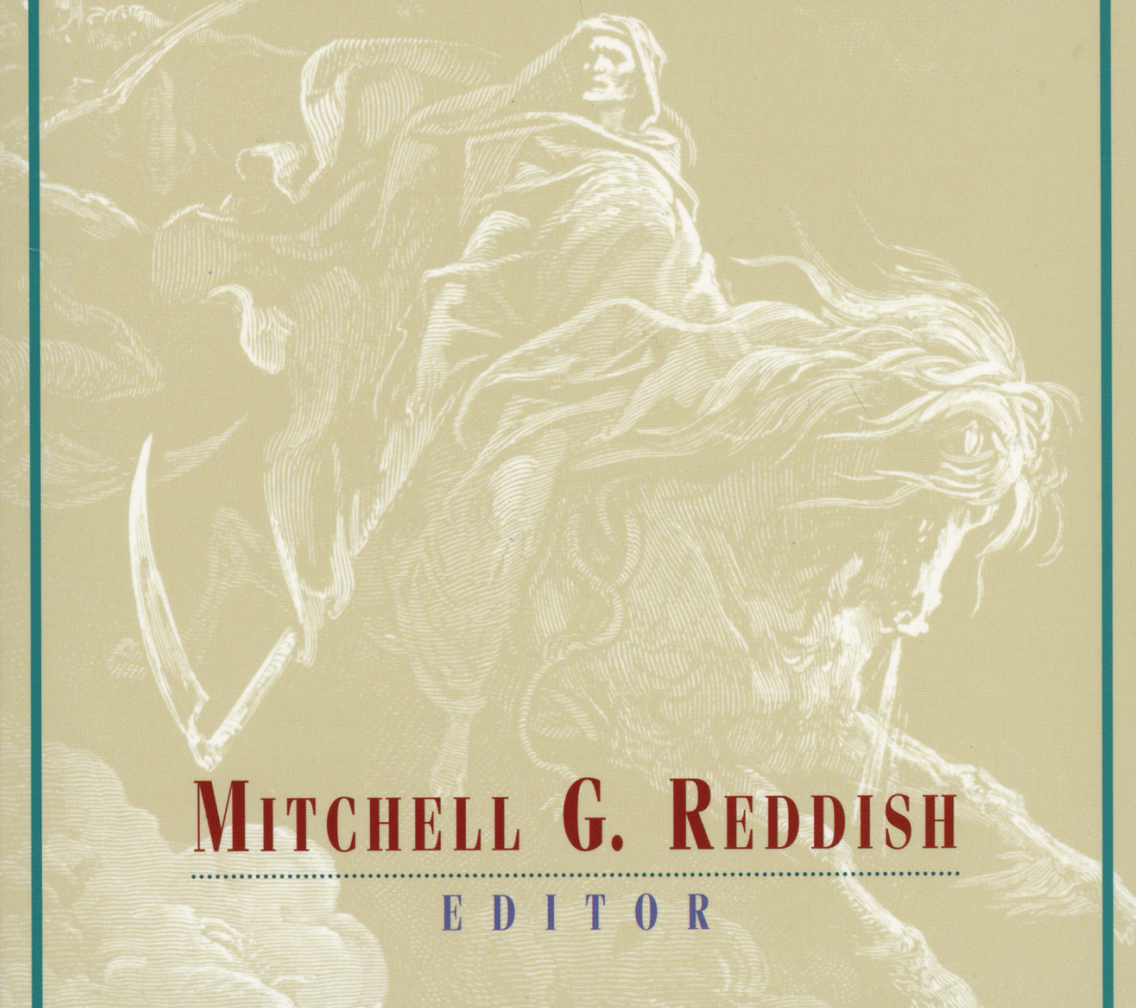
Apocalyptic Literature

A Reader



Mitchell G. Reddish

editor

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HENDRICKSON PUBLISHERS

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Edited by Mitchell G. Reddish

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To Barbara
and our children
Tim, Beth, and Michael

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD

Apocalyptic literature has received considerable scholarly attention in recent years, both for its inherent interest and for its importance in the formation of Christianity. Nonetheless this literature remains strange and forbidding not only to students but also to many scholars who specialize in other areas. A major reason for this has been the lack of a collection of texts that is suitable for classroom use. Mitchell Reddish's anthology is designed to fill that lack.

The virtues of Reddish's volume may be appreciated by comparison with the best collection of Jewish apocalyptic texts now available, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* volume 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments,* edited by J. H. Charlesworth. The two books are quite different in purpose. Charlesworth's volume is by far the more scholarly; its translations are annotated, and its introductions are more detailed. Reddish's anthology does not attempt to compete with it on any of these grounds. Precisely because of its scholarly virtues, however, Charlesworth's volume is often too ponderous for classroom use. Reddish's selection limits the corpus to a range that can be covered in an undergraduate course. Charlesworth's edition will remain indispensable for the scholar and specialized student, but Reddish's presentation is surely more accessible to the nonspecialist.

In addition to the practical advantage of its limitation, Reddish's anthology has three major virtues that should be emphasized.

First, it is organized in a way that brings order to a body of literature that is often perceived as chaotic. I admit to being partial to the typology

followed here, but the advantages of some such division of the material cannot be denied. Apocalyptic literature has too often been treated as an undifferentiated whole. The division into types allows the reader to perceive the different texts more clearly.

Second, while the collection of Jewish apocalypses is not nearly as complete as that of Charlesworth, Reddish's book has the advantage of including a sample of Qumran texts in the same volume. These texts were quite properly omitted from Charlesworth's collection of pseudepigrapha, but they are of immediate relevance for Jewish apocalypticism, and no one who teaches a course on the subject can afford to omit them.

Finally, this is the first anthology that brings together Jewish and Christian apocalypses in a single book. It is not unusual to read in textbooks that apocalyptic literature died out after the first century C.E. This common assertion is simply not true. The genre flourished in Christian circles down to the Middle Ages. Anthologies often shape our perception of a field. If Reddish's anthology makes students of apocalypticism aware of the extent and importance of the Christian apocalypses, it will have made a significant contribution to scholarship.

John J. Collins

PREFACE

This anthology arose out of the need for an affordable, one-volume reader that would contain a wide sampling of both Jewish and Christian apocalyptic texts. Several excellent collections devoted to either Jewish or Christian writings are available. Unfortunately, none of these contains both Jewish and Christian works. *Apocalyptic Literature: A Reader* is designed to make accessible to the interested student a representative sampling of Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic literature, along with brief introductions to each work that will help the reader situate the work in its historical and literary contexts and give the reader an overview of the contents of the work. This anthology is designed for the non-specialist. The introductions, therefore, avoid detailed, technical discussions and critical analyses of the texts and translations. Furthermore, the texts themselves are not, for the most part, annotated. The reader who is interested in more detailed studies of introductory issues related to the works, or who has questions about variant readings, manuscript traditions, or translation decisions related to the texts included here, is encouraged to examine the more comprehensive studies of these documents listed in the bibliography at the end of the book.

This work is not intended to be a complete collection of Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic writings. It is a representative sampling. Several other texts easily could have been included. The goal in choosing specific texts was to include the best-known, most interesting, and most influential writings. In many cases, the selection of writings

was easy. No collection of Jewish apocalyptic literature could justifiably omit *1 Enoch* or 4 Ezra. Likewise, no Christian collection could justifiably omit the *Apocalypse of Peter* or the *Apocalypse of Paul.* In other cases, however, the choice was more difficult. Certainly some individuals may, for various reasons, prefer the inclusion of other texts. I believe the works included here will provide the best introduction to apocalyptic literature for the general reader.

The paradigm for the selection and arrangement of texts is that developed by the Society of Biblical Literature's Genres Project, which was published in *Semeia* 14 (1979). This model was chosen because it uses clearly defined, easy to understand criteria for identifying the apocalyptic genre and for grouping the texts into two major categories: apocalypses that contain otherworldly journeys and those that contain no otherworldly journeys. To present a balanced understanding of apocalyptic literature, this anthology contains examples of both Jewish and Christian apocalypses from each of these two major categories. The apocalypses that are included are those whose classification has substantial scholarly support.

Examples of writings that have major similarities to apocalyptic literature but cannot be categorized strictly as apocalypses are also included. These writings were included to demonstrate that apocalyptic ideas were often conveyed in a literary genre other than that of an apocalypse. Furthermore, placing such texts alongside true apocalypses will help students to understand the distinctive elements of the genre better.

This collection is limited to Jewish and early Christian noncanonical literature. The restriction of the contents to noncanonical literature was solely on the basis of space limitations. It would have been helpful to have included at least Daniel from the Hebrew Bible and Revelation from the New Testament as examples of apocalypses, as well as Mark 13 and other passages as examples of related texts. They are readily accessible elsewhere, however. Limiting the volume to Jewish and early Christian literature is due again to space considerations. For this reason, Greco-Roman and Persian apocalypses and related texts are not included.

For most of the selections included here, translators' footnotes have been omitted. In a few cases, however, footnotes have been included when it was felt that the information contained in them was necessary for a proper reading of the texts. In all cases, the annotations are those

of the translators. Where appropriate, textual signs have been added to the texts to correspond to the information in the footnotes.

By making these apocalyptic writings more accessible to the general reader, it is hoped that more people will gain an appreciation for the contributions these writings have made in the history of Judaism and Christianity and will understand better the continuing influence of their ideas on modern society. Even more important, it is hoped that the reader will come to appreciate these writings on their own merits, as expressions of individuals and groups who struggled to find meaning and hope in an often confusing world.

Sincere thanks are due several people who helped make this work possible: Rex Matthews, Senior Academic Editor at Abingdon Press, who patiently guided and encouraged the production of this book; Professor John J. Collins, who graciously read the manuscript and made several insightful suggestions; my colleagues in the Department of Religion at Stetson University, who continually provide emotional and intellectual support and encouragement and who have endured my fascination with apocalypticism; Clyde Fant, in particular, also one of my colleagues in the Department of Religion, who read all the introductions to the texts and helped hone my writing skills and whose irreverent and humorous marginal glosses enlivened the production of this project; Stetson University, for providing special funds for research and typing; Savilla Beasley, who carefully typed the texts; and most of all my family, to whom this work is dedicated, who patiently allowed me to devote time that belonged to them to the completion of this project.

TEXTUAL SIGNS

In translating ancient documents, scholars sometimes are faced with passages that are difficult to translate because the text has been damaged, is in fragments, or has been altered. In those situations, translators must attempt to reconstruct the original wording of a text. The signs below have been devised to indicate to the reader when there are problems in a text underlying a particular translation, or when words have been added to make a text more understandable in translation. (Texts included in this anthology that used other signs have been modified to conform to the signs given here.)

[ ] indicates letters or words that have been restored to the text on the basis of the translator's or editor's conjecture of what was originally in the text.

⟨ ⟩ indicates a translator's or editor's correction of an apparently erroneous text.

{ } indicates material that the translator or editor believes is erroneous or superfluous and should be omitted.

( ) indicates material that has been added by the translator or editor in order to clarify the meaning of a text or to make the text read more smoothly.

(?) indicates that the translation or meaning is uncertain due to a fragmentary or corrupt text.

. . . indicates that a portion of the text is missing.

INTRODUCTION

The terms *apocalypse* and *apocalyptic* have become standard parts of the vocabulary of modern society. Politicians warn of a nuclear apocalypse. Ecologists describe the apocalyptic effects of pollution, acid rain, and abuse of the environment. *Apocalypse Now* was the title of a movie that depicted the chaos and insanity of the Vietnam War. So commonplace have the terms become that when strong winds fanned a brush fire into a raging inferno in a Los Angeles suburb, one observer described the scene as "just like hell, like an apocalypse." Although apocalyptic terminology has become widely used, most people are unfamiliar with the literature from which the terms and the ideas originated. The best way to understand the meaning of apocalyptic terms, ideas, and motifs is to study apocalyptic literature itself.

What Is Apocalyptic Literature?

The term *apocalyptic* has been used to describe a broad range of ideas, motifs, and literature that have varying degrees of similarity. In an attempt to bring about precision and clarity, scholars often distinguish among apocalyptic eschatology, apocalypse, and apocalypticism. The words *apocalypse, apocalyptic,* and *apocalypticism* are all derived from the Greek word *apokalypsis,* which means "revelation." Apocalyptic eschatology refers to a particular view of God's activity in the future. The term *eschatology* literally means "teachings about the last things"—that is, beliefs about how God will bring about God's ultimate purpose for the universe.

Eschatological beliefs can be found in the prophetic writings of the Hebrew Bible, but their eschatology is not apocalyptic. Prophetic eschatology envisioned God accomplishing divine plans within the context of human history and by means of human agents. God acted within political events and through world leaders. The prophets proclaimed that one day God would establish Jerusalem as a world center with a Davidic king on the throne of Israel. Israel's enemies would be defeated, the faithful would be rewarded, and the wicked would be punished. All of these events would occur on earth, within the normal bounds of history, brought about by God through human means.

Prophetic eschatology began to give way to apocalyptic eschatology, however, as the people of Israel began to lose confidence in such events occurring within history. Hope was shifted from this world and this age to another world and another age. God would not employ ordinary means but supernatural forces to bring about the divine plan. Apocalyptic eschatology, then, finds hope primarily in the future. This hope may take the form of God's bringing an end to this wicked world. A new world is created (or the present one is transformed); a new age begins. On the other hand, at times apocalyptic eschatology may not be concerned with destruction of the world but retribution after death. The righteous are rewarded and the wicked punished in the next life. In both types of apocalyptic eschatology, however, hope and retribution occur outside the bounds of normal human experience. In Judaism, the shift from prophetic to apocalyptic eschatology was a gradual process. The historical and social conditions of the post-exilic period of Israel's history seem to have been important factors in the development of their apocalyptic eschatology.

The term *apocalypse* refers to a particular literary genre. Although all scholars do not agree on the precise characteristics of an apocalypse, a useful definition has been proposed by John J. Collins and other members of the Apocalypse Group of the Society of Biblical Literature's Genres Project. Their definition of an apocalypse states:

> "Apocalypse" is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.[1]

Since this definition has been adopted in this anthology and has

provided the criteria for the selection and arrangement of the included texts, several elements of this definition should be elaborated. First, an apocalypse is revelatory literature—that is, the author claims to have received a divine revelation. This revelation is usually in the form of a dream or vision and is mediated by or interpreted by an angel.

Second, the human recipient of the revelation is normally presented as a famous hero of the past (Abraham, Enoch, Daniel, Ezra, Adam, Elijah). In actuality, the author is a much later individual who writes pseudonymously—that is, in the name of some venerable figure from the past. The technique of pseudonymity was used to lend authority to the writing, to suggest that the work was not of recent origin but came from a respected figure of ancient time.

Third, the content of apocalypses involves both horizontal and vertical (or temporal and spatial) dimensions. The horizontal dimension is the interest in salvation beyond human history. This usually involves divine judgment in the afterlife, followed by rewards or punishments. The vertical, or spatial, dimension is seen in the descriptions of otherworldly beings and otherworldly places: angels and demons, places of eternal reward and punishment (for example, heaven and hell), and the abode of God.

Apocalypses also can be divided into two major categories: those that contain an otherworldly journey and those that contain no otherworldly journey. In the first category, the author describes an experience of being taken on a tour of otherworldly regions—heaven, hell, Sheol, the outer boundaries of the earth. Vivid descriptions are given of what the author has seen. Of particular interest to these writers are descriptions of the abode of the dead, the places of eternal reward and punishment, the pain and torture inflicted upon the wicked, the dwelling place of God, and the locations of the stars, planets, and other heavenly bodies. Some of these apocalypses focus on the heavenly ascent of the author, describing in detail the ascent through the various levels of the heavens and the contents of each heavenly realm. This interest in the fixed series of heavens, and the concern over the order and regularity of the heavenly bodies found in some texts, served a practical purpose. The order and stability of the universe was a sign that God had all things under control. In spite of how events might appear to those on earth, who were living in the midst of chaos, destruction, and confusion, the universe was not out of control. God had predetermined the nature of the universe and the course of world history. At the appropriate time—which was very soon—God would bring history to a climax, and

the rewards and punishments seen by the writer would become reality.

Apocalypses of the second type contain no journeys to otherworldly regions. Instead, revelation is given to the apocalyptist in a dream or vision or is disclosed by means of an angel who appears and converses with the recipient of the revelation. Even in those cases in which revelation comes by means of a dream or vision, an angelic figure usually appears to serve as an interpreter of the revelation. Apocalypses that contain no otherworldly journeys normally stress the temporal elements more than the spatial, and therefore a major concern is eschatological predictions. Especially important are signs of the endtime that are revealed to the author. Individuals who are observant of these signs are able to detect that the end is near and that the present course of the world, in which history is dominated by evil, is drawing to a close. Signs of the dying of this age can be seen in events in nature (earthquakes; famines; disturbances among the sun, moon, and stars; unnatural births; destruction by fires) and among humanity (wars, rampant evil, violence).

Another frequent type of eschatological prediction involves descriptions of the final judgment. The last judgment is the great day of reckoning, the time when all will be judged according to their deeds—individuals, nations, angels, and demons. The wrongs of the world will be corrected, evil will be punished, and righteousness will be rewarded. This eschatological judgment will be God's final act of retribution and justice. The true nature of reality will then become evident. Whereas throughout world history evil and wickedness might have appeared dominant and superior, now that is seen as only false appearance. In reality, God and God's ways of justice and righteousness ultimately prevail, and the last judgment is proof of that reality. Descriptions of eternal rewards and punishments frequently accompany scenes of the last judgment.

A characteristic of many of these apocalypses without an otherworldly journey is an interest in the events of history. Major events of the past are recounted. Often this takes the form of *ex eventu* prophecy, or prophecy "after the fact." This technique coincides with the literary device of pseudonymous authorship, in which the author claims to be some renowned figure from the past. Appearing to write from the perspective of the ancient past (although actually writing from a much later time), the apocalyptist "predicts" major events of world history, particularly events involving the Jewish people. The writers sometime describe history as being divided into predetermined periods. The present age is

usually located in one of the final periods of history, and the history of the world is about to draw to a close. Along with or instead of this periodization of history, some of the *ex eventu* prophecies "foretell" the emergence and downfall of various kings and kingdoms of the world.

The use of *ex eventu* prophecy served at least two purposes for the apocalyptic writer. First, the use of these fulfilled "prophecies" enhanced the credibility and authority of the writer: If the venerable figure from the past had been correct in all these "predictions," readers reasoned that the person must be correct when foretelling events yet to come. Second, *ex eventu* prophecies engendered hope and assurance for persecuted and oppressed individuals. By describing what was to come, the apocalyptist reinforced the idea of history as being determined and ordered. The apocalyptist was able to describe these events only because God had determined them in advance. History, therefore, like individuals, must ultimately bow to God's designs. Furthermore, showing that the present period of world history is one of the last periods affirmed that the end was imminent. Suffering and oppression would not have to be endured much longer. The faithful must persist only a short while more, then God would intervene and eschatological salvation would ensue.

All writings that contain apocalyptic ideas should not be classified as apocalypses, however. An apocalypse is a particular literary genre, exhibiting the characteristics discussed above. A writer may choose to convey apocalyptic notions (divine intervention, eschatological judgment, otherworldly conflicts), but opt to do so using some other literary form—oracles, testaments, letters, parables. The parables of Jesus are a good example of writings that contain apocalyptic ideas, but are not apocalypses. Their literary form is the parable. Their contents are often apocalyptic, but their form is not. In this anthology, several examples of texts that are not apocalypses but are related to them have been included.

The final term that needs to be defined is *apocalypticism*. Apocalypticism is a pattern of thought or a world view dominated by the kinds of ideas and motifs found in apocalypses—emphasis on other worlds (heaven, hell, the abode of the dead) and otherworldly beings (God, Satan, angels, demons), supernatural intervention in world events, apocalyptic eschatology, and divine retribution beyond death. Certain historical movements can be designated as apocalyptic movements when apocalypticism provides the means by which their adherents view reality. Apocalypticism is usually very dualistic—earthly realities versus

heavenly realities, this age versus the age to come, God versus Satan (or whatever name is given to the leader of the forces of evil), angels versus demons, righteous individuals versus wicked individuals. The entire universe is caught up in a conflict between good and evil. Events in heaven are mirrored on earth, and earthly struggles are manifestations of the battle between God and evil throughout the cosmos. The righteous understand their present difficulties in terms of this cosmic conflict—that is, they are not fighting human evil only, but are locked in a battle with evil that has cosmic proportions. Adherents to apocalypticism see the world in opposing terms: One belongs either to the righteous or to the wicked; there is no room for compromise.

The group of Jewish individuals who lived at Qumran and produced the Dead Sea Scrolls are usually considered apocalyptic because their writings demonstrate that their "symbolic universe"—that is, their way of understanding how the world functions—was built upon the ideas prevalent in apocalyptic literature. In the Qumran writings, history is seen as a battle between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness. A final eschatological battle will occur when God will intervene through the angel Michael, the Prince of Light, and will defeat the forces of evil led by Belial, the Angel of Darkness. Through this supernatural intervention, God would deliver the righteous.

The Purpose of Apocalyptic Literature

Apocalyptic literature is crisis literature. These writings were produced during a time of perceived crisis to offer hope to oppressed and beleaguered individuals by giving them an alternative picture of reality. The crises faced by the people varied. In some instances, the crisis was military or political oppression (Daniel, Revelation); in other instances, it was a theological crisis (4 Ezra); in still other cases, the crisis was a sense of alienation brought about when one group felt cut off from the rest of society (the Qumran writings). The historical and sociological context of several of the apocalypses can no longer be determined. In many cases, however, apocalyptic writings do seem to be responses to some kind of crisis, either real or perceived. In reality, a crisis may not have existed. From the perspective of the apocalyptic writer, however, a crisis did exist. The reality of the crisis is not as important as the perception, because the authors wrote on the basis of their perception of the situation.

Critical studies of the book of Revelation have struggled with the

question of imperial persecution of the church during the latter years of the first century. Virtually no evidence exists in contemporary sources to support the idea of official persecution of the church. Yet, the author of the book of Revelation is greatly concerned about persecution, martyrdom, and steadfast witnesses. The resolution of this dilemma lies not so much in the reality of a massive persecution, but in the author's perception that such was the case. John of Patmos knew of at least a few instances of persecution and martyrdom. These provided the basis for his understanding of the situation. Whereas, objectively speaking, very little persecution may have existed, from the perspective of John and those who were feeling oppressed and threatened, imperial persecution seemed to be a reality. On the basis of this perception, John wrote to provide his readers a different way of viewing the situation, an alternative symbolic universe. The worldly reality seemed to be that God had lost control; Satan and Satan's forces had the upper hand. The Roman emperor as Satan's representative held all power. What John did through his apocalypse was to give his readers a different way of understanding their situation, an eschatological view of current events. Beyond the appearance was the reality that God was bringing order out of the chaos of the universe. Satan and his cohorts, especially the Roman emperor, would be defeated by the heavenly armies. God would be victorious. This divine victory extended to God's people, too. Those who remained faithful would share in God's new kingdom.

One of the functions of many apocalypses, such as Revelation, was to offer hope and comfort to the faithful by means of an alternative vision. They were encouraged to endure their situations, being assured that ultimately God would triumph. The current social or political situations were relativized because they were shown to be only temporary. God would soon bring about a change, another world in which the righteous are not the alienated ones but the rewarded ones.

Apocalyptic literature also functioned as a form of protest against society. It was resistance literature, whether the "enemy" was political, military, social, or theological. Protest and resistance can take many forms. Passive resistance involves a refusal to comply with the demands of the ruling authorities in a non-confrontational manner. One resists quietly and unobtrusively, attempting to avoid detection and confrontation. Active resistance could take either of two forms. Resistance may be violent, armed resistance, as is the case in violent revolutions and class conflicts. Apocalyptic writings do not seem to be intended to foster this kind of resistance. The outlook of apocalyptic writers generally is that

the course of world events has already been determined by God and will be brought to completion by God. Human efforts to change God's designs are futile. A second form of active resistance is nonviolent in nature. One openly confronts the ruling forces and challenges their authority and their world view. Martyrdom is the extreme example of this kind of protest. Martyrs refuse to accept the world view of their oppressors. They claim allegiance to a higher authority. Their valiant actions are a challenge to the understanding of reality presented by their persecutors. The apocalyptists serve as another example of this kind of protest. They, too, challenge the dominant society's understanding of reality. They present another view of the world by telling their readers that true power and authority in the world belong to God. All human institutions and rulers are flawed; God alone is the ruling power. Through their visions of another world and a higher reality, apocalyptists challenge and confront the present systems. They resist the claims of tyrannical rulers, unjust systems, and inadequate world views. Through their writings, they challenge others to resist also.

Apocalyptic thought has at times been criticized for its "pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by" attitude. Critics have accused apocalyptic writers of encouraging people to focus only on the world to come with the result that the present world, with its social and political ills, is ignored. Apocalyptic ideas, they claim, lull people into accepting life as it is now by offering them hope for the afterlife. This is an unfair critique of apocalyptic writings, however. Properly understood, these writings are a challenge to the established order of things, not an endorsement or even an acceptance of them. Apocalyptic literature calls upon its readers to resist the charms and delusions of the present world, to look beyond them and see a better world, to realize the ultimate authority in the world. The vision of the world as God intends it should serve as a catalyst for resistance and change, not a sedative to encourage hopeless acceptance of the current situation.

Apocalyptic literature is dangerous for the established order. Rather than being understood as fostering an escapist mentality, apocalyptic literature should be understood as protest literature. The apocalyptic writers spoke out against a world of evil, violence, oppression, and injustice. They provided visions of a better world, a world of peace and justice. They called for allegiance to a higher authority, not to human institutions, but to God. True, the idea held by the apocalyptists that history was in God's hands and that human effort could do little to change it prevented them from sounding calls for political and social

revolt. Yet, their writings were still a form of protest, of refusing to accept the present social and historical reality. The transcendent future that had been revealed to them would not allow them to settle for the status quo, but beckoned them to a new world. Through their literary works, they challenged others to follow that vision also.

Apocalyptic literature functions, then, not only to offer comfort and consolation, but also to register a strong word of protest. Both aspects are important and should not be separated. If only comfort and hope are emphasized, there is the danger that apocalyptic literature will be misused to encourage individuals to ignore their social and political responsibilities by living only for the future. On the other hand, if only the protest element is stressed, the risk is great that the transcendent perspective of apocalyptic literature will be lost. The new world of the apocalyptists is not a human construct brought into being solely through human efforts. Most important, it is God's new world, God's new creation, brought into reality through divine means.

Apocalyptic literature should function in this dual capacity—by consoling and challenging, by offering comfort and demanding protest. Through the centuries, it has largely functioned in that way. The book of Daniel provided hope and protest during the second century B.C.E., when Antiochus Epiphanes persecuted the Jews of Palestine. The *Testament of Abraham* did not challenge a human enemy, but the fear of death. It offered its readers comfort and hope in the face of death, the enemy of all humanity. The apocalyptic writings from Qumran provided a different understanding of the religious and social order of Palestine for those sectarian Jews who opposed the current practices of the high priest and Temple worship. The book of Revelation, with its protests against the beast of the Roman Empire and its visions of a new world, gave meaning to the struggles of the faithful and held out hope for a different reality.

The Prevalence of Apocalyptic Literature

The Hebrew Bible contains only one apocalypse: the book of Daniel. Other apocalypses were produced within Judaism, but none of these writings was eventually accepted as canonical. The book of Daniel exhibits the apocalyptic characteristics of pseudonymity and *ex eventu* prophecy. Although the story is set during the time of the Babylonian exile of the people of Judah (sixth century B.C.E.), the work was actually written around 165 B.C.E. when Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria and

ruler of Palestine, was persecuting the Jewish people. The book is composed of two sections: chapters 1–6 and chapters 7–12.

The first section consists of several tales about Daniel and his friends, who are in exile in Babylon. Persecuted because of their faith, the young men remain true to God, who helps them in their times of distress. These stories, which were likely ancient tales of heroic faithfulness, were used by the author of Daniel to foster hope and encouragement among his readers, who were faced with a similar threat to their faith, the threat of Antiochus Epiphanes.

The second section of Daniel, chapters 7–12, is the apocalyptic section of the work. This section contains four visions that Daniel receives. Cast in the form of *ex eventu* prophecies, these visions reveal the course of world history, culminating in the defeat of Antiochus Epiphanes and the establishment of God's eschatological kingdom. Through these visions, the author of Daniel was reminding the Jewish people that even someone as wicked as Antiochus would eventually be defeated by God. Therefore, they were not to give up hope, but were to remain faithful to God.

Among non-biblical Jewish writings, fourteen works qualify as apocalypses. These writings were produced from the third century B.C.E. to the second century C.E. Some arose in Palestine, others from Diaspora Judaism. The dates given below are, in many cases, only approximate. Other ancient Jewish writings contain the word *apocalypse* in their titles, but do not qualify as apocalypses according to the definition of that term cited above.

Jewish Apocalypses[2]

1. The "Book of the Watchers" (*1 Enoch* 1–36)—3rd century B.C.E.
2. The "Book of the Heavenly Luminaries" (*1 Enoch* 73–82)—3rd century B.C.E.
3. The "Animal Apocalypse" (*1 Enoch* 85–90)—2nd century B.C.E.
4. The "Apocalypse of Weeks" (*1 Enoch* 93:1-10; 91:11-17)—2nd century B.C.E.
5. *Jubilees* 23—2nd century B.C.E.
6. The *Testament of Levi* 2–5—2nd century B.C.E.
7. The *Testament of Abraham*—1st century B.C.E.—2nd century C.E.
8. The *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*—1st century B.C.E.–1st century C.E.
9. The "Similitudes of Enoch" (*1 Enoch* 37–71)—1st century C.E.
10. *2 Enoch*—1st century C.E.
11. 4 Ezra—1st century C.E.
12. *2 Baruch*—1st century C.E.

13. The *Apocalypse of Abraham*—1st–2nd century C.E.
14. *3 Baruch*—1st–2nd century C.E.

In addition to these writings, which fit the formal definition of an apocalypse given above, several other writings contain major apocalyptic elements. In the Hebrew Bible, certain passages have been noted for their apocalyptic or "proto-apocalyptic" nature. Chapters 40–48 of Ezekiel exhibit a kinship to later apocalypses in their extensive use of visions in which an angelic figure serves as a guide and interpreter for Ezekiel. Zechariah 1–6 also uses this visionary form. Additionally, these visions in Zechariah are highly symbolic, also a characteristic of later apocalypses.

Other passages in the Hebrew Bible, while not presented as apocalyptic visions, exhibit a movement from prophetic eschatology to apocalyptic eschatology. Zechariah 9–14 speaks of the defeat of Israel's enemies and the coming of a new king. The descriptions of the coming of the final battle and God's universal reign have more in common with the visions of the apocalyptists than with the pronouncements of the prophets. In a similar way, chapters 38–39 of Ezekiel describe a cataclysmic conflict between Israel and Gog of Magog. In the book of Joel, the almost exclusive orientation to the future, and particularly the listing of the signs that will precede the day of the Lord, are major concerns of later apocalyptists. Strictly speaking, Isaiah 24–27, often called the Apocalypse of Isaiah, is not an apocalypse. It lacks the visionary form and angelic mediators common to the genre. The contents of these chapters, however, are similar to the eschatological pronouncements of Jewish apocalypses in that they contain ideas of universal judgment, an eschatological banquet, and destruction of God's enemies. These passages (as well as others that have been noted by various scholars) probably should be seen as reflecting the beginning stages of apocalyptic literature in Israel. They provide the bridge between prophetic and apocalyptic thought.

Just as apocalypses are not limited to the Hebrew canon, so also related writings that contain apocalyptic elements can be found outside the Hebrew Bible. Examples of such related writings are certain texts from the collection of materials discovered at Qumran near the Dead Sea (for example, the *War Scroll,* the *Rule of the Community,* the *New Jerusalem,* some of the *Thanksgiving Hymns,* the *Testament of Moses,* the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs,* the *Testament of Job,* and some of the *Sibylline Oracles*).

Turning to early Christianity, one finds only one apocalypse in the New Testament: the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation opens with the Greek word *apokalypsis,* meaning "revelation." Some scholars have questioned the classification of Revelation as an apocalypse since the work also claims to be a prophecy (1:3; 22:19) and in some ways adheres to the form of a letter (see 1:4-9, 22:21). Furthermore, the work does not adopt the common apocalyptic technique of pseudonymity. "John" is apparently the real name of the author. Nevertheless the work does fit the definition of an apocalypse. The major focus of the work is revelation, which occurs through visionary experiences. The content of the revelation includes both personal and cosmic eschatology and exhibits considerable interest in otherworldly beings and places. Written during the last decade of the first century C.E., the book of Revelation issues a challenge to its readers to resist the claims of emperor worship (see chap. 13) and to remain faithful witnesses for God, even if the price of such faithfulness is martyrdom. By describing the eventual destruction of Rome and the other forces of evil and by assuring the readers of eschatological rewards for the faithful, the author offered hope and encouragement to Christians who were being persecuted (or at least perceived the possibility of persecution). Warnings against false teachings and exhortations to ethical living are also concerns of the work, particularly in the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3.

Although Revelation is the only apocalypse in the New Testament, the apocalyptic world view is pervasive in the New Testament writings. The resurrection of Jesus is understood as an apocalyptic event. The title "Son of man" that is applied to Jesus in the Gospels is an apocalyptic phrase. Jesus' parables are mostly about the kingdom of God, again an apocalyptic notion. Eschatological judgment, resurrection, future rewards and punishments, destruction of the forces of evil, conflict between good and evil forces, angels and demons—all of these ideas in the New Testament are derived from an apocalyptic understanding of reality.

Several passages in the New Testament show strong apocalyptic influence. Mark 13 (and its parallels, Luke 21 and Matt. 24–25) is the best known example from the Gospels. This passage, sometimes called the "Little Apocalypse," contains several characteristics of apocalyptic thought: signs of the endtime; the intervention of an otherworldly, eschatological figure; ingathering of the elect; and a cataclysmic end of history. Much debate has raged among scholars concerning the

historicity, source, and interpretation of this passage. Regardless of the answers to these questions, the passage certainly is apocalyptic in orientation. It falls short, however, of being an apocalypse because it lacks an otherworldly mediator of its revelation. Jesus of Nazareth, prior to his resurrection, is presented in the Gospels as an earthly, human figure.

Two passages from Paul's letters indicate his apocalyptic outlook also. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11, Paul deals with the Thessalonians' concern that fellow believers who have already died will not participate in the new kingdom. Paul presents an apocalyptic scenario in which Christ will descend to earth from heaven, deceased believers will be resurrected, and all Christians will then live forever in the new kingdom with Christ. Furthermore, he tells them that this coming of Christ will be sudden and unannounced. They are to live in anticipation and readiness for that eschatological event. Concerns about resurrection and the nature of the afterlife are also topics of discussion in 1 Corinthians. Some members of the church in Corinth were espousing inaccurate views of the resurrection. To correct these false teachings, Paul discusses the significance of Jesus' resurrection, the issue of bodily resurrection, and even presents a brief order of events of the endtime (1 Cor. 15).

In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, which is possibly pseudonymous and not actually from Paul, the author answers concerns that the end is near or has already begun by giving his readers an apocalyptic timetable of eschatological events. The end is not yet because all these events have not yet occurred. A final example from the New Testament is 2 Peter 3:1-13. The writer of this letter must deal with problems created by the delay of Christ's return. Scoffers were ridiculing the belief in his return, while the hope of believers was apparently diminishing. The writer reaffirms the coming of Christ, accompanied by a massive conflagration that will destroy the heavens and the earth as a prerequisite for new heavens and a new earth. Apocalyptic influences in the New Testament are by no means limited to these few passages. Apocalyptic eschatology and imagery permeate the entire corpus of the New Testament.

Noncanonical works provide further evidence of the influence of apocalyptic ideas on the early church. Several apocalypses were produced in the early centuries of the church. Some of these, while eventually being considered noncanonical, did exert tremendous influence over certain groups within Christianity. Some of the works listed below were originally Jewish writings, but were later extensively revised by Christian writers. In their present form, then, they are

Christian documents. The dates given are the approximate dates for the Christian versions of the works. These works are noncanonical apocalypses, likely produced in, or containing elements from, the early centuries of the common era. Many of these works were revised on several occasions. Because they often contain no internal clues, dating the works is extremely difficult. In many cases, the dates given are tentative. Gnostic Christian works are not included in this list.

Christian Apocalypses[3]

1. The *Shepherd of Hermas*—1st or 2nd century
2. The *Book of Elchasai*—2nd century
3. The *Ascension of Isaiah* 6–11—1st or 2nd century
4. The *Apocalypse of Peter*—2nd century
5. 5 Ezra 2:42-48—2nd century
6. *Jacob's Ladder*—2nd century?
7. The *Testament of the Lord* 1:1-14—3rd century?
8. The *Questions of Bartholomew*—3rd century?
9. The *Apocalypse of Sedrach*—2nd–4th century?
10. The *Apocalypse of Paul*—4th century
11. The *Testament of Isaac* 2–3a—1st–5th century?
12. The *Testament of Isaac* 5–6—1st–5th century?
13. The *Testament of Jacob* 1–3a—2nd–5th century?
14. The *Testament of Jacob* 2–5—2nd–5th century?
15. The *Story of Zosimus*—3rd–5th century
16. The *Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian*—2nd–9th century?
17. The *Book of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ by Bartholomew the Apostle* 8b–14a—3rd–6th century?
18. The *Book of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ by Bartholomew the Apostle* 17b–19b—3rd–6th century?
19. The *Apocalypse of the Virgin Mary*—4th–9th century?
20. The *Apocalypse of Esdras*—5th–9th century?
21. The *Apocalypse of the Holy Mother of God Concerning the Punishments*—4th–11th century?
22. The *Apocalypse of James, the Brother of the Lord*—pre-11th century
23. The *Mysteries of St. John the Apostle and Holy Virgin*—pre-llth century

Related works from early Christian writers that have been heavily influenced by apocalyptic ideas would include some of the *Sibylline Oracles* that were authored or expanded by Christian writers (books 1–2, 7, 8), the *Apocalypse of Elijah,* the *Apocalypse of Thomas,* 6 Ezra (2 Esdras 15–16), the *Testament of Adam,* the *Penitence of Adam, Didache* 16, the *Ascension of Isaiah* 3:13–4:18, and the *Apocalypse of John the Theologian Attributed to John Chrysostom.*

The Sources of Apocalyptic Thought

Apocalypticism is a complex phenomenon, yielding no easy answer to the question of its origins. Competent scholars have argued for various traditions as primary factors leading to the production of Jewish apocalyptic literature. Some have argued that Hebrew prophecy gave birth to apocalyptic thought. Others have suggested Israelite wisdom traditions as the major influence on the apocalyptists. Babylonian divination writings, Near Eastern (particularly Canaanite) mythology, and Egyptian literature have also been posited as major sources for Jewish apocalyptic thought. Another widely held view has explained apocalypses as borrowing heavily from the Persian religion of Zoroastrianism. Resurrection, dualism, periodization of history, and eschatological judgment followed by rewards and punishments can all be found in Zoroastrian writings. Nevertheless a major problem in viewing Jewish apocalyptic thought as depending on Persian religion is the uncertainty of dating the Persian material. Much of the Zoroastrian literature that presents the clearest similarities to Jewish apocalyptic thought comes from several centuries after the Jewish writings. Embedded within this late Persian literature, however, are earlier traditions, some of which likely predate Jewish apocalypticism and thus could have influenced it.

The best answer to the question of the origin of Jewish apocalyptic thought is to recognize that apocalypticism grew out of post-exilic prophecy within Israel, but was enriched by ideas and imagery borrowed, either directly or indirectly, from several traditions in the Hellenistic world. Persian, Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Canaanite influences affected Jewish apocalypticism. In addition, other strands of Hebrew thought, such as wisdom traditions, contributed to the complex phenomenon that came to be known as Jewish apocalypticism. Later, Jewish apocalyptic thought itself was modified when Christianity, born out of a Judaism heavily enriched with apocalyptic ideas, adapted the form and the content of Jewish apocalyptic literature for the presentation of its own beliefs.

The Continuing Importance of Apocalyptic Literature

Through the years, apocalyptic literature has suffered in two ways. First, it has often been ignored because it is viewed as being irrelevant for modern society, is considered too difficult to understand, or is seen as the arena for religious fanatics or extremists. Among people who

have strong faith commitments to the books of the Bible, the books of Daniel and Revelation are seldom read. They are the outcasts among biblical literature, known for their bizarre imagery and enigmatic symbolism. Some enterprising individuals who decide to tackle these works in order that their biblical knowledge will be more complete often end up having their suspicions of these writings confirmed. They come away from their study more confused and more convinced that, indeed, these works should be ignored. This conviction is unfortunate, for as will be shown below, Daniel and Revelation are vital parts of the canon. These works, when properly understood, continue to offer words of hope and comfort in a chaotic world.

Even among theologians, apocalyptic literature has in the past been ignored. It was seen as an anomaly, a perversion, and was not thought to represent mainstream Jewish or Christian thought. The influence of apocalyptic thought on Judaism and Christianity was said to be minimal and, therefore, could be safely ignored, or at least given little attention. Fortunately, apocalypticism has been "rediscovered" in recent years. Its importance for an adequate understanding of the development of Judaism and Christianity is now an accepted position among scholars. The famous statement of Ernst Käsemann that apocalyptic was "the mother of Christian theology," (*New Testament Questions of Today,* trans. W. J. Montague [London: SCM Press, 1969]) although perhaps an exaggeration, underscores the importance of studying apocalyptic literature for those who seek a better understanding of Judaism and Christianity.

The second way that apocalyptic literature has suffered, in addition to being ignored, is that it has been abused by overzealous and misguided interpreters who misuse apocalyptic writings to support their erroneous viewpoints. The most flagrant examples of such abuse occur among those who turn the poetic visions of apocalyptic writers into literal blueprints of endtime events, often complete with timetables and charts, indicating in detail all that is to happen before the world comes to an end. This approach is certainly not new. History is strewn with examples of individuals who have been guilty of this kind of distortion of apocalyptic writings, from the twelfth-century mystic Joachim of Fiore to the nineteenth-century founder of Adventism, William Miller, to the twentieth-century popular writer of sensationalist "prophecies," Hal Lindsey (author of *The Late Great Planet Earth* and subsequent works).

Unfortunately, the approach taken by Hal Lindsey and others like him is often the only interpretation of apocalyptic literature known to

the general public. Lindsey's premillennial dispensationalist theology (a complex belief system that originated with John Darby in the early 1800s and was popularized by the *Scofield Reference Bible*) expects a literal return of Jesus to earth to initiate a thousand-year earthly reign. At the conclusion of this messianic kingdom, God's final kingdom will be ushered in. Lindsey provides all the details about endtime events, describing the various cosmic and human catastrophes that will occur as well as the final judgments, punishments, and rewards. Comparing the situation of the modern world with apocalyptic descriptions in the Bible, Lindsey assures his readers that they are living in the last days. Present conditions are proof that the end is near. Faithful Christians need not worry, however, according to Lindsey. Before the "Great Tribulation" occurs, which will be a time of unfathomable terror on the wicked, the righteous will be snatched from the earth and carried to heaven during the "Rapture."

The fallacies of Lindsey's approach (and others of that nature) are too numerous to detail here. In general, however, two major problems exist with this approach to apocalyptic literature. First, this approach ignores the historical and social matrix out of which apocalyptic literature arose. Apocalyptic writers addressed the situation of their own time, attempting to offer hope and encouragement to their readers who were in distress. Lindsey's interpretation of apocalyptic writings, in which the works offer scenarios of the end that are unfolding in the modern world, turns them into cryptic writings that would have been incomprehensible, and thus meaningless, for their original audience. This misuse of apocalyptic writings, in addition to rendering them irrelevant for their original readers, is also extremely egotistical. All writings, according to this view, must have been specifically written for the modern reader.

A second problem with this approach is that it evidences no awareness of the nature and purpose of the apocalyptic genre. Lindsey reads apocalyptic literature the way one would read a front-page story in a newspaper. Apocalyptic literature, however, is not factual reporting. It is a special kind of literary work, filled with symbolism, figurative imagery, and ancient myths. It is more closely akin to poetry than to prose, more like an abstract painting than a photograph. These works need to be taken seriously, but not literally. In fact, to read them as literal, historical accounts is to distort rather than to elucidate their messages. All interpreters of the canonical books of Daniel and Revelation, including Hal Lindsey, would do well to familiarize themselves with other Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic writings.

By so doing, they would be less likely to misinterpret the canonical apocalypses.

If, as argued above, apocalyptic literature is occasional literature—that is, addressed to a particular situation in a particular time—does that mean that apocalyptic writings have no value for the modern reader? Certainly not. Apocalyptic literature is still important literature. From a nonreligious viewpoint, apocalyptic ideas and themes have been extremely influential throughout history. Their importance for an adequate understanding of first-century Judaism and early, as well as contemporary, Christianity is firmly established. In addition, artists, poets, novelists, and musicians have all borrowed images and motifs from apocalyptic literature. Pieter Bruegel, Hieronymous Bosch, Michelangelo, and Albrect Dürer are only a few of the many artists who have depicted apocalyptic scenes. Dante, John Milton, William Blake, T. S. Eliot, and the modern novelist Walker Percy are all indebted to apocalyptic thought. Olivier Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time,* Handel's *Messiah,* and even modern rock music utilize material drawn from apocalypticism. The titles of recent movies, such as *Apocalypse Now, Pale Rider,* and *The Seventh Sign* betray their indebtedness to apocalyptic thought. Since apocalyptic thought is such a significant part of Western culture, the more familiar one is with apocalyptic literature, the better equipped one will be to understand and critique that culture.

The reason why apocalyptic literature has had such a pervasive influence on society is that in spite of its ancient origin it has not lost its ability to communicate. Particularly for those people who value the religious dimension of apocalyptic literature, these writings continue to challenge and comfort. The eschatological visions of the apocalypses often serve as catalysts, motivating the people of God to work to make those visions of freedom, peace, justice, and reconciliation a reality. They serve as forceful reminders that the world as it is now is not the way it should be. Furthermore, apocalyptic literature challenges the people of God to confront the "beasts" of modern society, whatever form they may assume—political, economic, social, or religious. Any individual or institution that dehumanizes and oppresses the people of the world has taken on the role of the apocalyptic beasts.

Apocalyptic writings continue to offer hope also to people who feel overwhelmed by the world. The problems confronting the modern world are certainly enormous—overpopulation, environmental pollution and deterioration, threat of nuclear annihilation, global conflicts, crime, poverty, hunger. The apocalyptic writers invite their modern

readers to look beyond the problems to the God who is still sovereign over the universe. They affirm that ultimately God will prevail.

In this way, apocalyptic literature is timeless. Rooted in the ancient past and addressed to ancient problems, it continues to speak to new generations with its message of hope and comfort and its challenge to remain faithful. No one situation ever exhausts the full meaning of apocalyptic images. They continue to be reapplied in new situations whenever the forces of evil seem overwhelming and hope recedes into the distance.

An example of the continuing vitality of apocalypticism is seen in a recent book by Allan A. Boesak, a South African minister and eloquent opponent of apartheid. In *Comfort and Protest,*[4] a commentary on the book of Revelation, Boesak demonstrates how the struggles and fears of John of Patmos have become a reality for blacks in South Africa today. They know what it is like to be alienated and persecuted, he says, and for some, even to suffer martyrdom. The beasts of the Apocalypse may have taken on new forms and new methods, but for Boesak the same beasts that John saw in Asia Minor have appeared now in South Africa. Boesak convincingly argues that John's apocalyptic vision is as appropriate for the twentieth-century South African as it was for the first-century resident of Asia Minor. Revelation offers hope by giving the oppressed a vision of another world, another day, when peace, love, and justice will dominate. Yet, Revelation speaks a word of protest also. John's vision proclaims that ultimate power and authority rest with God—not with Rome or Pretoria, not with the emperor or the president. To God alone belongs total allegiance. The people of God are called to resist governments that claim power that is not theirs, to resist economic and social systems that dehumanize and imprison people, to resist and challenge religious institutions that become the mouthpieces for propaganda rather than proclaimers of the total message of God. In this way, apocalyptic literature continues to function as an instrument of hope and protest.

The texts included in this anthology bear witness to the vitality and appeal of apocalyptic literature in the ancient world. Although none of these texts is considered canonical within Judaism or Christianity today, their influence has not vanished. The continued use of motifs, images, and ideas derived from them attests to the continuing power of apocalyptic thought to inspire, challenge, and encourage.

NOTES

1. John J. Collins, ed., *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre, Semeia* 14 (1979): 9.
2. This list was compiled from the works classified as apocalypses in John J. Collins, "The Jewish Apocalypses" in Collins, *Apocalypse,* pp. 21-49.
3. This list was compiled from the works classified as apocalypses in Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Early Christian Apocalypses," in Collins, *Apocalypse,* pp. 61-105.
4. Allan A. Boesak, *Comfort and Protest: Reflections on the Apocalypse of John of Patmos* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987).