

The Messiah, the Heavens, and the Eschaton

1. Enochic *Similitudes*: “Son of Man” as Messiah

- Especially in light of the variety of ideas about Jesus’ identity as messiah within the Gospels, it is important to note that, within the early Jewish background and milieu of the Jesus Movement, the hope for a Messiah who appears at the Endtimes and ushers in the age of the final judgment (and, hence, the resurrection of the dead) was already understood in a variety of ways, ranging from human redeemer through military means to non-human angelic redeemer.
- The *Similitudes* is an apocalypse penned in the name of Enoch, which is now collected in *1 Enoch* (alongside *Astronomical Book*, *Book of the Watchers*, etc.; see February 4th handout for details). The text dates from the first century BCE or the early first century CE – i.e., pre-Christian.
- With regard to death and the afterlife, the *Similitudes* present the same basic ideas as the other Enochic apocalypse that we’ve looked at so far in this course (e.g., strong assertion of post-mortem justice as in the *Book of the Watchers*; eschatological interest, assertion of the coming of a messiah, and assertion of the resurrection of the dead, as in the “Animal Apocalypse” and “Apocalypse of Weeks”).
- The text is also dependant on the Book of Daniel in a manner that is especially important for our purposes. It expresses its messianic hopes in a figure that it terms “the Son of Man,” using the same term later used of Jesus in the Gospels. In the *Similitudes*, it is clear that the term comes from an interpretation of Daniel 7:13-14 (see box); whereas the figure in Daniel was an angelic (i.e., someone who was “like a son of man” in the sense of an angelic figure that looks like a person), the figure in the *Similitudes* is a human with angelic features, possibly Enoch himself after his transformation into an angel (as in, e.g., 2 Enoch)!

Dan 7:13-14 I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, 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.

2. The Apostle Paul

Pauline Epistles: The letters of Paul are the earliest texts in the NT and, hence, provide us with our oldest surviving evidence for conceptions about Jesus’ death—and its implications for the lives, deaths, and afterlives of others— among his followers. Unlike the NT Gospels (which were written later), Paul gives more attention to the death of Jesus than to his life and teachings—so his writings prove especially important for the themes of this class! Since Paul was a Pharisee, his writings also give us some feel for this Jewish group and what they believed at the time (note, e.g., the commonality between Pharisees and followers of Jesus with regard to the resurrection of the dead, in contrast to Sadducees).

Paul as visionary: Paul’s interest in Jesus’ death can be seen as consistent with his “conversion” experience. Unlike the other apostles, he was not a follower of Jesus during his lifetime. A student of Rabbi Gamliel, Saul of Tarsus claims to have seen a vision on the road to Damascus, a vision of Jesus as the risen Christ. This vision involved his commission to become the apostle to the Gentiles and name-change to “Paul.” Paul’s claim to visionary experiences akin to prophets in the Hebrew Bible and sages in Second Temple apocalypses is especially notable since, at another point, he makes what some scholars (e.g. Segal) see as a reference to his own ascent to heaven (see box).

2 Cor 12:1-11: I must boast; there is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven -- whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise -- whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows -- and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. Though if I wish to boast, I shall not be a fool, for I shall be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong. I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these superlative apostles, even though I am nothing. The signs of a true apostle were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.

Paul as “apostle to the Gentiles”: At the time of Paul’s commission and mission, the center of the nascent Church was in Jerusalem, led by Peter and James the brother of Jesus, who seem to have drawn converts to their movements mainly from the Jews in the area, e.g., preaching near the Temple. Saul/Paul, a Greek-speaking Roman citizen, traveled all around the Roman Empire, founding communities, and writing many letters that answered their questions about Christian belief and practice. Largely as a result, the Jesus Movement would spread to many Gentiles as well as Jews and begin to take shape into something that we can call “Christianity,” in the sense of a “religion” distinct from Judaism. One of the results of this spread is, as we shall see, the integration of a great many Hellenistic ideas about death, the soul, and the afterlife into Christianity, consistent with its closer connection to the dominant Greco-Roman culture of the time.

Paul on Jesus’ death and its place within salvation-history: Paul’s message (= “gospel,” lit. “good news”—a term that he coined) centered on the importance of Jesus’ death and resurrection within salvation history. Paul asserts that, by virtue of his status as Messiah (Greek: Christos), Jesus’ death served ushered in a new era. In a development of earlier ideas about martyrdom, he asserts that Jesus’ sinless death had a cleansing and expiatory effect (akin to sacrifices in the Temple, but on a cosmic level): opening the way for all humankind to be freed from sin: Jesus is the Second Adam, marking the beginning of the end, just as the first man Adam marked the beginning of human history with his sin. For him, Jesus was the second Adam, undoing the first sin, freeing humankind from death, and ushering in the end of history;

Paul on Jesus’ resurrection and its place within salvation-history: In his view, Jesus’ death and resurrection demonstrated the truth of resurrection (as opposed, e.g., to those who believed in no afterlife, like Epicureans and Sadducees). As such, his resurrection signaled the imminent approach of the Last Judgment.

Selections from the *Similitudes*

1 Enoch 45:1 This is the second Parable concerning those who deny the name of the dwelling of the holy ones and the Lord of Spirits.

2 And into the heaven they shall not ascend,
And on the earth they shall not come:

Such shall be the lot of the sinners
Who have denied the name of the Lord of Spirits,
Who are thus preserved for the day of suffering and
tribulation

3 On that day Mine Elect One shall sit on the throne
of glory

And shall try their works,
And their places of rest shall be innumerable.
And their souls shall grow strong within them when
they see Mine Elect Ones,

And those who have called upon My glorious name:
4 Then will I cause Mine Elect One to dwell among
them.

And I will transform the heaven and make it an
eternal blessing and light

5 And I will transform the earth and make it a
blessing:

And I will cause Mine elect ones to dwell upon it:
But the sinners and evil-doers shall not set foot
thereon.

6 For I have provided and satisfied with peace My righteous ones

And have caused them to dwell before Me:

But for the sinners there is judgment impending with Me,

So that I shall destroy them from the face of the earth.

46:1 And there I saw One who had a head of days,
And His head was white like wool,
And with Him was another being whose
countenance had the appearance of a man,
And his face was full of graciousness, like one of
the holy angels.

2 And I asked the angel who went with me and
showed me all the hidden things, concerning that
3 Son of Man, who he was, and whence he was,
(and) why he went with the Head of Days?

And he answered and said unto me:
“This is the son of Man who hath righteousness,
With whom dwelleth righteousness,
And who revealeth all the treasures of that which is
hidden,

Because the Lord of Spirits hath chosen him,
And whose lot hath the pre-eminence before the
Lord of Spirits in uprightness for ever.

4 And this Son of Man whom thou hast seen
Shall raise up the kings and the mighty from their
seats,

And the strong from their thrones]
And shall loosen the reins of the strong,
And break the teeth of the sinners.

5 [And he shall put down the kings from their thrones
and kingdoms]

Because they do not extol and praise Him,
Nor humbly acknowledge whence the kingdom was
bestowed upon them.

6 And he shall put down the countenance of the
strong,

And shall fill them with shame.
And darkness shall be their dwelling,
And worms shall be their bed,

And they shall have no hope of rising from their beds,

Because they do not extol the name of the Lord of Spirits.

And raise their hands against the Most High],

And tread upon the earth and dwell upon it.

And all their deeds manifest unrighteousness,

And their power rests upon their riches,

And their faith is in the gods which they have made with their hands,

And they deny the name of the Lord of Spirits,

8 And they persecute the houses of His congregations,

And the faithful who hang upon the name of the Lord of Spirits.

47:1 And in those days shall have ascended the prayer of the righteous,

And the blood of the righteous from the earth before the Lord of Spirits.

2 In those days the holy ones who dwell above in the heavens

Shall unite with one voice

And supplicate and pray [and praise,

And give thanks and bless the name of the Lord of Spirits

On behalf of the blood of the righteous which has been shed,

And that the prayer of the righteous may not be in vain before the Lord of Spirits,

That judgment may be done unto them,

And that they may not have to suffer for ever.

3 In those days I saw the Head of Days when He seated himself upon the throne of His glory,

And the books of the living were opened before Him:

And all His host which is in heaven above and His counselors stood before Him,

4 And the hearts of the holy were filled with joy;

Because the number of the righteous had been offered,

And the prayer of the righteous had been heard,

And the blood of the righteous been required before the Lord of Spirits.

48:1 And in that place I saw the fountain of righteousness

Which was inexhaustible:

And around it were many fountains of wisdom:

And all the thirsty drank of them,

And were filled with wisdom,

And their dwellings were with the righteous and holy and elect.

2 And at that hour that Son of Man was named In the presence of the Lord of Spirits,

And his name before the Head of Days.

3 Yea, before the sun and the signs were created,

Before the stars of the heaven were made,

His name was named before the Lord of Spirits.

4 He shall be a staff to the righteous whereon to stay themselves and not fall,

And he shall be the light of the Gentiles,

And the hope of those who are troubled of heart.

5 All who dwell on earth shall fall down and worship before him,

And will praise and bless and celebrate with song the Lord of Spirits.

6 For this reason hath he been chosen and hidden before Him,

Before the creation of the world and for evermore.

7 And the wisdom of the Lord of Spirits hath

revealed him to the holy and righteous:

For he hath preserved the lot of the righteous,

Because they have hated and despised this world of unrighteousness,

And have hated all its works and ways in the name of the Lord of Spirits:

For in his name they are saved,

According to his good pleasure hath it been in regard to their life.

8 In these days downcast in countenance shall the kings of the earth have become,

And the strong who possess the land because of the works of their hands,

For on the day of their anguish and affliction they shall not (be able to) save themselves.

And I will give them over into the hands of Mine elect:

9 As straw in the fire so shall they burn before the face of the holy:

As lead in the water shall they sink before the face of the righteous,

And no trace of them shall any more be found.

10 And on the day of their affliction there shall be rest on the earth,

And before them they shall fall and not rise again:

And there shall be no one to take them with his hands and raise them:

For they have denied the Lord of Spirits and His Anointed.

The name of the Lord of Spirits be blessed.