

## Appendix 5 - The Book of Revelation

Apocalyptic Themes in Biblical Literature (Adela Yarbro Collins, Interpretation, Vol. 53, Iss. 2, 1999)

Two kinds of apocalyptic themes appear in biblical literature. One type is intrinsic to the genre "apocalypse," whose themes include the idea of revelation and narratives about the reception of revelation through dreams, visions, hearing voices, or taking journeys to heaven and other normally inaccessible places. They also include the idea of the fulfillment of history, for example, in a final universal, peaceful, prosperous human community or in the destruction of the world and a new creation, including the resurrection of the dead. The other type is less closely related to the genre "apocalypse," but includes themes that cohere with the first group, such as the combat myth and the Antichrist.

The term "apocalyptic" comes from the Greek word *apokalypsis*, which means revelation. Apocalyptic literature defines only one type within the general category of revelatory literature, which also includes prophetic books and collections of oracles. Apocalypses differ from these other types of revelatory literature in form and content. With regard to form, prophetic books and collections of oracles typically present revelation as directly given by a god to a human being, who then repeats the divine speech as if the god were speaking through him or her. Apocalypses are typically narratives in the first person about how a human being received divine revelation through an intermediary, usually an angel or a deified or glorified human being. As to content, prophetic books and collections of oracles focus on events in history and look toward catastrophe or salvation primarily in this-worldly terms.

Apocalypses are also concerned with events in history, but usually in a veiled, indirect manner. They look toward a fulfillment that transcends ordinary space and time. On a high level of abstraction, prophetic books, collections of oracles, and apocalypses function in similar ways; all seek to modify the cognitive and moral outlook of their audiences and to reinforce or change their behavior. Each work, of course, has its own rhetoric that addresses its own specific situation and purpose.

### **Varieties Of Revelation and Their Rhetorical Aims**

According to Deuteronomy, Moses declared to all Israel, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (29:29 RSV). This saying implies that there are divine secrets that remain hidden to human beings, about which Israel should not be concerned. What is revealed are "the words of this law," presumably the text of Deuteronomy itself, and the people are urged to live in accordance with it. Since Moses is the speaker of these words and the introduction to the book ascribes its authorship to him, he is the mediator of this divine revelation. This is quite different from typically apocalyptic revelation.

More similar to apocalyptic literature is the case of Samuel: "Yahweh continued to appear at Shiloh when he revealed himself to Samuel, and Samuel's words went out to all Israel." Here God does not simply convey words to the prophet to be announced, but also appears to him (1 Sam 3:21-4:1); the experience thus has a visionary element. The case of Nathan and David in 2 Samuel 7 is also an important prototype. The Lord instructs the prophet Nathan to announce the

words of the Lord to David. The Lord rejects David's plan to build God a "house" (temple) and promises instead to make David a "house" (dynasty). David then praises God for speaking to him about a distant time and the generation to come (2 Sam 7:19).

Through Nathan, God has revealed the future to David. The revelation is historical in that it refers to David's son Solomon and the rest of his successors, yet is also mythic in that it speaks of an eternal kingdom. When David's dynasty ended, this promise inspired hopes for an ideal future that transcends ordinary historical existence.

A comment in the book of Amos makes a general point about the role of the prophets: "For my Lord Yahweh does nothing, unless he has disclosed his plan to his servants, the prophets" (3:7). The emphasis in this saying falls on the intimate relationship between the prophet and God. It implies that God's plans can be changed through the intercession of the prophet. This inference is supported by the statements elsewhere in the book that God decided not to execute punishment on certain occasions when Amos interceded for Israel (7:1-4). This theme differs from most apocalypses, in which the course of events is fixed and unchangeable. The book of Amos also indicates that God revealed potential future events to the prophet by means of visions.

As opposed to Amos's simple and brief visions, those in the book of Zechariah are more elaborate? Two of Amos's visions imply that he understood them immediately without any need for comment or explanation (Amos 7:1-3, 4-6). In two other accounts, God shows Amos something and asks him what he sees.

God then announces judgment upon Israel in a way that takes up the prophet's response by means of repetition and word-play. The vision accounts of Zechariah are presented differently. The prophet has a dream-vision and does not understand its meaning. He asks for an explanation, and the response does not usually come from God but from an angel. The things that Amos saw in his visions were ordinary and mundane, whereas the subjects of Zechariah's visions are more opaque and mythic. The themes of the divine council and the divine warrior appear in Zechariah's visions, themes that reappear in the classic apocalypses, notably in the Book of Revelation. Although the visions of Zechariah share the classic apocalypses' use of complex and mysterious symbols, Zechariah 1-8 does not focus on a definitive fulfillment of history in the later apocalyptic sense. These visions aim rather at legitimating the imperial authority of Persia and establishing the priesthood as the civil and religious authority of Yehud, the successor-state of Judah.

The account of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2 develops the theme of revelation in a typically apocalyptic manner. The king demands that his wise men tell him not only the interpretation but the dream itself. They complain that no religious expert could do such a thing. But Daniel, a wise man who worships the God of heaven, is able to do so. The text states that "the mystery was revealed to Daniel in

a vision of the night" (Dan 2:19). The dream concerned a great image or statue made of four metals. It is destroyed by a stone that then becomes a mountain, filling the whole earth. The four metals represent four earthly kingdoms, extending from the Babylonian to the Greek. The stone that becomes a mountain represents the kingdom of God that will stand forever. Although the format of the interpretation is typical of ancient Near Eastern literature and the pattern of a sequence of kingdoms is not unique to this passage, the heavenly origin of the final kingdom and

its eternal character are distinctive. The combination of heavenly revelation with the idea of an eschatological kingdom gives this text its apocalyptic character.

The means of revelation in the Book of Watchers, probably the oldest Jewish apocalypse, is quite different in that Enoch journeys to heaven and to the normally inaccessible extremities of the earth. This book was probably written in the third century BCE and was later incorporated into the composite, extracanonical work known today as Ethiopic Enoch or 1 Enoch. The account of Enoch's ascent to heaven in chapter evokes the majesty of God in such an awesome manner that even the righteous Enoch is terrified. This revelation probably aims at reforming the behavior of sinners by presenting them with a portrait of God as judge, but it also serves to legitimate Enoch, the alleged author, and thus the subsequent revelations in the work. The journeys of Enoch in chapters 17-36 reveal places of punishment and the last, definitive judgment. These accounts threaten sinners, on the one hand, and urge them indirectly to repentance. On the other, they comfort those who are distressed at the injustice of the world in which they live. Although the text does not directly address the situation in which it was written, it was probably composed in reaction to the challenges posed to traditional Jewish ways of life by the spread of Hellenistic culture.

The means of revelation in the Apocalypse or Revelation of John include an epiphany of the risen Christ (1:9-3:22) and an extended account of extraordinary things seen and heard (4:1-22:5). The open door in heaven and the invitation to John to "come up here" (4:1) suggest that the experiences recounted in 4:1-22:5 take place during the course of a journey to heaven, but this theme is not developed. John does not usually communicate directly with God but with the risen Christ and various angels who mediate the divine revelation. God speaks directly with John in 21:5-8.

The appearance of the risen Christ to John legitimates John as a mediator of divine revelation and lends authority to the praise, censure, and exhortation that appear in the messages to the seven communities addressed in Revelation 2-3.

These messages reflect conflict among leaders of the early Christian movement as well as conflict between followers of Jesus and local Jews who do not follow Jesus. The message to Pergamum also hints at conflict between Christians and the Roman authorities. Antipas has been killed because of his testimony to Jesus, probably in the context of an interrogation by the Roman governor. The description of Pergamum as the location of Satan's throne and the place where Satan dwells is also a reflection of conflict with Rome. The aims of the seven messages are to refute the positions of Christian teachers whom John opposes and persuade the audience to adopt the positions advocated by John; to console the audience with regard to conflict with local Jews and reassure them that the followers of Jesus truly constitute the people of God; and to encourage continuing faithful testimony in spite of the threat of Roman persecution.

Similarly, the extended account of things seen and heard in Revelation 4-22 and the hint of John's ascent to heaven legitimate his role as a mediator of revelation. The account, especially chapters 12-22, focuses on the irreconcilable differences in cognitive perspective, loyalty, and way of life between the Romans, with their allies, and the followers of Jesus. The aim of the account is to present Roman ideology and life as rebellious, blasphemous, and immoral, and to affirm that the Roman Empire will soon be destroyed and its leaders and adherents punished. The audience is urged to refrain from participating in the Roman system and this exhortation is reinforced with threats and promises. Each of the seven messages contains a promise of reward

for "the one who conquers." This phrase is a metaphor with roots in the contexts of battle and various forms of competition. It refers to those who remain faithful to the end, especially those who resist the temptation to succumb to Roman power (cf. Rev 12:10-12). Those who resist Rome will share in the first resurrection, and those who do not resist will be punished in the last judgment (20:4-6, 11-15; cf. 13:8).

## **The New Creation**

The opening words of the Torah read "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." These words express the mythic historical point of view that creation took place in time and space, once and for all. Toward the end of the exile, in the late sixth century BCE, a prophet speaking in the name of Isaiah called upon the people of Judah to "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die like gnats" (Isa 51:6 RSV). Here the prophet resorts to hyperbolic poetry to make the contrasting point that God's salvation will be forever. But this poetic utterance may be seen as the birth of the mythic historical idea that, just as heaven and earth had a beginning, they will have an end. This idea came to play an important role in later apocalyptic literature. The context addressed by this utterance is one of hope in the midst of crisis. The people of Judah have been exiled to Babylon but are confident of being restored to their land (Isa 51:11). Similarly, the same or a later prophet proclaimed the word of the Lord, "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind" (Isa 65:17). This prophetic utterance was made during the early period of restoration, when conflict had broken out within the people of Judah. The speaker expresses the point of view of those who feel wronged, and evokes the hope for vindication with the promise of a new heaven and a new earth. This poetic language is related to the later apocalyptic idea of a new creation following the destruction of the first created world. The original contexts of such language suggest that the mythic historical ideas of the end of the world and the new creation find expression in contexts of social crisis. The evidence is insufficient to demonstrate that such is always the case, but it is almost certainly true for some apocalypses.

These themes reappear in the Apocalypse of Weeks, an early extracanonical apocalypse. This brief work, like the Book of the Watchers, is preserved as part of I Enoch. It was written before the first century ACE. In this work, Enoch imparts to his children revelation that he received in a heavenly vision and from the words of angels and the tablets of heaven. The revelation consists of a review of history, schematized in a series of ten "weeks." History is characterized by the themes of sin and salvation. The climax of history, dominated by an apostate generation, is the seventh week at the end of which the "chosen righteous from the eternal plant of righteousness" are elected and apparently form a new social group or movement (93.10; trans. Knibb). Then the wicked will be destroyed by the sword. In the eighth week, the righteous will prosper and the Temple will be rebuilt. The judgment of all humanity and the destruction of the world will occur in the ninth week. In the tenth week, "the first heaven will vanish and pass away, and a new heaven will appear, and all the powers of heaven will shine forever with sevenfold light" (91.16; trans. Knibb). Although it is impossible to determine the social situation of its author and audience, the text seems to have originated during a conflict within the Jewish people, probably in Palestine, a situation analogous to that implied by the last eleven chapters of Isaiah. The conflict conveyed in the Apocalypse of Weeks centers on "sin" and "righteousness" and may have been due to differences of opinion on the proper actualization of biblical tradition. The themes of the destruction of the world and the appearance of a new heaven symbolize the

moral transformation of humanity. The brightness of the new heaven is analogous to the goodness and righteousness that will prevail (91.17).

According to the Book of Revelation, the first heaven and the first earth will pass away when God appears for the final, general judgment, sitting on a great white throne. The wicked will be punished immediately following the judgment by being thrown into the eternal lake of fire. Following the judgment, a new heaven and a new earth will appear (Rev 20:11-15; 21:1). It is striking that the new earth will have no sea. It is eliminated because the sea symbolizes the forces that rebel against God. In the Book of Revelation, these forces are epitomized by the Roman Empire. The voice from the throne following the announcement of the new creation presents it as a resolution of human need: there will be no more death, crying, mourning or pain, for the former things will have passed away (21:2-4). Perhaps more importantly, the ensuing speech, directly attributed to God, makes clear that the theme is related to the conflict between the two symbolic systems and ways of life alluded to throughout the work. Only those who conquer will enjoy the new creation. The cowardly and faithless—those who fail to remain loyal to Christ and succumb to the attractiveness of Roman culture or to the threat of Roman might—and all sinners will suffer in the lake of fire (21:5-8).

The destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE was a traumatic event for the author of the Book of Revelation, a follower of Jesus who probably had Jewish Palestinian roots. So this event may also have played a role in the expectation of the destruction of the world and the new creation expressed in this book. In Rev 11:1-2 the author apparently preserved and reinterpreted an oracle that had promised the Temple would not be destroyed. The message to Philadelphia promises that the one who conquers will be a pillar in the Temple of God (3:12). The visions reveal God enthroned in the heavenly temple, even though the new Jerusalem, which will come down from heaven, will have no temple.<sup>18</sup> The entire city, rather, plays the role of a temple, since God and the Lamb are present in it, and the faithful will see God there face to face. The statement that the city's temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb implies that a temple building is unnecessary because the faithful will experience the divine presence directly in the new Jerusalem.

The Jewish apocalypses known as 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch seem to respond to the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem and were written around the close of the first century CE, the same time as the composition of the Book of Revelation.

These works present themselves as written by Ezra and Baruch, respectively, not long after the first destruction of Jerusalem in the sixth century BCE. It is clear, however, that they were actually written after the second destruction. 4 Ezra consists of three dialogues between Ezra and the angel Uriel, three visions, and the legend of Ezra and the holy scriptures. In the third dialogue, the expectation of the end of this world and the transformation of human hearts is related to the catastrophe of the destruction of Jerusalem (4 Ezra 6:25-28; 7:28-31). On the one hand, the Temple and city were destroyed because the inhabitants of the city transgressed (3:25-27).

Ezra protests against this explanation, however, because God created Adam and all his descendants with an evil heart so they could not be obedient. He also protests that the deeds of Babylon (Rome) are no better, yet this city has obtained dominion over Zion (3:28-36). On the other hand, the vision of the eagle implies that the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem was one of the unjust deeds committed by Rome in its arrogance and that the Most High would

avenge these deeds by causing the downfall of the empire (4 Ezra 11, esp. w. 36-46). Since the human race is deeply flawed, this world must be destroyed and a new creation brought into being in which truth will prevail. The circle of birth and death ("corruption") is associated with evil; therefore, this age must end and the immortal age must come, which will be characterized by glory and righteousness (7:112-15).

## **The Combat Myth**

Conflict is a major theme in the best known apocalypses, where it often appears in the guise of rebellion against God or warfare between the forces loyal to God and opposing forces, led by a fallen angel, evil spirit, or wicked emperor. The authors of these works often adapted the ancient combat myth to describe this conflict, characterize its participants, and express its outcome. The combat myth is a genre that emerged in ancient Mesopotamia and provided imagery and a conceptual framework for explaining divine rule over the world and human kingship. The major office of divine governance was kingship. A god could win kingship over the other gods by resolving a crisis or defeating a threat to the cosmic order. Divine kingship reflected human kingship, or, as the Mesopotamian texts put it, "kingship was lowered from heaven." The king was the regent of the gods and represented divine order on earth and the people before the gods. When wars occurred between cities or empires, the new order that resulted could be said to represent the will of the god or gods.

Important examples of the combat myth in ancient Mesopotamia are the Sumerian Lugal-e of the late third millennium, the Akkadian Anzu, extant in both an Old Babylonian and an early first millennium version, and the Akkadian Enuma Elish, most often dated to the twelfth century CE. In these myths a monster, usually described as a composite animal, rebels against the king of the gods. These monsters represent political enemies; the chaos they bring is overcome and the new political order is defined over against chaos.

The combat myth was employed also in the literature of Ugarit and in the Bible. Although the majority of scholars assume there was a single mythic cycle at Ugarit, which first depicts Baal's war with Yamm (personified Sea) and then describes his war with Mot (personified Death), it is more probable that the two conflicts are variants of the same myth. Since the myth is fragmentary, it is difficult to interpret in detail, but the central issue of kingship is clear. The two variants of the combat myth from Ugarit supported the authority of the Ugaritic king whose proper rule was supposed to ensure fertility, uphold family and civic order, and see to the proper honoring of the gods. In the Ugaritic myths, Sea is apparently a monster. His allies, the enemies of Baal, include the dragon, the crooked serpent, Shilyat with seven heads. Appearing in the Bible under the name Leviathan, Lotan is the ally of Death. Sea and Death represent monstrous forces hostile to the human race and terrifying to the divine assembly.

In the early poetry of the Bible, the combat myth is adapted to celebrate Yahweh's victory over his enemies, a victory that has brought Israel into existence. In Exodus 15, for example, God's victory over Pharaoh at the Red Sea is celebrated, and his kingship is acclaimed. In later biblical literature, such as the books of Daniel and Revelation, the combat myth is adapted to portray current enemies as monsters whose rebellion threatens to dissolve the cosmos into chaos. The decisive combat is depicted as having already taken place in heaven, but this victory has not yet become fully manifest on earth. This adaptation of the myth characterizes Daniel 7 and Revelation 12.

The vision of Daniel 7 adapts the theme of the revolt of the monster in the combat myth to characterize the activities of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. He is portrayed as a little horn of the fourth beast in Daniel 7 and as a little horn on the he-goat of chapter 8. Whereas Daniel 7 simply speaks of the little horn having "a mouth speaking great things," the vision in chapter 8 gives a more explicit account of the offenses of the little horn: "It magnified itself, even up to the Prince of the Host; and the continual burnt offering was taken away from him, and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown" (7:8; 8:11). This lightly veiled account refers to Antiochus's rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem to the Syrian counterpart of Zeus Olympius. According to Daniel 7, the heavenly judgment against the beast will result in the establishment of the rule of God through the agency of "the one like a son of man" (7:9-14, 19-27). In the original historical context of Daniel, this human figure probably represents an angel. By the first century CE, this figure was interpreted as the Messiah by some Jews and by followers of Jesus. In the situation in which Daniel was written, the vision of chapter 7 served to unmask the Syrian king as God's adversary and to encourage the audience of the work to resist him and his policies.

The Book of Revelation draws upon the combat myth in its ancient Near Eastern and biblical form but also includes Greek and Egyptian myths and motifs. Chapters 4 and 5 reflect the genre of the combat myth by the way the scene is presented. The relationship between the enthroned deity and the risen Jesus is analogous to that between the administrator-father gods and the young-warrior gods of the ancient Near Eastern combat myths. The divine council in Revelation is also faced with a crisis, symbolized by the impossibility of opening the scroll with the seven seals (5:14). This crisis begins to be resolved when the risen Jesus, who is both Lion and Lamb, opens the seals, unleashing cosmic conflict. It will be resolved fully, however, only with the reappearance of the risen Jesus as the mighty Word of God, foretold in chapter 19, when he will engage the enemies of God in the final battle. His victory will lead to his joint kingship with God in the new Jerusalem that will come down from heaven to a new earth.

The combat myth is vividly evoked by Revelation 12-13 as well: "And a great sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. And she was pregnant, crying out in pain and laboring to give birth"(12:1-2). This woman is described as a great goddess, like Isis in the hellenistic and Roman periods. She also has cosmic and political connotations. Her heavenly attributes express cosmic order. Since she gives birth to the Messiah, she is also Israel. The author of Revelation considered the followers of Jesus to belong to "the seed" of the woman and thus to be the heirs of the divine promises to Israel (12:17). The narrative continues: "And another sign appeared in heaven, and behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars of heaven and cast them upon the earth. And the dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it could devour her child when she brought it forth"(12:3-4). The dragon is related to the monster Leviathan of the Bible and to the seven-headed Lotan, the enemy of Baal. The attack on the stars is an expression of rebellion and a threat to dissolve cosmic order into chaos (cf. Dan 8). In Revelation 12, the woman is helped by God and the earth. In related Greek traditions, Leto is helped by Poseidon and by her children, Apollo and Artemis.

The political dimension of the adaptation of the combat myth becomes even clearer in Revelation 13. The passage opens:

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*And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads and ten crowns upon its horns and names of blasphemy upon its heads. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, and its feet were like those of a bear, and its mouth was like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave it his power and his throne and great authority. And one of its heads was, as it were, slain unto death, but its fatal wound had been healed (13:1-3a).*

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The dragon of chapter 12 is identified with Satan, the adversary of God. The beast from the sea is explicitly presented as the ally of Satan. The description of the beast is based on Daniel 7. Like the four beasts in Daniel, this beast arises from the sea. And like the four beasts of Daniel, the beast of Revelation is a composite animal with features of all four beasts. Both the four beasts of Daniel and the single beast of Revelation recall the monsters of ancient Near Eastern combat myths, especially Tiamat, Sea, and Leviathan. Like its predecessors, the beast of Revelation has a political meaning: "And authority was given to it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation. And all who dwell upon the earth will worship him, all whose names have not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain" (13:7b-8). Such a reference to universal authority at the end of the first century CE could apply only to Rome. The description of universal worship alludes to the imperial cult, which the prophet John perceived as blasphemous. The reference to the fatal wound of the beast that was healed is an allusion to the legend of Nero's return. The slain and risen Christ would return to do battle with the slain and risen Nero, a kind of Antichrist, although the term is not used. In the Roman province of Asia, the elite honor the emperor as the regent of Zeus on earth. John, however, by invoking the combat myth, claims that the emperor is in reality the regent of Satan.

## **The Antichrist**

The idea of a final human opponent of all goodness is present in both Jewish and Christian scriptures, but the term "Antichrist" appears only in the latter. The idea is older than the term, and the use of the term in the New Testament is different from what became its typical later use. The term *antichristos* appears in the first two letters attributed to John. 1 John 2: 18 attests a tradition that the Antichrist would come in "the last hour." But the author of the letter seeks to persuade his audience that many antichrists have already come, and their presence demonstrates that the last hour has also arrived. These "antichrists" are those who once belonged to the same community as the author and his audience but separated from them because of doctrinal differences. Thus, according to the author, "Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son" (2:22; cf. 4:3). In 2 John 7, "the deceiver" or "antichrist" is defined as any one of the many who refuse to acknowledge that Jesus as the Messiah is coming in the flesh.

The idea of the Antichrist is fascinating in part because this human opponent is not merely human. He takes on connotations of the mythic composite beasts that play the role of rebel and bringer of chaos in the various combat myths. He is also closely associated with Satan. The Antichrist, like the false prophets, is expected to lead people astray. Satan, of course, is the Deceiver par excellence. This epithet derives from the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2-3 and



is also reflected in the story of the fallen angels in the Book of the Watchers (cf. Rev 12:9). The Watchers, led by Azazel and Semyaza, who are analogous to, if not identical with, Satan, appear to have revealed to humanity heavenly secrets, which were actually sinful things and worthless mysteries (1 Enoch 8.2-4; 9.6-10; 10.7-8; 16.3).

The oldest portrayal of a human eschatological adversary is the veiled depiction of Antiochus IV Epiphanes as the "little horn" on the fourth beast in Daniel 7-12.31 His rule, presented as oppressive and unjust, is thus characterized as rebellion against God and a resurgence of chaos, disrupting the created order and differing from the rule of the ideal king. Antiochus is thus portrayed as the human enemy of all that is good, even though the term Antichrist is not applied to him.

As was noted above, the Book of Revelation presents "the beast" as a negative counterpart of Jesus. Another passage that has been very influential on the Antichrist tradition, even though it lacks the term, is 2 Thessalonians 2. The first Jewish war with Rome was likely the occasion of this letter. The claim that the "day of the Lord" was imminent, a view opposed by the author, could well have been inspired by the military isolation of Jerusalem by Vespasian in the first half of 68 or by the march of Titus and his legions against the city in the first half of 70. Like the author of Mark, these Christians probably saw the hand of God in the pending destruction of the Temple and city, which they viewed as retribution for the rejection of Jesus as Messiah.

Mark wrote during the Jewish war and expected the parousia (the return of the risen Christ) to follow soon after its climax. Those opposed by the author of 2 Thessalonians evidently held a view similar to that of Mark. The view of the author of 2 Thessalonians was different, more universal and more christocentric, but not significantly less imminent. The mystery or secret of lawlessness was already at work (2:7). The eschatological adversary, "the man of lawlessness, the son of perdition," was ready to burst onto the scene. It was only "the restraining force" that prevented his appearance. The "one who restrains," until he himself is removed from the scene, is most likely an angel acting as an agent of God (cf. 2 Bar 6-8; Rev 7:1-3; 9:14-15). According to the scenario of 2 Thessalonians 2, when "the restrainer" is removed, the eschatological adversary will appear, "who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God" (2:4). This individual will be accepted by many who are destined to perish. This acceptance constitutes the "apostasy" or "rebellion" which must occur before the *parousia* (cf. w. 9-12 to v. 3). A similar theme occurs in Mark 13. False messiahs and false prophets will appear and deceive many, immediately before the revelation of the Son of man. But the main difference between Mark 13 and 2 Thessalonians 2 seems to result from divergent interpretations of Daniel's prophecy of the "abomination of desolation" (cf. Mark 13:14 and 2 Thess 2:4 with Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). Whereas Mark expected the Romans to fulfill this prophecy by setting up a statue in the Temple, the author of 2 Thessalonians expected the prophecy to be fulfilled more directly by an evil king, resembling the veiled description of Antiochus in Daniel 11, who would usurp God's place in the Temple. The apocalyptic instruction regarding the appearance of "the man of lawlessness" in 2 Thessalonians seems to result from a creative exegetical combination of passages about the abomination of desolation with the summary of Antiochus's activity in Dan 11:36-37.

It is tempting to speculate about the identity of this figure from the point of view of the author of 2 Thessalonians. He may have imagined that Simon, son of Gioras, the leader of the Jewish revolt, would exalt himself in this way once the war against Rome had been won. Or he may have envisioned the revelation of a new leader, a kind of Jewish super-messiah, who would work miracles, including the defeat of the Romans. Or he may have expected this evil king to be the Roman emperor or his agent who would expect divine honors after winning the war against the Jews. The text does not reveal this secret. In any case, this vivid portrayal of a final evil king reveals the power of older scripture to articulate the hopes and fears of a later age.

## **Conclusion**

Imaginative claims of revelatory visions, hearing voices, and making journeys to normally inaccessible regions legitimate teachings about universal concerns: the mystery of the origin of the world and its destiny as well as the more existential mystery of death and what follows it. These issues are always of concern. Some apocalyptic texts address more specific crises, such as political and religious conflict. Part of the power of apocalyptic language lies in its use of archaic, vivid images and themes to address such conflict and other pressing concerns of the audience.

The tension between autonomy and rule by a foreign power is an issue as old as the historical record itself. It continues to be an issue in the world today in the direct sense of political rule and in the indirect senses of economic and cultural control and influence. Apocalyptic language thematizes this problem and resolves it, usually in a nonviolent manner. Even though apocalyptic texts rarely call for physical violence, they often employ violent images and language. The harsh portrayal of opponents as archetypal monsters, demons, or sinners is hardly conducive to the resolution of conflict through mutual understanding and acceptance. Such language merely intensifies the polarization already present. But it is an effective tool at times for unmasking the forces that pretend to be benign, but actually exploit. Or perhaps more accurately, apocalyptic rhetoric can be a revelatory corrective to propaganda.

Propaganda stresses what is supposedly benign and constructive, whereas apocalyptic rhetoric has the potential to unmask what is exploitative and corrupt.