

Historical Apocalypses: History and its Culmination in Judgment

1. “Apocalypse of Weeks” in *Epistle of Enoch* (1 Enoch 93)

- Now preserved in 1 Enoch, the “Apocalypse of Weeks” may have been written in the period of persecution prior to the Maccabean Revolt; we find here, for instance, no hint of knowledge about a revolt – let alone about its success!
- Enoch’s visions here consist of a review of history, which is schematized into “weeks.” There are ten “weeks” in human history, which are followed by a new, eternal age. History as we know it, in other words, is here a temporary phenomenon. The story of history is here told in terms of ages of righteousness and ages of wickedness; the culmination is a period of great wickedness, followed by salvation for the righteous.
- The seventh “week” is likely the time in which the author of the apocalypse (as distinct from the ancient Enoch, its claimed author) himself lived. This “week” is marked by corruption but ends with the election of the chosen ones. The apocalypse assures us that all sinners will be destroyed in the eighth “week.”

2. “Animal Apocalypse” in *Book of Dreams* (1 Enoch 83–84)

- Another apocalypse preserved in 1 Enoch, the “Animal Apocalypse,” seems to have been written during the Maccabean Revolt.
- This apocalypse tells history allegorically by means of animals; again, no names are written; the reader must guess them from what s/he knows of biblical history. Israel and its ancestors are represented by white animals (bulls in the patriarchal period, later sheep); angels are represented by human beings; Israel’s foreign enemies are represented by predatory animals (e.g., Egyptians are wolves during the retelling of the Exodus).
- During the time of the monarchy, the white sheep (i.e., Jews) are said to have gone astray and become blind. God thus delivers them into the hand of a series of four predators (i.e., Babylonians, Persians, Ptolemies, Seleucids; so too w/the four kingdoms predicted in Daniel).
- During the last period (i.e., rule of Seleucids), predatory birds attack the sheep. Some lambs (i.e., Jews) are born who open their eyes and see the truth (compare the seventh week in the “Apocalypse of Weeks”)—this is the time of the author. Animals are then used to describe the beginning of the Maccabean Revolt. Judah Maccabee is represented as arising as a horn on one of these seeing sheep. Accordingly to this apocalypse, his victories usher in the end time: his victories are followed by attacks on the sheep by all the other nations (i.e., this is where description of history known to the author shifts to predictions about the end).
- According to the apocalypse, this leads to a period in which the blind sheep (apostate Jews) and predatory animals (Israel’s enemies, esp. Seleucids) will be destroyed. All the animals of the earth then come to serve the sheep. Then the world is renewed, a messiah arises, and the seeing sheep (chosen among Israel) are restored into bulls (i.e., the state of humankind during patriarchal times).

Further Note on Historical Apocalypses

Historical apocalypses are concerned with revealing secrets about the end of time. This is typically done by means of a figure of the past who sees highly symbolic and enigmatic visions or dreams that need interpretation by an angel to be understood (contrast prophetic oracles in the Hebrew Bible, which prophets [and readers!] can usually understand of themselves with no angelic help). The visions review history up until the End, often [1] in enigmatic terms which, e.g., do not mention specific people or places or events by name and [2] in highly schematized ways consistent with the desire to establish a set timetable for history’s and its final culmination and, in the process, to depict all history as under divine control and predetermined.

Scholars speculate that historical apocalypses arise from situations of persecution, responding to historical crisis (esp. situations of “cognitive dissonance” whereby lived reality contradicts long-held ideals, e.g. the ideal of the Temple as a special domain of God) through promises of future vindication. The chaos in this world is taken as a sign of the dissolution of this world and the birth of a new one, in which God’s order is more fully manifest. This view is predicated on the belief in a single God with power over all of human history as well as the power to create and destroy the world as He sees fit and a profound sense of justice which, in one way or another, will ensure that the righteous are rewarded while the wicked suffer.

In Jewish literature, historical Apocalypses cluster around two events:

Persecution of Jewish religion by Seleucids & Maccabean Revolt = 2nd century BCE

- “Apocalypse of Weeks”
- “Animal Apocalypse”
- *Book of Daniel*
- *Jubilees 23*

Jewish Revolt against Rome & Destruction of Second Temple = 1st century CE

- 4 Ezra
- 2 Baruch

3. More on the Book of Daniel

Messianism: In contrast to the Maccabees, who responded to persecution by organizing a military revolt to fight for freedom against the Seleucid persecutors, the authors of Daniel seem to respond with promises about Israel's victory by the hand of God and the angelic messiah that He sends, at the impending end of time. Daniel 7 ends its accounts of the rise and fall of earthly empires with the famous statement that "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man (lit. "son of Adam," a common Aramaic idiom for "person"), and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." Accordingly to Daniel 12:1-3, the end of time will be marked by great trouble on earth, to a degree never seen before, after which the angel "Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people will arise."

Eschatology: The names of those saved have been written in a book, and these (apparently: not all of Israel) will be delivered. "Many" of the dead (apparently: not all) will be resurrected. This image of resurrection draws on prophetic metaphors (see Segal pp. 262-65). The reference to the wise and "those who lead many to righteousness" (i.e., teachers of righteousness) "shining like the brightness of the sky" and "like the stars forever and ever" may allude to a notion (found, e.g., in Greek thought and also connected with biblical associations of angels with stars) that the righteous can become stars and/or angels after death.

Theodicy: The righteous resurrected will be risen to "everlasting life," and the wicked among them to "shame and everlasting contempt." Resurrection, in other words, here serves as a means by which God, at the end of time, makes fair retribution to those not justly punished or rewarded in this life. We can speculate that such concerns became particularly pressing and compelling with the martyrdom of pious Jews in the persecution leading up to the Maccabean Revolt.

"Apocalypse of Weeks" (trans. R.H. Charles)

1 Enoch 93 1,2 And after that Enoch both gave and began to recount from the books. And Enoch said:
' Concerning the children of righteousness and concerning the elect of the world,
And concerning the plant of uprightness, I will speak these things,
Yea, I Enoch will declare (them) unto you, my sons:
According to that which appeared to me in the heavenly vision,
And which I have known through the word of the holy angels,
And have learnt from the heavenly tablets.'
3 And Enoch began to recount from the books and said:
' I was born the seventh in the first week,
While judgment and righteousness still endured.
4 And after me there shall arise in the second week great wickedness,
And deceit shall have sprung up;
And in it there shall be the first end.
And in it a man shall be saved;
And after it is ended unrighteousness shall grow up,
And a law shall be made for the sinners.
And after that in the third week at its close
A man shall be elected as the plant of righteous judgment,
And his posterity shall become the plant of righteousness for evermore.
6 And after that in the fourth week, at its close,
Visions of the holy and righteous shall be seen,
And a law for all generations and an enclosure shall be made for them.
7 And after that in the fifth week, at its close,
The house of glory and dominion shall be built for ever.
8 And after that in the sixth week all who live in it shall be blinded,
And the hearts of all of them shall godlessly forsake wisdom.
And in it a man shall ascend;
And at its close the house of dominion shall be burnt with fire,

And the whole race of the chosen root shall be dispersed.

9 And after that in the seventh week shall an apostate generation arise,

And many shall be its deeds,

And all its deeds shall be apostate.

10 And at its close shall be elected

The elect righteous of the eternal plant of righteousness,

To receive sevenfold instruction concerning all His creation.

11 [For who is there of all the children of men that is able to hear the voice of the Holy One without being troubled ? And who can think His thoughts ? and who is there that can behold all the works 12 of heaven ? And how should there be one who could behold the heaven, and who is there that could understand the things of heaven and see a soul or a spirit and could tell thereof, or ascend and see 13 all their ends and think them or do like them ? And who is there of all men that could know what is the breadth and the length of the earth, and to whom has been shown the measure of all of them ? 14 Or is there any one who could discern the length of the heaven and how great is its height, and upon what it is founded, and how great is the number of the stars, and where all the luminaries rest ?]

1 Enoch 91:12 And after that there shall be another, the eighth week, that of righteousness,

And a sword shall be given to it that a righteous judgment may be executed on the oppressors,

And sinners shall be delivered into the hands of the righteous.

13 And at its close they shall acquire houses through their righteousness,

And a house shall be built for the Great King in glory for evermore,

14d And all mankind shall look to the path of uprightness.

14a And after that, in the ninth week, the righteous judgment shall be revealed to the whole world,

b And all the works of the godless shall vanish from all the earth,

c And the world shall be written down for destruction.

15 And after this, in the tenth week in the seventh part,

There shall be the great eternal judgment,

In which He will execute vengeance amongst the angels.

16 And the first heaven shall depart and pass away,

And a new heaven shall appear,

And all the powers of the heavens shall give sevenfold light.

17 And after that there will be many weeks without number for ever,

And all shall be in goodness and righteousness,

And sin shall no more be mentioned for ever.

Selection from the “Animal Apocalypse” (trans. R.H. Charles)

1 Enoch 90 1 And I saw till that in this manner thirty-five shepherds undertook the pasturing (of the sheep), and they severally completed their periods as did the first; and others received them into their 2 hands, to pasture them for their period, each shepherd in his own period. And after that I saw in my vision all the birds of heaven coming, the eagles, the vultures, the kites, the ravens; but the eagles led all the birds; and they began to devour those sheep, and to pick out their eyes and to 3 devour their flesh. And the sheep cried out because their flesh was being devoured by the birds, 4 and as for me I looked and lamented in my sleep over that shepherd who pastured the sheep. And I saw until those sheep were devoured by the dogs and eagles and kites, and they left neither flesh nor skin nor sinew remaining on them till only their bones stood there: and their bones too fell 5 to the earth and the sheep became few. And I saw until that twenty-three had undertaken the pasturing and completed in their several periods fifty-eight times.

6 But behold lambs were borne by those white sheep, and they began to open their eyes and to see, 7 and to cry to the sheep. Yea, they cried to them, but they did not hearken to what they said to 8 them, but were exceedingly deaf, and their eyes were very exceedingly blinded. And I saw in the vision how the ravens flew upon those lambs and took one of those lambs, and dashed the sheep 9 in pieces and devoured them. And I saw till horns grew upon those lambs, and the ravens cast down their horns; and I saw till there sprouted a great horn of one of those sheep, and their eyes 10 were opened. And it looked at them [and their eyes opened], and it cried to the sheep, and the 11 rams saw it and all ran to it. And notwithstanding all this those eagles and vultures and ravens and kites still kept tearing the sheep and swooping down upon them and devouring them: still the sheep remained silent, but the rams lamented and cried out. And those ravens fought and battled with it and sought to lay low its horn, but they had no power over it.

All the eagles and vultures and ravens and kites were gathered together, and there came with them all the sheep of the field, yea, they all came together, and helped each other to break that horn of the ram. 19 And I saw till a great sword was given to the sheep, and the sheep proceeded against all the beasts of the field to slay

them, and all the beasts and the birds of the heaven fled before their face. And I saw that man, who wrote the book according to the command of the Lord, till he opened that book concerning the destruction which those twelve last shepherds had wrought, and showed that they had destroyed much more than their predecessors, before the Lord of the sheep. And I saw till the Lord of the sheep came unto them and took in His hand the staff of His wrath, and smote the earth, and the earth clave asunder, and all the beasts and all the birds of the heaven fell from among those sheep, and were swallowed up in the earth and it covered them.

20 And I saw till a throne was erected in the pleasant land, and the Lord of the sheep sat Himself thereon, and the other took the sealed books and opened those books before the Lord of the sheep. 21 And the Lord called those men the seven first white ones, and commanded that they should bring before Him, beginning with the first star which led the way, all the stars whose privy members 22 were like those of horses, and they brought them all before Him. And He said to that man who wrote before Him, being one of those seven white ones, and said unto him: ' Take those seventy shepherds to whom I delivered the sheep, and who taking them on their own authority slew more 23 than I commanded them.' And behold they were all bound, I saw, and they all stood before Him.

24 And the judgement was held first over the stars, and they were judged and found guilty, and went to the place of condemnation, and they were cast into an abyss, full of fire and flaming, and full 25 of pillars of fire. And those seventy shepherds were judged and found guilty, and they were cast 26 into that fiery abyss. And I saw at that time how a like abyss was opened in the midst of the earth, full of fire, and they brought those blinded sheep, and they were all judged and found guilty and 27 cast into this fiery abyss, and they burned; now this abyss was to the right of that house. And I saw those sheep burning and their bones burning. 28 And I stood up to see till they folded up that old house; and carried off all the pillars, and all the beams and ornaments of the house were at the same time folded up with it, and they carried 29 it off and laid it in a place in the south of the land. And I saw till the Lord of the sheep brought a new house greater and loftier than that first, and set it up in the place of the first which had been folded up: all its pillars were new, and its ornaments were new and larger than those of the first, the old one which He had taken away, and all the sheep were within it.

30 And I saw all the sheep which had been left, and all the beasts on the earth, and all the birds of the heaven, falling down and doing homage to those sheep and making petition to and obeying 31 them in every thing. And thereafter those three who were clothed in white and had seized me by my hand [who had taken me up before], and the hand of that ram also seizing hold of me, they 32 took me up and set me down in the midst of those sheep before the judgement took place. And those 33 sheep were all white, and their wool was abundant and clean. And all that had been destroyed and dispersed, and all the beasts of the field, and all the birds of the heaven, assembled in that house, and the Lord of the sheep rejoiced with great joy because they were all good and had returned to 34 His house. And I saw till they laid down that sword, which had been given to the sheep, and they brought it back into the house, and it was sealed before the presence of the Lord, and all the sheep 35 were invited into that house, but it held them not. And the eyes of them all were opened, and they 36 saw the good, and there was not one among them that did not see. And I saw that that house was large and broad and very full.

37 And I saw that a white bull was born, with large horns and all the beasts of the field and all the 38 birds of the air feared him and made petition to him all the time. And I saw till all their generations were transformed, and they all became white bulls; and the first among them became a lamb, and that lamb became a great animal and had great black horns on its head; and the Lord of the sheep 39 rejoiced over it and over all the oxen. And I slept in their midst: and I awoke and saw everything...