

CHAPTER 4 A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

The apocalyptic literary genre, as we have seen, was born in the exilic and post-exilic Judaism and an abundance of apocalyptic literature was produced from about 200 BC to about 200 AD in the Judeo-Christian world. But only a few found official recognition and were accepted as canonical.

The Canonical Apocalyptic Literature

The Old Testament contains only one apocalypse : the Book of Daniel. The New Testament adds one more: The Apocalypse (also known as the Book of Revelation). These were selected from numerous apocalypses that were popular during the time when the canons of the Old Testament and the New Testament were still open. Both canons, however, contain important apocalyptic sections, viz., Ezekiel chs 40-48; Isaiah chs 24-27, 34-35, 56-66; Zechariah chs 9-14; Mark ch 13; Matthew ch 24; Luke ch 21; 1 Thessalonians ch 4; 1 Corinthians ch 15).

The Book of Daniel

The title of the book does not indicate its author but its protagonist who is presented as living in Babylon during the reign of the last king of the Neo-Babylonian empire and their first successors, viz., the early kings of the Medes and the Persians, which covers most of the 6th cent. BC. The book has 14 chapters. The first six chapters contain six edifying stories about the protagonist and his three companions at the Babylonian court: the food test (1:1-21); Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the composite statue (2:1- 49); Daniel's companions in the fiery furnace (3:1-97); Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great tree (3:98-4:34); the writing on the wall at Belshazzar's feast (5:1-6:1); and Daniel in the lion's den (6:2-29). The next six chapters record four apocalypses which Daniel was granted in symbolic images concerning the four successive kingdoms which the Jews lived in from the time of the Babylonian conquest of Judea until God established their own kingdom: the four beasts (7:1-28); the ram and the he-goat (8:1-27);

the interpretation of the 70 weeks (9:1-27); the revelations of the Hellenistic wars (10:1-12:13). The first two consist primarily of symbolic visions explained to the seer by an angel; the other two are direct revelations to him by an angel without the symbolic camouflage. The last two chapters deal with Daniel's exploits: Daniel's rescue of the chaste Susanna (13:1-64); Daniel and the priests of Bel (14:1-22); and the destruction of the dragon by Daniel (14:23-42).

The close relationship between apocalypticism and Biblical prophecy is quite evident in chapter 7 of Daniel which composed at the height of the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes IV unfolds the central vision of the book: the four beasts rising from the sea and one like a son of man riding on the clouds. This imagery is indebted to the myth of God's battle with the sea monster (Is 27:1; 51:9-11). In the Canaanite version of the myth, Baal who vanquishes the sea is depicted as riding on the clouds. The idea of a cosmic battle is a very prominent theme among the apocalyptists. Further, four other characteristics clearly sets the book of Daniel apart as apocalyptic. They are (i) the use of the expression 'son of man' to refer to a divine saviour, which is employed in later apocalypses (1 Enoch chs 37-71; 4 Ezra ch 13 and the ascription of the title to Jesus); (ii) the prominence accorded to angels (8:15; 9:21; 10:18,21; 12:1,6-7): revelation mediated by an angel through interpretation of a vision (chs 7 and 8), interpretation of scripture (ch 9), or direct speech (chs 10-12); (iii) the review of history (ch 11 recounts the Hellenistic history accurately down to Antiochus Epiphanes IV) - such a phenomenon is a characteristic feature of the apocalyptic genre (1 Enoch chs 85-90; 91:11-17; 93); (iv) the affirmation of life after death (resurrection) in unequivocal terms (12:1-3).

The Book of Ezekiel (chs 38-39; 40-48)

Ezekiel after whom the book is named began his ministry in 593 BC in Babylonia among the Judean exiles (1:2). His last prophecy is in the year 571 BC (29:17). He must have been one of the 8000 captives Nebuchadnezzar carried to Babylon in 598 BC after the fall of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 24:16). It appears that

the bulk of his ministry took place between 593 and 586 BC, viz., during the reign of king Zedekiah (last king of Judah who ruled between 597 and 587 BC) and the devastation that followed the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. The book of Ezekiel is remarkable among the prophetic books in that it combines prophetic oracles with judicial reflections, prosaic narratives with poetic descriptions, elaborate historical accounts with highly imaginative mythical allusions, sober judgement with grotesque visions, verbose discourses with vivid dramatic presentation as no other prophet does. The book has 48 chapters, divided into 3 sections by scholars, in terms of the 3 stages in the prophet's ministry: oracles of judgement (chs 1-24); oracles against foreign nations (chs 25-32); and oracles of salvation (chs 33-48). The last section has two parts: promise of a new exodus and conquest of the land, viz., return from the exile (chs 33-39), and a new division of the land and rebuilding of the holy city (chs 40-48).

The chs 38-39 contain the prophecy against Gog. They describe in fantastic terminology, like Joel 4, the vengeance of God against nations. A cosmic battle in which all adversaries of God would be completely destroyed features prominently in all apocalyptic works. The Apocalypse makes use of this imagery from Ezekiel (Ap 19:17-21; 20:8-10).

The chs 40-48 depict the vision of the glorious restoration of Jerusalem. Ezekiel is guided by a mediating angel in this vision. The vision begins with Ezekiel's guided tour of the new Temple and the description of the return of God's glory (40:1-43:12). It is followed by a detailed account of the cultic requirements to be adhered to in the Temple, similar to the ordinances in the book of Leviticus (43:13-46:24). Then the seer is given a vision of the stream of water issuing forth from the Temple (47:1-12). The vision of the restored Jerusalem ends with the delineation of the division of land in the new city (47:13-48:35).

The Book of Isaiah (chs 24-27; 34-35; 56-66)

Isaiah received his call to prophesy 'in the year King Uzziah died' (6:1), i.e., in 742 B.C, shortly after

Tiglathpileser III (745-727) acceded to the throne of Assyria. His ministry lasted during the reign of Shalmaneser V (726-722), Sargon II (721-705), and Sennacherib (704-681) in Assyria and Ahaz (735-715) and Hezekiah (715-687) in Judah. The book of Isaiah consists of 66 chapters. The material clearly indicates that it is not the work of one author nor of one period: the content, outlook, and the style differ widely. The scholars have pointed out that chapters 1-39 belong to the pre-exilic period; chapters 44-55, to the exilic period; and chapters 56-66, to the post-exilic period. Hence they are called Proto-Isaiah, Deutero-Isaiah, and Trito-Isaiah, respectively. The chs 24-27 known as the 'Apocalypse of Isaiah' depict in vivid imagery the final end of the earth. Though these chapters are made up of oracles and do not employ the apocalyptic genre (accounts of visions or heavenly journeys), the perspective and themes encompassed therein like the punishment of cosmic powers, the final destruction of death, and the resurrection of the dead are apocalyptists' favourites. The vivid poetic description of the destruction of earth (24:1-20) is followed by that of Yahweh's triumph. The vengeance is pronounced on cosmic powers: the heavenly hosts (24:21-22) and the monsters of the sea (27:1). After defeating the heavenly hosts, Yahweh is enthroned as king on Mt Zion (24:22-23). A hymn to Yahweh follows (25:1-5). Then there is a divine banquet on Mt Zion in celebration of the victory over death (25:6-10). A song entreating divine protection concludes this section (26:1-21). The apocalypse ends with the pronouncement of weal of the people of God (27:2-13).

In chs 34-35 is presented the judgement on Edom and the joy of the people of God saved from their enemies. Edom, one of Judah's enemies, located across the Dead Sea serves as a paradigm of a general slaughter of all the nations together with an end to the heavens and their armies of stars (34:1-17). The imagery of the flowering of the southern desert (35:1-10) indicates the salvation of the people in terms of a new creation from the ruins.

Trito-Isaiah (chs 56-66)

After depicting a struggle between the faithful and the false leaders (56:1-59:21), the author goes on to present the glorious new Zion (60:1- 62:12), and a complete new creation - the new heaven and new earth (63:1- 66:16).

The Book of Zechariah (chs 9-14)

Zechariah is the son of Berechiah the son of Iddo (1:1,7). The book of Nehemiah includes Iddo among the priests who returned to Jerusalem from the Babylonian exile (Neh 12:4). In Ezra we read that 'Zechariah son of Iddo' exhorted the people to build the Temple (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). Again Nehemiah refers to Zechariah as the head of the priestly clan of Iddo (Neh 12:6). He exercised his ministry from 520 BC (1:1) to the beginning of the following century (Neh 12:16).

The book of Zechariah has 14 chapters. There is general agreement among the scholars that chs 1-8 and chs 9-14 cannot be the work of the same prophet. The oracles in the latter manifest an eschatology in apocalyptic overtones: they are less directly concerned with contemporary historical events but exhibit more interest in a future salvation in mythical tone. The oracles in chapters 9-11 refer to God as a warrior taking the side of his people (9:1-8); to God as King of peace (9:9-10); to the Divine Warrior leading His people to victory (9:11-17); to abusers of confidence (10:1- 3); to God's victorious followers (10:3-12); to destruction of Lebanon and Bashan (11:1-3); and to bad shepherds and bad flocks (11:4-17). The last three chapters are made up mostly of eschatological oracles, introduced by the formula 'on that day' with the dominant theme of 'the destruction of all nations that come against Jerusalem'. They deal with the victorious Jerusalem (12:1-9); mourning and cleansing in Jerusalem (12:10-13:1); removal of idols and prophets (13:2-6); the sorting of shepherd and flock (13:7-9); and trial and exaltation of Jerusalem (14:1-21).

The Book of the Apocalypse

As we have seen, in the book of the Apocalypse, it is God who gives the revelation to Jesus Christ to be shown through an angel to his servant John who is in exile on the island of Patmos in order that John may become his seer and prophet to the church. John is to write down what he has seen, what is, and what is to come.

After this introduction the book continues first as a series of seven letters to the seven churches in the province of Asia, and to the whole church. The letters sent by Christ through John (chs 2-3) exhort, comfort, or censure the churches in accordance with their condition under persecution or danger of heresy.

From chapter 4, there are series of visions in three main cycles (seals: chs 6-7; trumpets: chs 8-10; and bowls: chs 15-16), each recapitulating and expanding the former in greater and clearer details. These visions are interspersed with the vision of God in His heavenly court, the visions of various catastrophe, the appearance of two witnesses and the glorious martyrs to spur the people to endurance, the victory of archangel Michael over the dragon (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb (Christ), the beasts (powers of emperor cult and false prophecy) leading the people astray, and the heavenly woman and her messianic son being protected by God from the dragon. The beasts then persecute the Christians. The second beast is a man identified by his number '666' (in a variant reading '616'). Then the judgement on the harlot Babylon (Rome), the victory of Christ over Antichrist and his followers followed by his thousand year reign with those who witnessed unto death, the loosening of Satan who is finally vanquished by fire from heaven along with the beasts, and the last judgement heralding a new heaven, a new earth, and the new Jerusalem are depicted.

The Gospel According to St Mark (ch 13)

There is no evidence in the Gospel that identifies its author. We know of a John Mark who was a companion of Paul (Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5-13; 15:37-39; Col 4:10; Philem 24; 2 Tim 4:11). Peter also speaks of 'my son Mark' (I Pet 5:13). The book is traditionally ascribed to Mark, the interpreter of Peter, and placed in Rome after the death of Peter, c 64-67 AD.

The Gospel according to Mark is divided into 16 chapters. The author's intention in writing the book was to deepen the faith of the members of his community in Jesus so that they face the persecutions with courage and resist the temptation to embrace the worldly comforts. Hence, he shows them how the prophecies and traditions about the Messiah were fulfilled in Jesus who died and rose again to give them a new hope.

The prologue (1:1-15) purports to identify Jesus as the 'coming one' in fulfilment of the OT prophecies. The rest of the Gospel may be divided into two equal parts. The first (1:16-8:21) depicts Jesus' ministry in and around Galilee. The second (8:22-16:20) describes his journey to Jerusalem (8:22-10:52), his teaching in Jerusalem (11:1-13:37); his passion and death (14:1- 15:47) and his resurrection, appearances, and ascension into heaven (16:1-20).

Jesus' final discourse in Jerusalem (13:1-37) is generally considered as a Jewish or Jewish-Christian apocalypse edited or adapted by Mark and ascribed to Jesus, containing some of Jesus' sayings notwithstanding. It begins with the prediction of the destruction of the Temple (13:2). It goes on to describe the beginning of sufferings (13:5-13); the great tribulation (13:14-23); the final triumph of the Son of Man (13:24-27); and exhorts the faithful to be vigilant and steadfast (13:28-37).

The Gospel According to St Matthew (chs 24-25)

The Gospel according to Matthew is a mature synthesis in Aramaic of the Gospel according to Mark and an early collection of Jesus' sayings. It contains the universally acclaimed Sermon on the Mount. The book is a Jewish-Christian in its outlook. The excommunication of Matthew's community by the rabbis of Jamnia in about 80 AD by a ban called 'birkat hamminim' seems to have had a major influence on its composition. The harsh polemics in ch 23 against the rabbis strengthens such an assumption. The rabbinic academy of Jamnia/Yavneh sat from about AD 75 to 90. Hence, we can reasonably situate the book between AD 80-90.

The book has 28 chapters: the genealogy and birth of Jesus (ch 1); the visit of the Magi, flight to Egypt, slaughter of the innocent, and return from Egypt (ch 2); the preaching of John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus (ch 3); the temptation, beginning of Galilean ministry, and call of the first disciples (ch 4); the Sermon on the Mount (chs 4-7); Jesus' healing ministry (chs 5-9); mission of the twelve Apostles (ch 10); rejection of Jesus (chs 11-12); parables about the kingdom of God (ch 13); healing ministry with various teachings (chs 14-17); social teachings (ch 18); healing ministry, parables, and teachings (chs 19-22); woes and lament (ch 23); eschatological discourse (chs 24-25); suffering and death of Jesus (chs 26-27); resurrection and the commission to the Apostles (ch 28).

The eschatological discourse of Jesus is full of apocalyptic features. He pronounces woes against the scribes and Pharisees (23:1-36); laments over Jerusalem (23:37-39); predicts the destruction of the Temple (24:1-14); speaks of the coming of the Son of Man (24:29-31); gives the example of the fig tree (24:32-35); tells about the end of the world as on a day and an hour not known to anybody (24:36-44); exhorts to be vigilant for the coming of the Son of Man (24:45-50); and describes the last judgement in which all people would receive according to their acts of commission or omission (25:31-46).

The Gospel According to St Luke (ch 21)

Luke, the author of the Gospel according to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, was a Syrian from Antioch. His Gospel presupposes that the Jerusalem Temple had been destroyed (21:5-38). It does not mention anything about the persecution under Domitian (81-96) nor does it refer to the rift between the church and the synagogue after the decree of Jamnia. Therefore, it is reasonably presumed that the book must have been written about 80-85.

The Gospel according to Luke consists of 24 chapters: annunciation of the birth of John to Zechariah and of Jesus to Mary, the pronouncements of Elizabeth and Mary about Jesus' place in God's plan, the pronouncement of Zechariah of John's place in God's plan (ch 1); the pronouncement of the angel of the baby Jesus in the manger, the pronouncement of Zechariah of the baby Jesus brought to the Temple (ch 2); the preaching of John the Baptist, the baptism of Jesus (ch 3), Jesus' overcoming his temptations and his Galilean ministry (4:1-8:50); Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (8:51-19:27); Jesus in Jerusalem (19:28-21:38); the Last Supper, suffering and death (22:1-23:56); resurrection, promise of the Spirit, commissioning, and ascension (23:56-24:53).

As in Mk ch 13 and Mt chs 24-25, Lk ch 21, too, is clothed in apocalyptic imagery. Jesus exhorts his disciples to be steadfast (21:8-9); predicts cosmic disasters (21:10-11); foretells events that precede the end of the world: persecution of the Christians (21:12-19), and destruction of Jerusalem (21:20-24); again speaks of cosmic disasters (21:25-33); and exhorts his followers to be vigilant (21:34-36).

The First Letter of St Paul to the Thessalonians (4:13-5:11)

According to the Acts of the Apostles, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy came to Thessalonica, a port city in Macedonia, during Paul's Mission II. Paul's success in winning the Jews over to the new faith caused resentment among the Jews and they expelled them from the city. So, they came to Berea (Acts 17:1-

9). Due to the Jewish opposition in Berea, Paul had to move on to Athens (Acts 17:10-15). Later Silvanus and Timothy joined him there. Paul longed to visit Thessalonians but due to the strong opposition from the local Jewish population was unable to do so. He sent Timothy instead (I Thes 2:17-3:3) and moved on to Corinth. Timothy joined him there (Acts 18:5). Timothy's report of the Thessalonian community, the misunderstanding among them concerning the fate of the dead in particular (4:13), must have occasioned this letter. A majority of the Biblical scholars hold that this letter was written in 50 AD while a few date it a year later.

The I Letter to the Thessalonians contains five short chapters. The traditional salutation (1:1) followed by a lengthy thanksgiving (1:2-3:13) leads on to exhortation on chastity and on charity (4:1-12). Then we find Paul's eschatological discourse (4:13-5:11) followed by further exhortation to respect the order in the community (5:12-13) and assiduously carry out various functions (5:14:22). The letter ends with the final leavetaking (5:23-28).

It is the earliest written book of the NT and the eschatological expectation of the early Christian community, (4:13-5:11) couched in apocalyptic terminology bears ample proof of the popularity the genre enjoyed in the contemporary religious milieu. Paul uses this discourse allegedly to allay the fears of the Thessalonians and to clear some of their misconceptions with regard to the life after death. He speaks about the Parousia, that is, the Second Coming of Christ to judge the world (4:13-18) and the day of the Lord which will come like a thief in the night (5:1-11).

The First Letter of St Paul to the Corinthians (ch 15)

Paul himself informs us that he wrote this letter in the spring from Ephesus (16:8) but he does not mention the year. The suggested dates range from AD 52 to 57, and most scholars opt for the golden mean and suggest the spring of 54. The letter was written advising the Corinthians on a number of problems

they faced in their day to day life.

The letter is divided into 16 chapters. It begins with the typical Pauline greeting and thanksgiving (1:1-9). Then various issues are addressed: dissension and division in the community (1:10-4:21); sexual immorality (5:1-6:20); marriage and sex (7:1-9); marriage and divorce (7:10-16); partaking of food offered to idols (8:1-11:1); the conduct of liturgical gatherings (11:2-14:40); the resurrection of the body (15:1-58). The conclusion includes an appeal to contribute to the church in Jerusalem (16:1-4); Paul's travel plans (16:5-9); recommendations regarding Timothy, Apollos, the household of Stephanos (16:10-18), and the final leavetaking (16:19-24).

On arguing about the fact and necessity of bodily resurrection (ch 15), Paul makes use of apocalyptic imagery. He postulates the creed of the Church (15:1-11); delineates the Corinthians thesis (15:12-19) and counters it with his own (15:20-28); puts forward arguments for resurrection (15:29-34); describes the resurrected body (15:33-49); and dwells upon the need for transformation of the resurrected body (15:50-58). Mark the apocalyptic scenario in the last section:

Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised, and we shall be changed... When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

"Death is swallowed up in victory."

"O death, where is thy victory?"

O death, where is thy sting?"

The Non-Canonical Apocalyptic Literature

Many of the apocalypses that did not find official acceptance as sacred scripture seem to have been lost

or perished. The following list of the extant apocalypses and testaments containing apocalyptic sections will give us an idea of the popularity this genre enjoyed. Though the bulk of the literature was produced between 200 BC and 100 AD, it retained its appeal much longer. We have compositions well up to the 9th century AD, sporadic though.

The Enoch Literature

The genealogy of Adam places Enoch in the seventh generation. He was the father of Methuselah, the grand father of Noah (Gen ch 5). He "walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Gen 5:24). This idea of God having taken him also appears in the book of Sirach (44:16; 49:14). The mysterious disappearance of Enoch produced legends about him and his life-span of 365 years caused astronomical speculations. There are three books attributed to Enoch : The Ethiopic Enoch (also known as 1 Enoch or simply Enoch); the Slavonic Enoch (or 2 Enoch) and the Hebrew Enoch (or 3 Enoch).

1 Enoch or the Ethiopic Apocalypse of Enoch (2nd cent. BC to 1st cent. BC)

1 Enoch is divided into five sections: The Book of Watchers (chs 1-36); The Book of Parables or Similitudes (chs 37-71); The Astronomical Book of the Heavenly Luminaries (chs 72-82); The Book of Dreams (chs 83-90); and The Epistle of Enoch (chs 91-108). The first section has an introduction (chs 1-5) which describes the eschatological era and the final judgement of the righteous and the wicked, and a narrative (chs 6-36) which portrays the fallen angels (6:1-4), their corruption of all men, Enoch's unsuccessful intercession on their behalf, a prediction of their doom, and Enoch's tour of the earth, sheol and heaven. The second section deals with the coming judgement of the righteous and the wicked; the Messiah, the Son of Man, the Righteous One, and the Elect One; the exposition of additional heavenly secrets; the measuring of Paradise; the resurrection of the righteous; and the punishment of the fallen angels. The third section concerns the reckoning of time by the sun, the nature of solar year of 364 days, and the cosmic disorders of the last days. The fourth section consists of two visions of future

history (from Enoch's antediluvian viewpoint) of the world and Israel: the coming of the deluge as punishment for sins, and the history of Israel from Adam to the Maccabees presented in symbolic imagery - oxen symbolise patriarchs; sheep, the faithful Israelites; beasts and birds of prey, the heathen oppressors of Israel; a great horned sheep, a rising Jewish leader; a white bull with great horns, the Messiah. There is also additional material on fallen angels, the throne of judgement, and the new Jerusalem. The fifth section recapitulates the theme of the spiritual blessedness of the righteous and the sorrowful end of the wicked. Woes are pronounced on the sinners who are repeatedly identified with the exploitative wealthy and oppressive powers. It has a summary of events that would unfold upon the earth during ten world weeks (91:12-17 and 93:1-10).

The 2 Enoch or the Slavonic Apocalypse of Enoch (late 1st century AD)

2 Enoch is an amplification of Genesis 5:21-32: it covers events from the life of Enoch to the onset of the Flood. The first part (chs 1-68) depicts the journey of Enoch through the seven heavens and his return to his family to report what he saw. The second part (chs 69-73) deals briefly with the life of his descendants, Methuselah and Nir, and ends with the story of the birth and ascension of Melchizedek, just before the Flood.

The 3 Enoch or the Hebrew Apocalypse of Enoch (5th to 6th cent AD)

3 Enoch is an account of R Ishmael's journey into heaven, his visions of God's throne and chariot, his receiving revelations from archangel Metatron, and his vision of the upper world. The book may be divided into four sections: The Ascension of Ishmael (chs 1-2); The Exaltation of Enoch (chs 3-16); The Heavenly Household (chs 17-40); and The Sights of Heaven (chs 41-48). The Ascension of Ishmael concerns Ishmael's prayer to God when challenged by the guardian angels at the gate of the seventh heaven; God's response in sending the angel Metatron; Ishmael's entry into seventh heaven with the help of Metatron; and his joining the angels in singing the sanctus. The Exaltation of Enoch consists of the

disclosure of the identity of Metatron as Enoch; his transfer from earth to heaven, his transformation in mind and body and his elevation above all angels; the description of his insignia and the heavenly duties he performs. The Heavenly Household portrays the organisation and the activities of the heavenly world: angelic hierarchies, a session of the heavenly assize, performance of the climactic act of the angelic liturgy - the recitation of the celestial sanctus. The Sights of Heaven contains the cosmological, eschatological and psychological marvels: the cosmological mysteries include the cosmic letters by which the universe was created, and the cosmic 'opposites' (such as fire and water) held in balance by the power of divine names; the eschatological secrets comprise of the whole course of human history from Adam to the coming of the Messiah represented on the curtain before God's face, and the right hand of God waiting for the appointed time of Israel's redemption; the psychological wonders consist of the souls of the righteous enjoying God's presence while those of the wicked in Sheol, the souls of the patriarchs interceding for Israel, the souls of the stars, and the souls of the angels banished from God's presence and imprisoned behind walls of fire for their failure in the performance of the sanctus.

Sibylline Oracles (mid 2nd cent BC to 7th cent AD)

The Sibylline Oracles are preserved in 14 books. They are dominated by eschatology: the destruction of the world by fire, the inauguration of a glorious kingdom and the transformation of the earth. The periodisation of history is another remarkable feature of the Sibylline Oracles. The history is divided into ten generations. They also incorporate popular legends, such as the legend about Nero returning as an eschatological adversary at the head of a Parthian army. The Christian books exhibit a keen interest in resurrection and after life. The Oracles, in general, denounce idolatry, greed, and sexual immorality, homosexuality in particular.

The first two books constitute one unit. The work consists of an original Jewish oracle and an extensive Christian redaction. The Jewish oracle was structured on the division of the world history into ten

generations. The first seven generations are preserved without any interpolation (1:1-323). Then a Christian passage on the incarnation and life of Christ follows (1:324-400). The original sequence (2:6-33) follows a transitional passage (2:1-5). There is no reference to the 8th and 9th generation, indicating that a considerable portion of the work is lost.

The third book contains 829 verses which may be divided into three sections: verses 1-96 probably constitute the conclusion of a different book; verses 97-349 and 489-829 contain oracles about the fall of tower of Babylon, war of the Titans against Cronos and his sons; and a list of world kingdoms; and verses 350-488 consist of oracles against various nations. The eschatology of the book is political in character and revolves around the expectation of an ideal king or kingdom, in terms of renewal of the earth and the exaltation of the Temple (701-761; 767-795). This ideal rule is preceded by chaos and tribulations (611-615; 660-701) and the destruction of adversaries by God.

The fourth book has 192 verses. They consist of various oracles that may be divided into two sections. The first (49-101) speaks the twofold division of history into ten generations and four kingdoms: the Assyrians will rule for six generations, the Medes for two, and the Persians for one. The Macedonian empire is the tenth generation as well as the fourth kingdom. There is also a reference to Rome and its downfall (145-148) which probably is a later addition as Rome is not mentioned in the numerical schema of history. The second relates to various events and legends (102-151) and the moral and religious outlook of the redactor (1-48; 152-172). The conclusion deals with the end-time (173-192).

The fifth book is made up of 530 verses. We may divide them into two sections: the review of history from Alexander to Marcus Aurelius, the emperors being referred to by gematria (1-51); and oracles against nations (52:434) showing a common scheme as oracle against nations, the return of Nero as an eschatological adversary, the coming of a saviour, and destruction, generally by fire. The conclusion

deals with the building of a temple to the one true God in Egypt and its destruction by the Ethiopians followed by God's judgement (493-511), and a battle of stars (512-530).

The sixth book is a hymn to Christ in 28 verses. It describes briefly the life of Christ, beginning with his divine origin. The last three verses is an apostrophe to the cross on which Jesus was crucified.

The seventh book has 162 verses containing loosely collected oracles. They deal with the Flood (7-15) and an eschatological scenario foretelling a conflagration, the everlasting punishment of the sinners, and the restoration of the earth (118-151), catastrophe against various nations and places (1-6; 16-23; 40-63; 96-117), rise of Rome after the fall of Macedonia (108-111) interspersed with eschatological passages about a conflagration (24-28), a messianic prophecy (29-39), the baptism of Jesus (64-75), and some ritual prescriptions (76-95).

The eighth book contains 500 verses which may be divided into two parts: 1-216 and 217-500. The former deals with political prophecies, specially directed against Rome. It begins with the fall of the tower of Babylon and a list of kingdoms annunciated in the third book vs 159-161 (1-16), and an admonition against greed (17-36). Now Rome becomes the target of the oracles: against idolatry (37-49), against Hadrian with a reference to Nero's return (50-72), woes to come upon Rome (73-130), the rule of the fifteenth king of Egypt (131-138), return to the Nero legend (139-159), oracles against various gentile nations (160-168), chaotic upheavals of the end-time (169-193), and the eschatological reign of a woman (194-216). The second section is centered on Christology. It begins with an acrostic poem on Christ (217-250): *Iesous Christos Theou Huios Soter Stauros* (Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour, Cross). There follow a long poem on Christ, sketching his earthly life (251-336); a description of eschatological upheavals (337-358); a speech of God emphasizing the denunciation of idolatry (359-428), a hymn in praise of God (429-455), the incarnation (456-479), and some ethical and ritual exhortations (480-500).

The last four books (11-14) outline history from the Flood to the Arab conquest, with a very brief conclusion with eschatological imagery (14:351- 361). Each book begins with similar introductory verses and ends with a prayer by the Sibyl (11:315-324; 12:293-299; 13:172-173), picking up the content from where the previous book left off. The eleventh book reviews history from the Flood to the death of Cleopatra: the kingdoms of Egypt (19-32), Persia (47-50), Media (51-60), Ethiopia (61-79), Assyria (79-105), Macedonia (186-223), Egypt (232-260), and Rome (261-314). There is a major digression after verse 105: on Romulus and Remus (109- 121), the Trojan War (122-143), Aenas (144-162), and Virgil (163-171).

The twelfth book of 299 verses, after an introduction (eleven verses directly borrowed from book 5), continues the political review of book 11. It begins with Augustus and ends with the death of Alexander Severus. The thirteenth book has 173 verses. It deals with a brief period: from Gordianus III (AD 240-244) to Odenath of Palmyra, during the reign of Gallienus (AD 260-268). The fourteenth book is a random collection of oracles. Further, as the text is hopelessly corrupt, not much importance is attached to this book. It is possible that vss 1-283 refer to Roman emperors but none can be identified with certainty. The rest of the book (284-361) deals with Egypt. The reference to a battle involving the Jews, Arabs, and 'Fair heads' (340-349) is interesting in that the last may be indicating Europeans (or Americans).

The Ezra Literature

In addition to the canonical book, there are five other apocryphal books ascribed to Ezra: the Fourth Book of Ezra, the Greek Apocalypse of Ezra, Vision of the Blessed Ezra, Questions of Ezra, and the Revelation of Ezra.

Fourth Book of Ezra (late 1st century AD)

The Fourth Book of Ezra is also known as 2 Esdras or IV Ezra. It has three sections: an introduction (chs 1-

2), the apocalypse of Ezra (chs 3-14) and the conclusion (chs 15-16). The introduction and the conclusion are Christian works appended to the apocalypse of Ezra, a Jewish composition. The introduction concerns with the call of Ezra (1:1-3); his censure of the Jews for not remaining faithful to God (1:4-2:32); his turning to the gentiles (2:33-41); his vision of a great multitude that stands on Mount Zion, each receiving a crown from 'the Son of God, whom they confessed in the world' (2:42-48).

The apocalypse consists of seven visions of Ezra (also called Salathiel) in Babylon. In the first vision (3:1-5:19), presented in a dialogue form, Ezra bewails the fate of his people and raises perplexing questions about the origin of sin and suffering and is assured that the end of the age is near; the vision concludes with the enumeration of the signs of the approaching end of the age. The second vision (5:21-6:34) contains a complaint that God has delivered his chosen people into the hands of the gentiles; Ezra's query about the lot of those who die before the end of the present age and an assurance that their lot will be similar to that of those living at the inauguration of the new age; and the signs of the end of the age. The third vision delineates the final judgement and the future state of the righteous and the wicked; Ezra's dilemma of reconciling God's mercy with the destruction of the wicked; his intercession on their behalf; an admonition to Ezra to ponder over his future rather than brood over the fate of sinners; and the recapitulation of signs which will precede the end of the world. The fourth vision (9:26- 10:59) portrays a woman in mourning for her only son and her sufferings; and the sudden transformation of this woman into a glorious city identified as heavenly Jerusalem in the day of salvation. The fifth vision (11:1- 12:39) depicts the future course of history by means of the allegory of the eagle rising from the sea: the eagle, Ezra is told, represents the Roman Empire, which will be punished by God's Messiah for persecuting his chosen people. The sixth vision (13:1-58) concerns the figure of a man rising from the sea and riding on the clouds leading a great army and destroying his adversaries with the fire issuing from his mouth. The final vision details the production of ninety four books - twenty four canonical and seventy apocryphal - by five men under dictation from Ezra according to the command of the Lord. The

conclusion (chs 15-16) concerns God's judgement against the nations, and exhortation for the people of God to put their trust in the Lord.

The Greek Apocalypse of Ezra (2nd to 9th century AD)

The Greek Apocalypse of Ezra has seven chapters containing the visions received by Ezra. They deal with Ezra's prayer, his being taken up into heaven, his intercession for the sinners who are being punished there, and God's answer that He rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked (ch 1); Ezra's remonstrance with God requesting God to be merciful to mankind, vision of judgement, and the signs of the end-time (chs 2-3); his descent into Tartarus where he sees Herod being punished, his descent into the bottom of Hell where he sees sinners of various crimes being punished, his vision of the Antichrist (ch 4); Ezra's journey into heaven where he learns about the creation of man, saints in heaven, certain cosmological secrets, and details of judgement (ch 5); Ezra's struggles with the angel for his own soul, God's comfort to him as death is near, his concluding prayer, death and burial, and a doxology (chs 6-7).

The Vision of the Blessed Ezra (4th to 7th century AD)

The Vision of the Blessed Ezra consists of sixty six verses. Ezra prays God for courage (1-2); has a series of visions at the fiery gates of hell (3-11); descends into Tartarus and sees the punishment of various types of sinners (12-55); enters into Paradise, entreats for the sinners, and is told that what they receive is commensurate with their works (56-66).

The Questions of Ezra (date unknown)

the Questions of Ezra also entitled, The questions of the Prophet Ezra of the Angel of the Lord concerning the Souls of Men is a dialogue between the prophet Ezra and the angel of the Lord on the fate of human souls after death. It survives in two small works of forty and ten verses, respectively. On questioning Ezra is informed that the righteous are destined for 'great joy and eternal life' while the sinners for

'the outer darkness and the eternal fire'. Then follows the seven steps to Divinity, and the freeing of the souls of sinners through expiatory prayers. The second document begins with the discussion about the destiny of the righteous and the sinners and concludes with the prediction of the resurrection and final judgement.

The Revelation of Ezra (before 9th century AD)

The Revelation of Ezra is a almanac describing the nature of the year, seasons, autumn, abundance of crops and cattle or famine, rainfall or drought, sickness or weal, etc., depending on the day of the week on which the year begins.

The Apocalypse of Zephaniah (1st century BC to 1st century AD)

A portion of the text of the Apocalypse of Zephaniah is missing. The missing pages probably describe the seer's heavenly journey. The existing text contains 12 chapters. They may be divided into two parts: The Travelogue (chs 1-9) and the Trumpet Scenes (chs 9-12). The Travelogue begins with a brief fragment mentioning a burial (ch 1). It is followed by scenes from some heavenly location above the city of Jerusalem. The seer witnesses scenes of a city life, discusses the nature of the endless light shining on the righteous, and sees men in torment (ch 2). Then, in the scenes from Mount Scir, he sees three men led by two angels; the angel accompanying him describes the manner in which the angels record the good and the evil deeds of men for the final judgement (ch 3). Next, Zephaniah has a vision of the terrifying angels who bring the souls of the wicked to their eternal punishment. He intercedes for them and his petition is heard (ch 4). Now the seer's attention is drawn to the gates and the city square. He also sees the transformation of his angelic guide (ch 5). Zephaniah turns back and beholds the Hades. He observes a sea of fire. He is confronted by the accuser holding the manuscript containing his sins and shortcomings. But the angel Ermiel comes to his rescue holding the manuscript of his good deeds (chs 6-7). The seer then is put in a boat to cross the river in a journey out

of Hades. Here he puts on angelic garments (ch 8). The Trumpet Scenes consist of the first trumpet heralding the seer's triumph over his accuser, the seer's wish to embrace the angel and the angel's conversation with the Old Testament luminaries (Abraham, Isaac, etc.) (ch 9); the second trumpet announcing the opening of heaven, the vision of the sea of fire in which the sinners are tormented, and the bodies with hair (ch 10); the third trumpet calling the saints for prayer followed by the intercession of a multitude for those in torment ch 11); and the fourth trumpet initiating a discussion on the end-time (ch 12).

Baruch Literature

Besides the deuterocanonical book of Baruch (1 Baruch), there are three apocryphal books of Baruch: 2 Baruch, 3 Baruch and 4 Baruch.

The 2 Baruch (early 2nd century AD)

The 2 Baruch, also known as the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch, consists of 87 chapters. They may be divided into 12 sections: the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (1:1-8:5); Baruch's Lament (9:1-12:4); a discussion on the usefulness of righteousness and on long life (12:5-20:4); announcement of twelve disasters, coming of the Anointed One, the resurrection of the dead and the final judgement (20:5-30:5); warning of imminent disasters (31:1-34:1); the vision of a forest and a plain surrounded by mountains, forest changing into a cedar, the vision of the vine and the spring, names of those who will live to see the fulfilment of this vision (35:1-43:3); Baruch's address to the people about God's judgement (44:1-46:7); Baruch's prayer expressing his faith that everything is determined by God (47:1-48:50); Baruch's enquiry about the appearance of the resurrected (49:1-52:7); Vision of a cloud pouring bright and dark waters alternately (53:1-74:4); Baruch's thanksgiving to God and address to the people on the salvation of the righteous (75:1-77:26); a letter to the nine and a half tribes exhorting the Jews of the Diaspora to be faithful to God.

The 3 Baruch (1st to 3rd century AD)

3 Baruch, also known as the Greek Apocalypse of Baruch, is a composition of 17 chapters. The first chapter contains Baruch's lament over the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the Lord sending him an angel to comfort him and guide him through the heavens. Baruch, then, is taken on a tour of five heavens by the angel (chs 2-16): in the first heaven, he sees a plain where those 'who built the tower of the war against God' were kept (ch 2); the second heaven is a prison for those who 'forced men and a multitude of women to make bricks' for the tower (ch 3); in the third heaven he is shown a snake, a sea, primal rivers, the Garden of Eden, the sun with the Phoenix, and the moon (chs 4- 9); the fourth heaven contains a pool and exotic birds as well as the souls of the righteous (ch 10); the fifth heaven with closed gates is the place where angels responsible for men bring the gifts from men to Michael who presents them to God (chs 11-16); the last chapter concerns Baruch's return to earth to tell his fellow men what he has seen in the heavens.

Apocalypse of Abraham (1st to 2nd century AD)

The Apocalypse of Abraham can be divided into two parts: Abraham's Youth (chs 1-8) and the Visions (chs 9-32). The first part concerns with Abraham's youth and his perception of idolatry. He concludes that his father's idols are not gods because some stone idols are crushed and a wooden idol is accidentally consumed by fire. Abraham prays to God to reveal himself; he hears God's voice instructing him to leave his father's house. The second part contains God's command to offer a sacrifice to him and a promise to "reveal great things" (9:6); Abraham's ascension to heaven (15:4); seven visions in heaven - the light and fiery angels (15:5-7), the fire (17:1-3), the throne (18:1-14), the firmaments (19:4-9), the world (21:2-7), the seven sins (24:3-25:2), and the destruction of the Temple (27:1-3); and God's announcement of judgement - punishment of the gentiles through ten plagues (chs 29-30) and the reward of the just (chs 31-32).

Testament of 12 Patriarchs (2nd century BC)

The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs claims to be the final utterances of the twelve sons of Jacob. It is composed on the model of Jacob's last words in Genesis 49. Just before his death each son of Jacob is depicted as gathering his offspring around him, reflecting on aspects of his life, confessing his misdeeds, exhorting his family to avoid his sins and lead a virtuous life, concluding with predictions about the future of Israel and instructions concerning his burial. In the process, each patriarch asks for special honour to be given to the tribes of Levi and Judah, the account in each case ends with a report of the burial of the patriarch. Most of the Testaments include a section in which the destiny of the nation is described in terms of the nation's sin, its exile as divine judgement, and its restoration in the eschatological times.

Treatise of Shem (1st century BC)

The Treatise of Shem contains twelve chapters, following the twelve signs of the zodiac running anticlockwise from Aries to Capricorn, but reversing the order of Pisces and Aquarius. History moves from the worst to the best, gradually, Aries representing the worst year and Pisces, the best: there will be peace and prosperity among men, and love and harmony among all the kings who are on the entire earth (11:8).

Apocalypse of Sedrach (2nd century to 5th century AD)

The Apocalypse of Sedrach (2nd to 5th century AD) has 16 chapters. It begins with a sermon by Sedrach on the necessity of genuine love on the model of the sacrifice of the son of God (ch 1). At the end of it he hears an angel's voice and is taken up into the presence of the Lord (ch 2). A discussion on how far man is responsible for the evil in the world follows (chs 3-8). In the end Sedrach pleads with God to be merciful to man. God directs his only begotten Son to take Sedrach's soul into paradise (ch 9). But Sedrach resists with a series of questions and lamentations highlighting his concern for sinners (chs 10-11). The Lord, then, promises that if a man who lives in sin for a hundred years repents for only three

years, he will be saved (ch 12). Sedrach is not satisfied. He, assisted by archangel Michael gradually persuades the Lord to reduce the period of repentance from three years to twenty days, and allows his soul to be taken to paradise (chs 13-16).

Apocalypse of Adam (1st to 4th century AD)

The Apocalypse of Adam a revelation in Gnostic overtones, which Adam communicates to his son, Seth. The book has eight chapters. Adam begins with the story of the fall of man (ch 1). In his fallen state, inferior to the creator God, devoid of the knowledge of the God of truth, he receives a revelation concerning the future from three mysterious strangers (ch 2). This revelation concerns the Flood (ch 3), the resettlement of the world (ch 4), a cosmic conflagration (ch 5), the persecution of 'the Illuminator of knowledge' by the powers of the world (ch 6). There follows a long poetic passage about the origin of the Illuminator of knowledge: erroneous myths on the part of the thirteen kingdoms (7:1-48) but true knowledge on the part of the descendants of Seth (7:49-52). Then all people realize their error and acknowledge the supremacy of the Gnostics (8:1-8), which is confirmed by a voice from above (8:9-15). The conclusion equates baptism with the 'secret knowledge' (gnosis) (8:16-17).

Apocalypse of Elijah (1st to 4th century AD)

The Apocalypse of Elijah contains five chapters. The first chapter is a prophetic homily encouraging fasting and prayer. The second chapter describes the historical events preceding the coming of the Antichrist (2:2-28, 41-53) interrupted by a lament for Egypt (2:29-38) and the announcement of the appearance of the 'lawless one' (2:39-40). The third chapter announces the advent of the 'son of lawlessness' (3:1) and goes on to narrate the signs of the coming of the true Christ (3:2-4); the works of the Antichrist (3:5-13); the physical characteristics of the Antichrist (3:14-18). The Chapter four is an account of the martyrdom of Tabitha (4:1-6), Elijah and Enoch (4:7-19), persecution of the righteous (4:20-29), and the martyrdom of the sixty righteous men (4:30-31). The fifth chapter portrays the denunciation of the

Antichrist by many and the saving by Christ of those who are sealed (5:1-6), cosmic signs and the rebuke of the Antichrist by the misled (5:7-14), the Antichrist's lament of his end, pursuit of the saints, and the fight against the angels (5:15-21), the cosmic fire (5:22-23), the coming of the judgement (5:24-31), the execution of the Antichrist (5:32-35). The chapter concludes with the description of the thousand-years reign of Christ (5:36-39).

Apocalypse of Daniel (9th century AD)

The Apocalypse of Daniel seems to be primarily dependent on the Apocalypse for its language and imagery. It has fourteen chapters which may be divided into two major sections. The first (chs 1-7) is based on the historical events of the Byzantino-Arab wars of the eighth century and their aftermath leading up to the coronation of Charlemagne in 800 AD. The second section (chs 8-14) deals with the Antichrist, his origin and personal characteristics, his rise to power as king and messiah of the Jewish nation, his brief reign abruptly ended by the coming of the day of judgement and the appearance of Christ.

Testament of Job (1st century BC to 1st century AD)

The Testament of Job is divided into 53 chapters. The prologue (ch 1) gives the title and setting of the book. Job gathers his children around him for last words of advice and for the distribution of his estate. The epilogue (chs 51-53) delineates the death, and burial of the protagonist. The main corpus (chs 2-50) may be divided into four sections: Job and the revealing angel (chs 2-5), Job and the Satan (chs 6-27), Job and the three kings (chs 28-45), and Job and his three daughters (chs 46-50). The first deals with Job's perplexity over idolatry (ch 2-3), angel's disclosure of calamities (ch 4), and Job's destruction of the idol's shrine. The second deals with the consequent attack on Job by Satan disguised as a beggar (chs 6-8) seeking to take advantage of Job's piety and generosity (chs 9-15), Job's tragic losses (chs 16-26), and Job's triumph over Satan. The third narrates the arrival of the three kings (chs 28-30), Eliphaz' laments

over Job's losses (chs 31-34), Baldad's dialogue with Job (35:1-38:5), Sophar's offer of the royal physician (38:6-8), burial and death of Sitis, Job's wife (chs 39-40), Elihu's speech (ch 41), Job's intercession for the kings (ch 42), a curse against Elihu (ch 43), Job's recovery (ch 44), and Job's final counsel and division of inheritance among his sons (ch 45). The fourth describes Job's handing over a magical cord to each of his daughters, which makes them lose interest in the mundane things and speak in the language of angels.

Testament of Abraham (1st to 2nd century AD)

The Testament of Abraham exists in two texts, the longer one with twenty chapters and the shorter, eight. The events preceding the death of Abraham is the setting of this work. When it was time for Abraham to die, God sends archangel Michael to him to inform him to prepare for his death and to make a will (ch 1). Archangel Michael goes to Abraham and he is looked after by Abraham (chs 2-5). Sarah recognises the guest by his speech and informs Abraham (ch 6). Isaac sees a vision and is afraid. The Archangel Michael, while interpreting the vision, conveys the message he had for Abraham. But Abraham refuses to go with him (ch 7). Michael reports the matter to God who sends him again to Abraham to convince him of the fact that all have to die (ch 8). Abraham listens to Michael but requests that he be shown all the inhabited world first (ch 9). Michael takes Abraham on such a tour. Abraham, seeing people committing various sins, calls down death upon them. God immediately commands Michael to stop the tour because He is compassionate to sinners (ch 10). Now Abraham is conducted to the place of judgement to witness the fate of souls once they depart from their bodies, so that he may be kind towards sinners. Abraham learns of a threefold trial of souls: by fire, by record, and by balance; and of a threefold judgement: by Abel, by the twelve tribes of Israel, and, finally, by God (chs 12-13). Moved by what he sees, Abraham intercedes for a soul judged to be neither wicked nor good, and pleads for those whom he had caused to die. God saves the former and restores the latter (ch 14). Abraham is, then, taken back home but he still refuses to surrender his soul to Michael (ch 15). God finally sends Death who shows

Abraham his ferocity and takes his soul by deception (16:1-20:9). The soul of Abraham is conducted to heaven by angels (20:10-15).

Testament of Isaac (2nd century AD)

The Testament of Isaac is made up of narrations, and speeches of the patriarch Isaac. After the Trinitarian formula is stated, Isaac delivers a brief homily on the futility of worldly life and the glorious eternal reward promised by God (ch 1). God sends the archangel Michael to tell Isaac of his approaching death. Isaac is willing to go but is concerned about Jacob. The angel assures him that Jacob will flourish and twelve tribes will come forth from him, and departs (ch 2). Isaac informs Jacob what he learnt from the archangel. Jacob is disturbed. He wants to accompany his father. Isaac explains to him that God's decrees are final and informs Jacob of his great ancestry from Adam on, and of his great future as the progenitor of the twelve tribes, and of Jesus, the Messiah (ch 3). The narrator, then, dwells on Isaac's ascetic life: his frequent fasting and praying, abstention from meat and fruit, his refusal to sleep on a bed, etc. Then we find a lengthy homily of Isaac to the crowd that had gathered, on the obligation to be devout, specially to priests. After this, an angel comes and takes Isaac for a preliminary visit to the next world during which he is shown hell and some of the terrifying tortures inflicted on sinners. Soon he declares that he cannot endure the sight of the horrifying tortures any more. Then the angel takes him to heaven. In heaven, he sees his father Abraham with many saints. They lead him up to a curtain behind which is the throne of God. God speaks a few words of welcome to Isaac but most of the conversation is between God and Abraham. God lays stress on his being very compassionate and forgiving to all earnestly striving to lead a good life. At the end of the conversation, God orders Michael to bring a delegation of angels and saints together with the chariot of seraphim. God mounts the chariot and they descend, with the cherubim and angels in the lead, to bring Isaac back. Jacob is again disturbed and needs to be reassured (ch 6). Then the Lord takes Isaac's soul, white as snow, to heaven in the chariot, with the choir of cherubim and angels leading the procession (ch 7). The narration concludes with a

description of the happiness in heaven, an exhortation to the reader to celebrate the special day of Isaac (ch 8), and a final thanksgiving to God (ch 9).

Testament of Jacob (2nd to 3rd century AD)

The Testament of Jacob contains 8 chapters. It has a similar structure as that of the Testament of Isaac. After stating the Trinitarian formula, the narrator takes up the sending of the archangel Michael to inform Jacob that his death is at hand. Jacob expresses his readiness to die, now that he has seen his son, Joseph in Egypt. Another angel appears and identifies himself as Jacob's guardian angel who had saved him from Laban, Esau, and various dangers (ch 2). The angel departs. Jacob's household gathers around him and express their sadness (ch 3). After this, Jacob makes Joseph promise that he would take his body back to the land of Canaan to be buried in the ancestral tomb. Then there is an account of the blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh (ch 4), followed by a brief vision of the blessing on his twelve sons. Then, Jacob is taken on a preliminary tour of the next world, first to hell where he witnesses the horrifying torture of sinners and then to heaven where he sees the happiness of the righteous. He returns to the earth and dies at the age of 147 years. The Lord and his angels come down and take his soul to heaven. Jacob's body is embalmed (ch 5). After many days of mourning his body is brought to Canaan in a great procession and buried at Mamre (ch 6). The book ends with the exhortations: to read the Torah, imitate the patriarchs, pray, fast, and give alms, and to honour the memory of the patriarchs (chs 7-8).

Testament of Moses (1st century AD)

The Testament of Moses is the farewell exhortation of Moses to his successor Joshua just before the Israelites entered the Promised Land. A part of the document is lost. The extant work has ten chapters. Moses calls Joshua and entrusts him with the task of leading the Israelites into the Promised Land (ch 1). Then Moses briefly outlines the history of Israel: the conquest, the period of the Judges, the united kingdom of Israel, and the divided kingdoms (ch 2). After this Moses predicts the fall of Jerusalem,

and the reunion of all Israel in the land of exile (ch 3). Next, is the return from the exile and rebuilding Jerusalem (ch 4). Then follows the unfaithfulness of Israel: their apostasy (ch 5), and its consequence: partial destruction of the Temple, and the persecution of the faithful (ch 6). Chapter 7 continues the thought in chapter 5, and chapter 8, chapter 6. The historical sketch ends with the account of the resolve of Taxo, a Levite, and his seven sons to die rather than betray their ancestral faith (ch 7). Next comes the eschatological hymn depicting the destruction of the evil one by Israel's guardian angel, cataclysmic cosmic events, and the restoration of Israel in the end-time (ch 10). There follows a dialogue between Moses and Joshua in which the latter questions his ability to succeed Moses, and laments that Moses' death will encourage Israel's enemies to attack them (ch 11). Moses reassures Joshua that it was God's will and mercy that protected the people, and the same will continue during Joshua's days, and, in spite of all odds, a nucleus of God's people will survive in accordance with the covenant (ch 12). The rest of the work is lost.

Testament of Solomon (1st to 3rd century AD)

The Testament of Solomon is a folktale about the building of the Temple of Jerusalem combined with the ancient lore about magic, astrology, angelology, demonology, and medicine. It begins with the story of a boy, Solomon's favourite, whose soul was sucked out of him by a demon, Ornias. In response to Solomon's prayer on behalf of the boy, Archangel Michael gives him a magic ring which enables Solomon to summon demons, interrogate them on their plans and activities, and make them work in the construction of the Temple. It is through such interrogations that Solomon learns about Ornias and his nature. With the help of the archangel Quriel, Ornias is sentenced to work in a quarry (chs 1-3). Solomon summons Beelzeboul who shows him Onoskelis, a cliff-dwelling satyra. She is commanded to spin hemp for the construction ropes (ch 4). Next comes Asmodeus, the Great Bear constellation, who makes men mad, plots against newlyweds, spreads madness among women, and commits murders. He was controlled by archangel Raphael and smoke from burning liver and gall of a fish (ch 5). Then Solomon

learns all about Beelzeboul and commands him to cut marble (ch 6). The wind demon Lix Tetrax is assigned the work of hurling stones to the heights of the Temple for the workers (ch 7). The seven heavenly bodies (Deception, Strife, Fate, Error, Power, and The Worst) are made to dig the foundation for the Temple (ch 8). The headless demon, Murder, is ordered to stay with Beelzeboul (ch 9). The doglike demon, Scepter, is asked to provide an emerald stone for the Temple (ch 10). The legions are asked to carry wood for the Temple and the Lion-Shaped Demon, to saw it (ch 11). The three-headed Head of the Dragons is ordered to make bricks for the Temple (ch 12). The female demon, Obyzouth, is bound and hung in front of the Temple (ch 13). The Winged Dragon is assigned the work of cutting marble for the Temple (ch 14). Enepsigos, another female demon, is sealed with a triple-link chain. Then Solomon explains that he wrote his Testament in order to make known to the Israelites the form and power of various demons and the angels who controlled them (ch 15). Then the cruel sea-horse demon, Kunopegos, is sealed and stored away (ch 16). The lecherous spirit born of a giant is locked up (ch 17). The thirty-six heavenly bodies are ordered to bear water for the Temple (ch 18). Now there is a description of various kings, including the queen of Sheba, giving riches to Solomon (ch 19). The demon Ornias tells Solomon how the demons overhear God's decisions in heaven (ch 20). After this the contribution of the queen of Sheeba, ten thousand shekels for the Temple is mentioned (ch 21). Now Adarkes, King of Arabia, requests Solomon's help against the wind demon, Ephippas. Solomon sends his servant boy to Arabia. The servant boy entraps him in a leather flask and brings him to Jerusalem (ch 22). He is requested to put the corner stone of the Temple (ch 23). Ephippas and the demon of the Red Sea bring back the pillar of air from the Red Sea and hold it in place to this day (ch 24). On interrogation of the demon of the Red Sea, Abezethibou, Solomon learns that he was the one who was responsible for the events against Moses and the Israelites in Egypt. He is adjured to hold the pillar (ch 25). The last chapter narrates Solomon's love affair with the Shummanite woman, the sacrifice of five locusts to the foreign gods, Raphan and Moloch to have her, building of temples for her idols, and the consequent departure of the glory of God from Solomon.

Testament of Adam (2nd to 5th century AD)

The Testament of Adam is divided into three sections: the Horarium (hours of the day and night), the Prophecy, and the Hierarchy. The first two are ascribed to Adam. Adam speaks to his son Seth, listing the hours of the day and night and telling him which portion of the world worships God at a particular hour (chs 1-2). The Prophecy includes Adams disclosure to Seth about the creation and fall of man, the Flood, the birth, passion, and death of Christ, and the consummation of the world. The section ends with Seth's attestation of the testament and of the burial of Adam in the Cave of Treasures (ch 3). The Hierarchy (ch 4) deals with the function of the nine orders of the heavenly beings (angels, archangels, archons, authorities, powers, dominions, thrones, seraphim, and cherubim).