

Hebrew Bible – Directly from Dr. Hanneken's HTML
Psalm 49

It is easy for Christians to approach a psalm about the afterlife according to the template of the wicked go to hell while the righteous go to heaven, but look more closely.

What is the distinction drawn among humans, if not (or not merely) righteous vs. wicked? *The righteous will have dominion over the wicked. In the end all will die, rich or poor alike. But the rich will not be able to take anything with them, for their riches are of this world and the riches of the upright are from within.*

What is the fate of the not-so-good? *Their death is forever, never again to see the light of day. Death herds them straight to hell*

What is the fate of the psalmist/protagonist? *God reached straight down and grabbed me from the clutches of death.*

What is the point for how people should live their lives before the afterlife? *Amassing in and of itself is no guarantee to an afterlife. A life lived upright and free from sins, the psalmist would say, would be the way to secure a heavenly respite.*

As Psalms were transmitted over the centuries, scribes or other transmitters would sometimes add a phrase or two here and there, especially when the received meaning was controversial. Scholars suspect additions when a short portion contradicts the larger context, or is somehow jarring such that the unit reads more smoothly if the suspected addition is removed. Do you see any such suspicious phrases in this Psalm? If so how would you distinguish the point of the original unit from the concern of the one who made the addition?

Amos 5, 9

How could Amos be interpreted as about the end of the world? The readings are about God issuing judgement and that there is nowhere to hide.

How could it be interpreted otherwise? It could be the preventive story, the “don’t live this way, or else...”

What do we know about the Day of the Lord? He will execute judgement and “sieve” out the upright to rebuild the house of David

What are the standards of behavior expected to fare well in divine judgment? “Seek me and live” ie: Care for the poor and feed the hungry. Do not build luxury for yourself it will only bring God’s wrath upon you. Be not a bully and help people when they are down.

Joel 3-4

The chapter divisions are not entirely uniform. The reading begins with “I will pour my spirit on all flesh,” which is 2:28 in the NRSV.

Context: Joel 1 and 2 interpret a natural disaster (an infestation of locusts) as judgment from God which will destroy the crops if they do not repent immediately. Joel 3 and 4 picks up similar themes on a larger scale. The disaster is not agricultural but the exile and dispersion of the people of Judah. The resolution is divine judgment, which will punish foreigner and restore Judah.

One the one hand, the original message is not so much an end of the world or even judgment of all nations (only neighboring nations). On the other hand, the passage has enough imagery of ecological and political upheaval and reversal, battle, and judgement to fuel later expectations of a final war and judgment.

According to Luke's account of the Acts of the Apostles, Peter's first address after Pentecost began with an interpretation of Joel 3 as fulfilled in Peter's day (Acts 2:14-24). We will return to Luke, but it is not too early to mention the idea of "realized eschatology." On the surface, Joel seems to describe an event of unmistakable external significance.

Especially if we imagine Luke was thinking of the whole passage, it is significant that Luke seems to be implying that a new world order and realignment of the nations and Judah with God has already happened (or at least has already begun).

Ecclesiastes 3:19-22

19 For the lot of mortals and the lot of beasts is the same lot: The one dies as well as the other. Both have the same life breath. Human beings have no advantage over beasts, but all is vanity. 20 Both go to the same place; both were made from the dust, and to the dust they both return. 21 Who knows if the life breath of mortals goes upward and the life breath of beasts goes earthward? 22 And I saw that there is nothing better for mortals than to rejoice in their work; for this is their lot. Who will let them see what is to come after them?

Ecclesiastes is presenting the default view of ancient Israel that death is the great equalizer, the end of consciousness. What is interesting here in this fairly late biblical book is that the author, though skeptical, is aware of the ideas that the spirit of a human ascends after death, and that some visionaries have seen what is to come after death. This puts Ecclesiastes in conversation with ideas we know about from Greek sources and early apocalypses, such as 1 Enoch (to which we will return).

Isaiah

The passages from Isaiah are presented in the order in which they most likely took shape, not the order they appear in the book today.

Isaiah 38:9-22

This prayer, attributed to Hezekiah in the 8th century, reflects an early view of Sheol as shadow-being without retribution. Although some

images could have been interpreted differently later, the original audience would have understood the torment to refer to the illness, not the fate of the damned. The ethical dimension comes in life and the avoidance of death:

You have preserved my life from the pit of destruction, when you cast behind your back all my sins.

The implication (which we too easily take for granted) is that sin is the cause of death, and that God's mercy has the ability to forgive sins (colorfully imagined). It is not claimed that God's protection comes from lack of sin or righteousness, other than asking God for help.

Without quite claiming to bribe God, Hezekiah suggests that it is in God's interest to preserve the lives of the faithful if God wants to receive praise.

Isaiah 14:1-27

Most of this taunt-song is rather timeless. It could apply to anyone celebrating the shameful end of an oppressor. The song itself mentions "the Assyrian." The prose addition applies the song to the king of Babylon. It could fit Mussolini pretty well. What may not be obvious without a reading guide is that the Latin word for "morning star" (verse 12) is "Lucifer." Especially if you are a fan of Milton, or even just a close reader of the NT and traditions about Satan, you should know that this verse is understood as Satan's fall from heaven. (See also Ezekiel 28; Luke 10:18.)

How have you fallen from the heavens, o morning star, son of the dawn! On the one hand, there is some strong imagery of judgment and retribution. On the other hand, the conceptions are consistent with early notions: death is weakness (not torment), a good burial is the best one can hope for, lack of burial is the worst that can happen. Death is technically an equalizer. It resembles reversal only compared to the arrogance he had in life.

The prose introduction also touches on an issue that will become increasingly important to us. Who are God's people? [The Israelites](#) Whom does God hate? [The Assyrians](#) What status will non-Israelites have when God puts everything right? [Slaves](#) Here "aliens will join them and be counted with the house of Jacob," but not as equals. Rather, some or all of them will be slaves.

Isaiah 24-27

Historical-critical scholars hate this passage because it is very difficult to date. Even our usual dirty-trick of gauging how "primitive" or "advanced" the ideas are does not work well here because the same images could have been mythic in one generation, symbolic in another, and literal in yet another. I'm fully committed to the historical-critical methods, but passages like this force us to reckon with the timelessness of some passages. In fact, much or most of the Hebrew Bible was passed down until today because successive generations were able to find new meaning in it, with little regard for what it meant to its original audience. Many scholars would call these chapters the latest addition to the book of Isaiah. I think it could be earlier, although it is admittedly uncanny how the images fit with later ideas.

Images of the present world and its fate: strikingly dismal. The world is described as corrupt, and God's just response will be to literally or figuratively destroy it. The problem is imagined not just as the people on the earth; the angels (host of the heavens, 24:21) also require punishment (see especially the fallen angels in 1 Enoch). Note also they are imprisoned and then punished after many days (also 1 Enoch and Revelation). The NAB translator of 24:23 implies an early form of the idea of the moon turning to blood and the sun to darkness. God battles the mythic sea monster Leviathan (27:1, see also Daniel 7 and Revelation).

Universalism: There is repeated concern for other nations. On the one hand, they come to know God's truth. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to assume that national boundaries are dissolved or that other

nations can join the chosen nation. The lost who come from Egypt and Assyria are Israelites who had been exiled (27:13), although Third Isaiah may take this image to include Assyrians and Egyptians. I do not detect sectarianism within Israel here.

Resurrection imagery: death is destroyed forever (25:7); corpses shall rise, sheol gives birth (26:19)

Reward: Israel is vindicated and expands its territory (26:19; 27:6)

Punishment: fire consumes enemy nations until they are dead, but afterwards they are just shades (not eternal torment)

Ethical emphases: divine virtues are protecting the needy and poor. Human agency is limited, especially in 26:18, “Salvation we have not achieved for the earth, the inhabitants of the world cannot bring it forth.” The proposed action in 26:20 is to hide and wait. In 27:19 Israel makes peace with God by destroying incense altars (places of worship outside Jerusalem).

Isaiah 65-66

This passage is still not an apocalypse in terms of literary genre, but many of the distinctive elements are in place here. Paul Hanson described this stage of frustrated hopes and internal division during the early restoration as “the dawn of apocalyptic.”

Universalism: What role do other nations have in God’s future plans? **God will take them in** See especially 66:18-23. (Note: this view, though widely quoted, is rare in the Hebrew Bible and early Judaism.)

Sectarianism: Who are God’s enemies? **People who make up their own religion.** Who are God’s favored ones? **Those who “obey me” (not all Israelites)** See especially 65:1-16.

Criteria/ethics: What distinguishes the good from the evil? “But there is something I’m looking for: a person simple and plain, reverently responsive to what I say.” See especially 66:1-3. (Note: The “tremblers” in Isaiah 66:2 give their name to Haredi [ultra-orthodox] Jews and the Quakers.)

Agency: Who does the work in bringing about God’s plan? God’s missionaries that people are failing to listen to The major options in general are: God directly, angels, people directly, people as indirect catalysts, etc. I think it is pretty clear throughout 65-66, but if you’re confused flip back to 63:1-6.

The world: What is discontinuous? Sin and oppressors What is continuous? God and Goodness In what ways is this the end of the world, in what ways a reformed world? God will give longevity to the right and quick burn to the wicked What is wrong with the present world? The people See especially Isaiah 65:17-25.

The afterlife: Is there an afterlife? Yes Any related themes? “No more babies dying in the cradle, or old people who don’t enjoy a full lifetime; One-hundredth birthdays will be considered normal—”

Reward: Where does the restoration fall on the spectrum of earthly/natural to super-natural/other-worldly? See especially 65:17-25.

Punishment: See especially 65:13-15; 66:24.

Cognitive dissonance: It’s okay if we don’t fully grasp this until we read Festinger later in the course. The theory of cognitive dissonance has been used to explain the development of the radical ideas and images in Third Isaiah. The theory suggests a cycle of frustration and radicalization. Every time a hope goes unfulfilled (dissonance), the response is to make the hope more radical. Thus, the earliest hope was for vengeance against Babylon and restoration of the Israelite temple and monarchy. For example, the frustrated attempts to restore the

Davidic king led some to expect an idealized monarchy in the future, and the cycle of radicalization proceeded until the son of David was imagined as a supernatural, eschatological, son-of-God messiah.

Daniel's Apocalypses

Let's start with some terminology about apocalypses. At least around me, it is important to avoid the popular usage of "the apocalypse" to mean "the catastrophic end of all things" or "apocalyptic" to mean "dark and violent."

"Apocalypse" is a type of literature. In this course examples of apocalypses are Daniel 7-12, The Book of the Watchers, the Animal Apocalypse, The Apocalypse of Weeks, 4 Ezra, The Apocalypses of John, Peter, and Paul. The so-called (but not really) apocalypses are the so-called Isaiah apocalypse (Isaiah 24-27) and the so-called synoptic apocalypse. The writings of the Qumran sectarians and Paul are not apocalypses.

One might think of the formal definition in three major parts. First is the narration of the revelation of hidden things. Second is that some of the hidden things are otherwise invisible agents and places of reward and punishment (the spatial axis). Third is that some of the hidden things are otherwise invisible patterns of history and its future culmination (the temporal axis). The formal definition was published in Semeia 14 in 1979, and is widely accepted.

"'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."

"Apocalyptic" is an adjective. It can modify nouns. Using it as a noun will arouse the wrath of most scholars. Ideas and images can be apocalyptic if those ideas and images are typical of the apocalypses. For example, Paul's writings are not apocalypses, but one can say his eschatology is apocalyptic if it matches the eschatology typical of the apocalypses.

“Apocalypticism” is a religio-social phenomenon. People and groups can be representatives of apocalypticism if their ideas are apocalyptic. As a phenomenon, it is observed in many cultures, even those not influenced by apocalypses. Some have attempted to argue that there is a single movement of “apocalypticism” in ancient Judaism, but they are wrong.

Daniel 7

This chapter is tremendously influential on early Christianity, particularly the phrases “son of man” and “kingdom of God.” The Apocalypse of John is heavily dependent on this chapter.

The manner of revelation: the cryptic symbolism is not exhausted by its “decoding” (the four kingdoms are Babylon, Media, Persia, Greece, the little-horn is Antiochus Epiphanes, the human-like figure is the archangel Michael). The imagery is mythic (see the Further Reading for the very close relationship to Canaanite myths of El, Baal, and Yamm). It evokes God’s victory over primordial chaos at the first creation to suggest a resurgence of cosmic chaos/evil and a second divine intervention to defeat chaos and bring about a new creation. The vision is cryptic. Even within the chapter it needs to be interpreted, but even Daniel did not fully understand the references. The original audience of the book must interpret the interpretation yet again in order to fully understand. This makes the audience feel wise and chosen.

Another consequence of visions being coded is that they can be reinterpreted as situations change. Some apocalypses seem to have fallen out of circulation because they were too clear, and too clearly proven wrong. Of course it is still difficult to imagine how Daniel weathered the same logic. As time went on, the four kingdoms were interpreted differently to account for the Roman and Islamic empires. Perhaps the biggest interpretation is to interpret the “human-like figure” (literally “one like a son of man”) as “THE son of man” in a sense opposite the plain sense (see Ezekiel, where a son of man is the opposite of a heavenly figure). Even before Christianity, “The Son of Man” was understood as a messianic figure of divine origin.

The spatial axis: Note that the beasts are not exactly nations, but angelic or cosmic agents which have nations assigned to them. The idea is that all nations have a patron angel. Earthly events are just the shadows of cosmic agents. In this case the kingdoms of the world are just the earthly avatars of cosmic agents. Note that elsewhere in Daniel the good angels are outnumbered,

The prince of the kingdom of Persia stood in my way for twenty-one days, until finally Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me [Gabriel]. I left him there with the prince of the kings of Persia... No one supports me against all these except Michael, your prince.” (Daniel 10:13, 21)

There was no debate about other nations having angels, but there was about God’s sovereignty over Israel being mediated by an angel. There is mild universalism in that all nations will serve Israel’s prince, but they are not included as equals.

The temporal axis: Daniel 7 accounts for the past (starting with Babylon), the present, and the future. Note that history declines here as in many apocalypses (Babylon is not nearly as bad as Greece). The crisis of Antiochus Epiphanes is unlike other crises. God knows about it (and long knew), and has a resolution right around the corner. The kingdom of the holy ones (not exactly called the Kingdom of God) is a major change of history, but still an earthly kingdom.

Daniel 8-12

The other apocalypses develop some of the same themes. Daniel 8 contains greater specificity. Daniel 8:43 influenced William Miller to calculate the date of the second coming.

Daniel 9 develops the themes of coded interpretation and the fundamental problem of how we can know God’s final plans. Here another part of the Bible is explicitly interpreted, and interpreted cryptically. Unbeknownst to Jeremiah, seventy years of exile actually

means 490 years of exile (many Jews in the Second Temple period did not recognize the exile as having adequately ended). The chapter also presents two opposing explanations of suffering and proposed response. Daniel's penitential prayer assumes that suffering is punishment from God for the sins of Israel, and God will restore them if they repent (the Deuteronomistic model). The angel comes and corrects Daniel's understanding, at least for the present situation. Suffering is actually the result of independent evil, not punishment for sin. God allows evil to thrive until a predetermined time of judgment. The proposed action, more explicit later in the book, is to endure in righteousness until the appointed time when the forces of good will defeat the forces of evil (the apocalyptic model).

Daniel 10-12 is one long apocalypse. The historical references are detailed and verifiable up to a point, then suddenly diverge from actual history. That is how we know when the work was written (164 BCE). Also, the predictions are updated from 1290 days to 1335, apparently after the failure of the first prediction. We read some hints as to the self-understanding of the individuals who wrote the work in 11:32-35. Some scholars call this a quietist movement; I think they took some action all right, but more to prove their loyalty to the right side than out of expectation of efficacy. Not unlike Paul, the "wise men" expect divine vindication any moment now, but they face a problem in that some of their number die before the divine vindication comes about. Another group or another generation might have been content to know the movement carries on and the collective is vindicated, but the concern here is deeply personal. Daniel 11:35 implies that their deaths are actually good for them, because it allows them to be tested, refined, and purified. That way, when the divine vindication (through Michael) comes, they will be rewarded more greatly than those who have not died. They will literally rise from the dead and become like stars (angels) forever (12:1-3). This is the only time the Hebrew Bible explicitly asserts the resurrection of the body (not counting imagery later interpreted as literal resurrection). Note that not everyone rises—only those in particular need of reward or punishment. Reward and

punishment is eternal and relatively active. While Daniel 7 was purely collective eschatology, Daniel 12 maintains collective eschatology and incorporates personal eschatology.