. Martin Kähler, *The So-called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*, 80 n. 11.

12–13: a dragon, a whale, and a raging bull.²⁹ The author combines all three versions of the ancient Near Eastern creation myth to describe the end-time duel between the champions of God and Satan:

Version 1 (Rev 12:1–17): Then another portent appeared in heaven: a great red dragon (δράκων μέγας πυρρός). . . . And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, but they were defeated. . . . The great dragon . . . was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (Rev 12:3a, 7–8a, 9a,c NRSV)

Version 2 (Rev 13:1–10): And I saw a beast rising out of the sea (ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης τὸ θηρίον). . . . (Rev 13:1a)

Version 3 (Rev 13:11–18): Then I saw another beast (θηρίον . . . εἶχεν κέρατα δύο) which rose out of the earth; it had two horns. . . . (Rev 13:11a–b)

Here are three versions of the common creation myth, not three different figures as literalists would have it: the one enemy in three symbolic forms.

Note also that in projecting the golden age of the past onto the screen of the future, seers do so in terms of their own cultural horizons: for ancient nomadic Hebrews, paradise is a fertile oasis in the midst of a parched desert, the garden of Eden (Gen 2:4b–9); for the urbanized early Christians paradise is a shining city decorated with precious jewels and golden streets, the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21).

B. Prophecy *ex eventu* (Antedated list of penultimate events)

Devastating events leading up to the culminating final battle in the apocalyptic scenario are formulated as predictions from the past, though actually composed after these traumatic events. Like the ancient Near Eastern creation myth, prophecy after the fact is also an ancient genre, with examples dating back to the Twelfth Dynasty of the Middle Kingdom in ancient Egypt. *The Prophecy of Nefer-Rohu* is set in the time of the Pharaoh Snefru of the Fourth Dynasty (2650–2500 BCE). Snefru asks the priest-seer Nefer-Rohu to forecast the future. He predicts the political anarchy of the First Intermediate Period (2260–2040 BCE) and then announces that Amen-em-het I (1991–1962 BCE) would put down all rebellions and reunite Upper and Lower Egypt.

The rivers of Egypt are empty. . . . A foreign bird will be born in the marshes of Northland. . . . Foes have arisen in the east, the Asiatics have come down to Egypt. . . . This land is helter-skelter. . . . Men will take up weapons of warfare, (so that) the land lives in confusion. Men will make arrows of metal . . . Men

29. If there is a sequential narrative in Revelation, it runs from chapters 4–11. Beginning in Revelation 12, elements of the narrative are randomly expanded. Thus commentators who try to construct a linear outline of the author's end-time scenario by going from Revelation 4–22 are never successful.

take man's property away from him, and it is given to him who is from outside. . . . Men will [*treat*] (fellow) citizens as hateful, in order to silence the mouth that speaks. If a statement is answered, an arm goes out with a stick, and men speak with: "Kill him!"

(Then) it is that a king will come, belonging to the south, Ameni, the triumphant, his name. He is the son of a woman of the land of Nubia; he is one born in Upper Egypt. He will take the [White] Crown; he will wear the Red Crown; he will unite the Two Mighty Ones. . . . Rejoice, ye people of his time! The son of a man will make his name forever and ever.³⁰

According to the caste system of ancient Egypt, members of the royal family married only within their own ranks. During the fragmentation and cultural decline of the First Intermediate Period the genetic link to the Old Kingdom rulers was evidently broken and Amen-em-het I, son of a Nubian mother, was regarded as an illegitimate Pharaoh by the nobility. Hence, *The Prophecy of Nefer-rohu* was composed during his reign to legitimate his claim to the throne. One piece of evidence that this prophecy was created after the events it describes is the anachronistic sentence: "Men will make arrows of metal." There is no evidence that metal-tipped arrows existed before the Eleventh Dynasty (c. 2000 BCE).

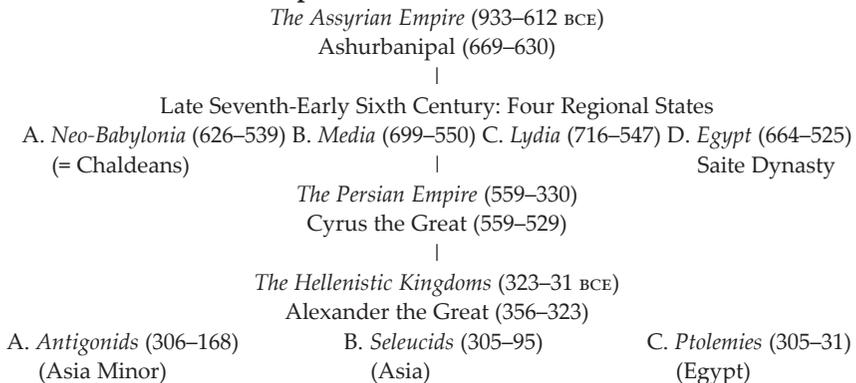
An example of prophecy *ex eventu* in the NT is the "little apocalypse" of Mark 13. The author lists the terrible events that occurred during the Jewish war against the Roman empire (66–70 CE) but casts them as predictions of the historical Jesus. If Mark 13:2 is a reference to the destruction of the temple, then the first gospel may have been written just after the end of the war in the early 70s. This would also explain why the fading of apocalyptic is already beginning in Mark's time: since God did not come to the aid of the Jewish freedom fighters, this war was not the end-time battle that supporters of the war had falsely prophesied (Mark 13:22). Therefore, there is no description of the end-time war in Mark 13; rather, Jesus is said to have rejected apocalyptic speculation: "As for that exact day or minute: no one knows, not even heaven's messengers, nor even the son, no one, except the Father" (Mark 13:32 SV). The disparate sayings combined in Mark 13 are loosely organized in three clusters: (1) list of disasters that occurred as a result of the war (13:5–13) = a description of the current situation of Mark's readers; (2) warnings about the imminent suffering and persecution of Mark's readers (13:14–23) = the near future as the Romans continue their retaliation against Jews for the rebellion of 66–70; and, (3) more distant cosmic events (13:24–27) when the triumphal climax will be ushered in with the arrival of the son of Man/new Adam (SV) on the clouds, though the parousia cannot be dated (13:33–37). Since Mark 13 does not contain a vision of a triumphal end-time war but emphasizes impending suffering for the community, it ends with the outcome of the apocalyptic scenario unclear, much like the gospel as a whole (16:8).

30. Pritchard, ed., *ANET*, 444–46.

**Step IV: Options after the
Babylonian Conquest of Jerusalem**

The establishment of the monarchy in ancient Israel occurred after the three centuries of historical “darkness” and chaos that followed the eclipse of the classical empires of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt in the fourteenth century BCE. This three-century power vacuum in the Ancient Near East created a space for smaller kingdoms like Israel, Phoenicia, and the Aramaeans around Damascus to flourish for several centuries during the first millennium BCE. Only Assyria survived the upheavals at the end of the Bronze Age, mainly because of its isolation and protection from the invasions of the twelfth century. Assyrian dominance reasserted itself beginning with the reign of Ashur-dan II (933–910) and reached its zenith in the eighth century (782–727 BCE). By the time the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel (722–721 BCE), both Israel and Judah were caught in a vise between the more powerful empires of Mesopotamia and Egypt, allying now with one side, now with the other, until the Babylonians twice invaded Judah (597 and 587) and destroyed Jerusalem. The destruction of the Solomonic temple and the monarchy was a watershed for both the political and religious ideology of the First Temple period. The David-Zion ideology was based on the natural theology of the ancient Near Eastern creation epic in which Elohim/Yahweh as the creator of the world had enthroned the Davidic dynasty as the divinely-ordained rulers. The end of the monarchy challenged the divine right of kings and revitalized the Moses-Sinai ideology of the period of the judges and handed on by the prophetic tradition. The Deuteronomic reforms under King Josiah in 621 (2 Kings 22–23) pressed this issue: “The LORD said, ‘I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I removed Israel; and I will reject this city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there’” (2 Kgs 23:27 NRSV). Less than three decades later this had all come to pass (another example of prophecy *ex eventu*) as the Deuteronomist and Jeremiah had warned.

Chart 2: Near Eastern Empires of the First Millennium BCE



The Second Crisis: The Babylonian Exile

Could Israel move beyond the trauma of exile and the undermining of its belief that Yahweh would protect Zion? Three major answers to the crisis of the Babylonian conquest were proposed in the wake of this tragedy. All three assume that the destruction of Jerusalem means that Yahweh has withdrawn from history. Yahweh has left this world and no longer will manipulate human affairs in favor of the Israelites. The new theological reality of the exile is that Yahweh has become an absent god, and thus irrelevant to daily affairs. The righteous are now thrown into the turbulence of history with no protection.

The responses to the destruction of Solomon's temple, the loss of political independence, and the collapse of traditional religious certainties were worked out in a distant land. The heart of Jewish life was now in Babylon. How could the faithful deal with their alienation from Yahweh in an alien environment? The five laments compiled in the book of Lamentations give voice to various stages of grief following the tragic end of Jerusalem in 586, beginning with mourning its destruction: "How lonely sits the city that once was full of people! . . . She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks; . . . The roads to Zion mourn, for no one comes to her festivals" (Lam 1:1a, 2a, 4a NRSV). The three main narratives that grew out of the experience of the Babylonian exile can be summarized as follows:

Narrative 1: Torah and Cult

Premise: Yahweh has withdrawn from history.

Theological response: Yahweh has left the Torah and the priestly traditions contained in it. The righteous should study Torah and follow its prescriptions in the absence of Yahweh (e.g., Ezekiel).

Narrative 2: Prudential Wisdom

Premise: Yahweh has withdrawn from history.

Theological response: Yahweh has left an orderly cosmos and human reason. The sage should formulate practical guidance from the workings of nature and the cosmos and regulate his/her life on the basis of this proverbial wisdom in the absence of Yahweh (e.g., Proverbs, Ecclesiastes).

Narrative 3: Apocalypticism

Premise: Yahweh has withdrawn from history.

Theological response: (a) The vacuum has been filled by the forces of evil. As a result, the righteous are now suffering and the evil are prospering. (b) But the days of evil are numbered. Yahweh will soon return to history: then the forces of evil will be defeated and retaliation will be meted out in spades—the evil will be brutally punished and the righteous lavishly rewarded (e.g., Daniel).

The various responses to the end of the monarchy and the apparent absence of Yahweh led to the fragmentation of Jewish culture following the Exile (the beginning of the Jewish diaspora with leaders deported to Babylon and oth-

ers fleeing to Egypt) and the formation of an array of sectarian movements (Hasidim, Sadducees, Essenes, et al.).

The Third Crisis: Alexander's Conquest of the Near East

The trauma that the Babylonian conquest inflicted on the Jews was later inflicted on the rest of the Near East by Alexander the Great and his successors. Aristotle's student saw himself as the instrument for carrying out the long-standing PanHellenic vendetta against the Persians for their invasions of Greece in 490 and 480. His methods in dealing with enemies were brutal, but his goal was more than military conquest. He aimed to create the first "global" empire (*oecumene* or one "inhabited world") by exporting Greek culture and institutions to the known world. As a result, the scars of Alexander's military campaigns were not limited to the casualties of war, but included the loss of tribal identity throughout the Near East as a veneer of Hellenistic culture was imposed on local structures.

The negative impacts of Alexander's decade-long crusade to conquer and Hellenize the Near East were social dislocation, personal alienation, and the overwhelming sense that evil is the most powerful force in the cosmos. The Hebrew feeling, following the Babylonian exile, that Yahweh had abandoned history exploded into the theodicy problem in the Hellenistic period. In the age of tribalism, there was no personal identity apart from one's ethnic group. What sociologists refer to as the "dyadic" personality of tribal communities was no longer viable as persons were cut adrift in the wake of Alexander's march to India. In order for a cosmopolitan culture to emerge, Zeno and the Stoics invented a new concept: the concept of the individual person. Once the concept of *self*-identity was formulated, new story-formed communities could be created and personal religious conversion became a possibility. During the Hellenistic period individualism took shape in two forms: (1) for intellectuals, Greek *pai-deia* became the basis for self-identity; (2) for many others, new religious cults (Greco-Roman mystery religions) provided the passport to a new identity.³¹

The trauma of Alexander's grand plan, however, was not fully experienced by the Jews until the second century BCE. The Ptolemies in Egypt controlled Palestine during the third century from the battle of Ipsus (301) to the battle of Panium (198 BCE). Jews were allowed a measure of self-governance and, paradoxically, the Tobiads and other cosmopolitan Jews were gradually assimilated to the wider Hellenistic cultural milieu. This all changed when the Syrians (Seleucid dynasty) defeated the Ptolemies at the battle of Panium and gained control of Palestine. The efforts of the Seleucids to force Jews to abandon their religious practices and adopt Hellenistic culture, in order to strengthen Seleucid

31. The classic study of the idea of personal conversion and its relationship to the mystery religions is Nock, *Conversion*.

unity, reached a boiling point when Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–163) announced his intention to transform Judaism into a SyroHellenic religious cult by identifying Yahweh with Zeus: Jewish religious festivals were abolished, Jews were forced to eat pork, copies of Torah were burned, and the cult of Olympian Zeus was set up in the Jerusalem temple (2 Maccabees 6). This attempt to erase Jewish religious identity accelerated Jewish dispersion throughout the Mediterranean region and sparked the Maccabean revolt in order to regain independence and protect Jewish national identity.

Interlude: Summing Up the Argument

Before addressing the apocalyptic scenario that fueled the revolts against Rome in 66 and 132 CE, let me sum up with a series of propositions:

1. The apocalyptic scenario is a revenge narrative.
2. The roots of the revenge narrative go back to the beginnings of Western civilization in ancient Mesopotamia.
3. The revenge narrative has two constituent parts:
 - a. A litany of disasters and sufferings narrated as prophecies *ex eventu*.
 - b. A visionary description of a climactic end-time war.
4. The two constituent parts of the apocalyptic scenario follow the crisis-response pattern: a crisis causes the disasters and the violent conflict is a response to the crisis.
5. The history of the ancient Hebrews is narrated in the Bible as a series of crises and responses.³²
6. The mythopoeic language of apocalyptic discourse is this-worldly, not other-worldly.³³

Outline of the crisis-response pattern in the history of ancient Israel:

First Crisis: amphictyony or empire (c. 1050–960 BCE)?

Responses: monarchy versus prophetic tradition (critique of empire).

Second Crisis: Kingdoms of Israel (721) and Judah (587) destroyed.

Responses: Torah and cult, wisdom, and apocalyptic narratives.

Third Crisis: Greek colonialism and loss of national identity (200–63 BCE).

Responses: assimilation versus Maccabean revolt and sectarian groups.

Fourth Crisis: Roman colonialism and loss of homeland (63 BCE–134 CE).

Responses: collaboration versus resistance and the formation of rabbinic Judaism and diaspora identities.

32. The crisis-response pattern is used by Humphreys, *Crisis and Story: Introduction to the Old Testament*.

33. Given the holistic worldview of antiquity (sublunar gods are actors in the historical arena), myth functioned in antiquity as psychological projection does in the modern world: an externalization of irrational scenarios in order to guard against anxiety.

Jewish Apocalypticism in the Greco-Roman Period

The only complete apocalyptic text in the Hebrew Bible is Daniel. Daniel was written during the persecution of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (168–165 BCE). It describes the struggle for religious freedom before the outbreak of the Maccabean revolt in December 164 BCE. Daniel is typical of the apocalyptic genre: though written during the third crisis (c. 165), the author uses the examples of the persecution of Daniel and his three companions during the second crisis (sixth century Babylonian conquest and exile during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar) as a means to encourage resistance against the Seleucid ruler Antiochus in the second century, cast in the form of a prophecy *ex eventu* (Daniel 1–6). The second part of the apocalyptic genre, descriptions of future conflict and “the end the days” (12:13b), is narrated in four visions (Daniel 7–12).³⁴

Jesus and the Apocalyptic Layer in the Gospels

Since the time of Albert Schweitzer and Johannes Weiss, many scholars have argued that Jesus saw himself as an end-time apocalyptic prophet. This was one of the “assured results” of NT scholarship that the Jesus Seminar tested. Marcus Borg’s paper, “A Temperate Case for a Non-Eschatological Jesus,”³⁵ persuaded members of the seminar to reject Schweitzer’s claim and conclude that Jesus did not have a messianic self-consciousness. Borg makes three arguments:

1. Though there is a layer of apocalyptic material in the synoptic gospels, the apocalyptic “son of Man” sayings are not authentic Jesus sayings, but post-Easter Christian scribal interpretations of Dan 7:13–14.
2. The term “kingdom of God” and a future arrival of the “son of Man” figure are never joined in the texts.
3. As a result, Jesus’ focus on the “kingdom of God” does not refer to an imminent event in the future, but, in fact, is a creation metaphor referring to “Israel’s myth (or story) of God’s kingship over Israel and the world.”³⁶

I would add the following point to Borg’s analysis. There is no revenge narrative in the authentic sayings of Jesus. A violent battle in which the righteous are rewarded and the evil are destroyed (the eschatological reversal) is the climax of the apocalyptic scenario. Jesus, however, does not describe a violent end-time battle in which the forces of God slaughter the forces of “the beast” (à la Rev 19:17–21). Quite the opposite: “As you know, we once were told, ‘An eye for an

34. Other literature of the Maccabean period following Daniel includes the book of Judith, evidently about the continuing struggle for political independence down to 141 BCE, and the book of Esther, though set in the Persian period, seems to be about campaigns of revenge against the enemies of the Jews after 141 BCE.

35. Borg’s paper was first published in Westar’s journal *Forum* 2,3 (1986) 81–102. It was reprinted as chapter 3 in Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 47–68.

36. Borg, “A Temperate Case for a Non-Eschatological Jesus,” 92.

eye' and 'A tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you: Don't react violently against one who is evil: when someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other as well. When someone wants to sue you for your shirt, let that person have your coat along with it. Further, when anyone conscripts you for one mile, go an extra mile" (Matt 5:38–41 SV).³⁷

Moreover, the analysis of the apocalyptic scenario as a two-part crisis-response narrative (1. account of current suffering and persecution; 2. revengeful violent battle) suggests that, while Jesus shared the apocalyptic's negative assessment of history, he offered a radically different response: love and inclusiveness, not revenge.

Chart 3: Jesus' Message vs. the Apocalyptic Scenario

	Crisis:	Response:
<i>Apocalyptic:</i>	God has left history	→ God will return in vengeance
	Evil is now in power	→ God will conquer evil
<i>Jesus:</i>	God is impartial (Matt 5:45)	→ (but) God is here (Luke 17:20–21)
	This generation is evil (Luke 11:29)	→ (but) Love one's enemies (Matt 5:44)

Those who focus on Jesus' negative attitude toward history tend to locate his message in the apocalyptic tradition. But if the accent is on Jesus' vision of an inclusive community that is arriving through his parables, then he is not an apocalyptic prophet and his negative view of history reflects the prophetic critique of culture, not the revenge scenario of apocalyptic. Thus, the earliest narrative that informs the story of Christianity was a protest narrative, the counter-cultural stance of the ancient Hebrew prophets who preceded the establishment of the Davidic monarchy.³⁸

Seven years later Borg published a follow-up essay on whether Jesus was an apocalypticist.³⁹ Here Borg critiques E. P. Sanders's argument for an apocalyptic Jesus by noting that it ignores the bedrock of the Jesus tradition, his parables and aphorisms, and instead filters Jesus through Sanders's hypothesis that Jesus was a prophet of restoration eschatology.⁴⁰ After summarizing his view that Jesus was a teacher of subversive wisdom, Borg also notes that apocalyptic language and the language of social criticism are incompatible.⁴¹ Borg further observes that the "delay of the parousia" did not seem to create a crisis in early

37. If Matt 5:41 refers to the practice of Roman soldiers "conscripting" Jews to accompany them on unprotected highways like the one from Jerusalem to Jericho, then Jesus' admonition to "go an extra mile" with a soldier suggests he would not have supported efforts to take up arms against Rome.

38. See Schneidau, *Sacred Discontent: The Bible and Western Tradition*, for a discussion of classical prophecy as a form of social protest. Schneidau also argues that the prophetic critique of culture is the forerunner of the critical spirit in the Western tradition.

39. Borg, "Jesus and Eschatology," 69–96.

40. Borg, "Jesus and Eschatology," 80–81.

41. Borg, "Jesus and Eschatology," 82–83.

Christianity, since it was not the only, or even the main, theological issue in the formation of the tradition.⁴² If Jesus was not an apocalyptic prophet, then why did the claim that he was one become an “assured result” of NT scholarship after Schweitzer? Borg argues that it is because of Mark’s influence. Mark, a “wartime gospel,” was written at the height of the crisis created by the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the Herodian temple in 70 CE. The author of Mark was the one who believed the end-time was imminent and so, via prophecy *ex eventu*, turned Jesus into an apocalyptic prophet. Mark 1:15 (Jesus’ inaugural address), 9:1 (the imminence of the end), and chapter 13 (the little apocalypse) are all redactional.⁴³

Was Paul an Apocalypticist?

Borg not only questions whether Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet, but also doubts that Paul was one, as the conventional paradigm assumes. “The dominant emphasis of Paul’s message. . . seems to have been the new life in Christ available in the present, not primarily (or even very much) the need to repent before the judgment.”⁴⁴ Many scholars have noted this “yet/not yet” juxtaposition in Paul’s letters. He both asserts that the eschaton is already present (2 Cor 5:17), but that it is not yet complete (Phil 4:5b).

Despite the occasional apocalyptic language in Paul’s authentic letters, like Borg I have never been persuaded that Paul was an apocalyptic seer. The main reason is that there is no revenge narrative in Paul’s writings. Like Jesus, Paul does agree with the negative view of history in apocalyptic texts (Rom 1:18–23). But, like Jesus, Paul does not describe a slaughter at the end of history. Rather, he argues that the faithfulness of Jesus confirms the reliability of God (Rom 1:16–17) so that God will “triumph” or will be “vindicated,” not through a violent conquest, but through the faithfulness of those, whether Jews or the nations, who imitate the faithfulness of Jesus (Rom 3:23–26).⁴⁵ We could thus expand chart 3 to include Paul:

Crisis:	Response:
Is (an absent) God trustworthy?	→ Jesus’ faithfulness confirms God’s reliability
Jews and non-Jews are disobedient	→ God accepts all who, like Jesus, trust God

42. Borg, “Jesus and Eschatology,” 79.

43. Borg, “Jesus and Eschatology,” 86–87. Schmidt describes the features of Mark that indicate it was written during the Jewish war against Rome and labels Mark as “A War-Time Gospel.” See Schmidt, *The Gospel of Mark*, 3–6.

44. Borg, “Jesus and Eschatology,” 79.

45. This reading of Paul’s world-changing insight that the faithfulness of Jesus made possible the inclusion of “the nations” in the eschatological community, and thus “vindicated” the righteousness of God (contrary to the apocalyptic scenario) is based on the Scholars Version translation. See Dewey et al., *The Authentic Letters of Paul*.

As a peripatetic evangelist and pastor, Paul corresponded with dissimilar groups in divergent cities of the early Roman empire. Because his audiences were diverse, he employed a range of discourses, shifting from one metaphor or rhetorical strategy to another, in his efforts to translate his world-changing insight into the idiom of his readers.⁴⁶ I would suggest that apocalyptic language is only one of the symbolic fields that Paul exploits to communicate his insight about the significance of Jesus' faithfulness as a way of solving the "gentile problem."

Concluding Comments

After Judas Maccabeus fought the Syrian general Lysias to a draw at Beth-zur in the fall of 165 (1 Macc 4:26–35) and cleansed the rebuilt temple in December 165 (1 Macc 4:52–58), the path to political independence was again cleared. By the time the Maccabean dynasty was established two decades later, however, resistance to Hellenization had diminished and, under John Hyrcanus (134–104 BCE), it became another Hellenistic kingdom much like the Seleucid and Ptolemaic kingdoms. Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II appealed to the Roman general Pompey to settle their dispute over the throne in 63 BCE. When Pompey annexed Jerusalem instead, the local population did not experience much difference between Maccabean and Roman rule. Thus the period from Pompey to Claudius was mostly peaceful in Palestine.⁴⁷ The revolutionary movement did not begin until the Zealot party was established in 52 CE, and resistance against Roman rule was further fueled by widespread unemployment after the Herodian temple was completed in 62 CE. Within four years the revolt against Rome broke out, based on the apocalyptic hope that Yahweh would destroy the enemies of the righteous.

Much of the debate about apocalypticism has focused on its matrix: did it come from Babylonian, Persian, or Hellenistic influences? I am not especially interested in this question, since I think the dualism and mythological language of apocalyptic goes back to the beginnings of Western civilization in ancient Mesopotamia, as argued above. What intrigues me more is dating: all the apocalyptic texts seem to have been produced between 200 BCE and 100 CE. Within this three-century span, there are two periods when many of the texts are dated: the generation following the edicts of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (e.g.,

46. Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought*, discusses Paul's juxtaposition of symbolic fields and his use of apocalyptic language to communicate his new view of God based on his insight about the significance of Jesus. See especially chapter 12 for a discussion of the various symbols of salvation and righteousness in Paul's letters.

47. Since Josephus mentions no military invasions from 4 BCE–66 CE in his list in *Against Apion* 1.34–5, Martin Goodman concludes that this seventy-year period, the generations of Jesus and Paul, was one of "stability and peace." See Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem*, 382.

Daniel, 1 Enoch, Jubilees, and 1QM: the War Scroll) and the generation following the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (e.g., Mark, Revelation, 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, and the Apocalypse of Abraham).⁴⁸ This would mean that these apocalyptic texts were responses to the third and fourth crises described above. When times are peaceful, apocalyptic scenarios tend to fade. During times of crisis and persecution, however, evil seems to be more powerful than good, and the apocalyptic scenario provides some consolation for the victims and defends the (absent) power of God.

Some years ago a colleague asked me to list biblical stories that do not contain conflict or violence. The stories we tell our children, he argued, shape their values and worldviews. I replied that, off the top of my head, I could think of only two: the story of Ruth in the Hebrew Bible and the parable of the Good Samaritan in the NT. From its beginnings in Mesopotamia five thousand years ago, a myth of conquest and domination has shaped Western civilization. Tribal vendettas have been glorified in the name of God, whether they are called "Holy Wars," "Crusades," or "Jihad." The basic mantra is the code of the warrior, "to kill and survive," rather than the rule of those who follow a path of self-sacrificial love, "to die and become." Reevaluating the role of apocalyptic in early Christianity opens another window onto the forces that shaped Christian identities and the myth(s) that founded a new story-formed community.

48. Dating most of the apocalypses is difficult, especially since they are often composite texts. *The War of the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness* (1QM) from Qumran is an example of this problem.

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