

## CHAPTER 3 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT FROM PROPHETIC TO APOCALYPTIC

The apocalyptic literature arose in Israel as a crisis-management endeavour to reassure and strengthen the Jews by instilling in them a strong faith that God would intervene to vindicate them and punish their oppressors. The traumatic experience of the exile which had the most profound effect on the thought patterns and lifestyle of the people had to be countered with equally strong and effective message of consolation and rehabilitation. The prophets had to speak with a totally different diction and tenor. Their style of speaking and writing, naturally, underwent a dramatic change: the prophetic preaching was transformed into apocalyptic writing. In order to put this significant transformation in perspective, it is necessary to examine three major periods of Israelite history: the late pre-exilic, the exilic and the post-exilic.

**The Late Pre-exilic Period (640-587 BC):** The late pre-exilic period is characterised by two important events: the prophetic revival inspired by Jeremiah and the Deuteronomic reform spearheaded by Josiah.

**The Prophetic Revival:** The death of Ashurbanipal (668-633 BC) sounded the death knell of the mighty Assyrian empire. His successors could not arrest the death and destruction unleashed by the invaders: the Scythians from the north, the Medes from the southeast and the Babylonians from the southwest. This tumultuous political upheaval is sounded in the preaching of the prophets Zephaniah (640-630), Nahum (663-612) and Jeremiah (627-587). They reintroduced the theme of the 'day of the Lord' first heard about a century ago. Amos (786-746 BC) had announced it as a day of 'darkness and not light' (5:18) and Isaiah (783-687), as that day when men will 'hide in the dust from the terror of the Lord' (2:10-11). Zephaniah relates it to widespread destruction (1:1-3). Nahum calls it a day of salvation to Judah (1:12-13; 2:2) but of complete destruction to the enemies of Judah (1:8-10; 2:8ff). This note of God destroying all His adversaries became a key theme among the apocalyptists. They announced cosmic wars and the

establishment of Yahweh's universal rule.

Another important development during this period was the antiquarian interest. Nebuchadnezzar (604-562 BC) used the long-discontinued script and language of early Babylonia for some of the royal inscriptions. Nabonidus (556-539 BC) attempted to revive the primitive cult and ritual while in Egypt, the kings of the 26th Dynasty (660-525) tried to recapture the glory of the Pyramid Age (2800-2400 BC). This interest in the ancient personages and events is also reflected in the apocalyptic writings.

Jeremiah who exercised a tremendous influence on the apocalyptists, was, in many ways, the opposite of the apocalyptic. The "I" is predominant in his discourses; the apocalyptists, on the other hand, assumed fictitious names. Jeremiah dealt with individual persons and particular events; the apocalyptists assumed cosmic dimensions:

a thousand thousands served him,

and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him (Dan 7:10b).

But it was his insistence on the cosmic effect of Judah's sins that became a take off for the apocalyptic writing. The following lines give a graphic description of the cosmic desolation:

I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void;

and to the heavens, and they had no light.

I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking,

and all the hills moved to and fro.

I looked, and lo, there was no man,

and all the birds of the air had fled.

I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert,

and all its cities were laid in ruins

before the Lord, before his fierce anger. (Jer 4:23-26)

He also speaks of God as the creator of the whole universe:

It is he who made the earth by his power,  
who established the world by his wisdom,  
and by his understanding stretched out the heavens. (Jer 10:12)

The second factor in Jeremiah's preaching to exercise considerable influence on the apocalyptists was his recognition of individual responsibility:

In those days they shall no longer say:

'The fathers have eaten sour grapes,  
and the children's teeth are set on edge.'

But every one shall die for his own sin; each man who eats sour grapes,  
his teeth shall be set on edge. (Jer 31:29-30)

and that it was not enough to be an Israelite to inherit God's blessing:

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke,.. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they will be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. (Jer 31:31-34)

The same idea appears in Ezekiel also (Ez 18:2; 36:26; 37:26).

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. (Ez 36:26-27)

Of course, the treatment of this subject differed with the apocalyptic writers but they did insist upon the involvement of the whole universe in the new creation.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, unfulfilled prophecies too had a major impact on the development of the apocalyptic. The 'seventy years' (Jer 25:12; 29:10) occur repeatedly in apocalyptic works (Zech 1:12; 7:2, Dan 9:2; Enoch 85-90) and is a source of quandary and speculation. The apocalyptists sought to look more deeply into the book of divine secrets when the fulfilment was delayed.

**Josiah's Deuteronomic Reform:** The "Book of the Law" (Deuteronomy) was discovered in the Temple in 621 BC. Josiah's religious reform was based on this book. Hence, the epithet 'deuteronomic'. This reform had political overtones. It amounted to an assertion of independence from Assyria. It was in the 'eighth year of his reign,' (632) i.e., just one year after the death of Ashurbanipal, that Josiah 'began to seek the God of David his father; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, and the graven and the molten images...' (2 Chr 34:3ff). The same account is also found in 2 Kings chs 22-23.

Three characteristic features of the deuteronomic movement, clearly evident in the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings, reappear in the apocalyptic writings: a theology of history, an actualisation of the past and a strong antipathy to the Jerusalem Zadokite priesthood.

The deuteronomic theology may be summed up as sin - punishment - repentance - deliverance. Israelites were to worship Yahweh and shun other gods.

But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the Lord; for he is a holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good." And the people said to

Joshua, "Nay; but we will serve the Lord." Then Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him." And they said, "We are witnesses." He said, "Then put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the Lord, the God of Israel." And the people said to Joshua, "The Lord our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey." So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made statutes and ordinances for them at Shechem. (Jos 24:19-24)

But the people broke the covenant and incurred God's anger.

And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals; and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; they went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were round about them, and bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger. They forsook the Lord, and served the Baals and the Ashtaroath. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them; and he sold them into the power of their enemies round about, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had warned, and as the Lord had sworn to them; and they were in sore straits (Jgs 2:11-15).

The same theme is repeated in 2 Kings: Ahaz did what was evil in the sight of the Lord (ch 17). The chs 27-28 of the book of Deuteronomy has a summary of blessings and curses associated with the fidelity and infidelity to Yahweh.

"And if you obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments which I command you this day, he Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God. Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your beasts, the increase of your cattle, and

the young of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading-trough. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out..." (Deut 28:1-14)

"But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command you this day, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading-trough. Cursed shall be the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your cattle, and the young of your flock. Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out..." (Deut 28:15-68)

But whenever the people repented and cried out to the Lord, he delivered them from the hands of their oppressors.

Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the power of those who plundered them. Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them. (Jgs 2:16,18)

A similar pattern is discernible in the apocalyptic literature. The apocalyptic style of curses and blessings is reflected in Jesus' eschatological discourse in Matthew chs 23-25, too.

"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who enter to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves... You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth ... O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you!..." (Mt 23:13- 39).<sup>2</sup>

The deuteronomic penchant to view the present as the actualisation of the the past is reflected in the interpretation of the immediate event of salvation as the renewal of the Sinai Covenant.

And Moses summoned all Israel, and said to them, "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I speak in your hearing this day, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them. The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. Not with our fathers did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive this day .... (Deut 5:1-5).

The various 'statutes and ordinances' of the past are concrete acts of help from God (Deut 1:21,31; 4:1-8; 8:1-5); God is awesome and inscrutable (Deut 4:32-36; 5:22-24; 10:14,21) but nothing is so mysterious as his goodness and love (Deut 4:31,37; 6:4-12; 7:6-9; 10:15). The apocalyptists lacked this tenderness but insisted on the awesome presence of God; they spoke of the transformation of the world into the promised paradise and saw it as the renewal of the past salvific acts.

Finally, the antagonistic attitude of the deuteronomic movement toward the Jerusalem priesthood has left its stamp on the apocalyptic spirit and style. Josiah, in his efforts to renew the religious life of Judah, made use of the legislation, traditions and personnel of the kingdom of Israel. In keeping with the liberal tendencies of Deuteronomy, he wanted to open the priesthood to the levites.

"The Levitical priests, that is, all the tribe of Levi, shall have no portion or inheritance with Israel; they shall eat the offerings by fire to the Lord, and his rightful dues... For the Lord your God has chosen him out of all your tribes to stand and minister in the name of the Lord, him and his sons forever. And if a levite comes from any of your towns out of all Israel,... then he may minister in the name of the Lord his God, like all his fellow levites who stand to minister there before the Lord."  
(Deut 18:1-7)

But Ezekiel, Zechariah and other early representatives of the apocalyptic movement, being the members

of the Zadokite priesthood of Jerusalem - Solomon had replaced Abiathar with Zadok (I Kgs 2:27,35) - opposed it.

"But the Levites who went far from me, going astray from me after their idols when Israel went astray, shall bear their punishment... They shall not come near to me, to serve me as priest, nor come near any of my sacred things and the things that are most sacred... But the Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept the charge of my sanctuary when the people of Israel went astray from me, shall come near to me to minister to me; and they shall attend to me to offer me the fat and the blood, says the Lord God; they shall enter my sanctuary, and they shall approach my table, to minister to me, and they shall keep my charge." (Ez 44:10, 13, 15-17)

After 250 BC, however, the apocalyptic movement no longer found leadership among the Jerusalem priests who became more and more conservative. But Pharisees (a lay group advocating rigorous legalism originated about 140 BC) and the Qumran community continued the apocalyptic beliefs in angels, cosmic war and world transformation.<sup>3</sup>

**The Exilic Period (587-539 BC):** In exile, with nothing but the word of God (Torah) and the threat of the persecuted prophets, the people took a hard look at their past. Their realistic and genuine reflection echoes in the writings of Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah.

**Ezekiel:** Both in the first part of his book, where his prophetic office predominates (ch 1-24, 33-37), and the last part, the priestly concern is more manifest (ch 40-48), Ezekiel speaks, acts, and writes as an apocalypticist: the enigmatic vagueness of his style, the juxtaposition of the weird signs and symbols, the angelic mediators explaining the visions and the theme of astounding reversal from total destruction to complete renewal are striking.

Ezekiel not only spoke but also acted enigmatically. In his actions, he himself was "a sign for the house of Israel"(Ez 4:2, 12:6,11; 24:24,27).

"In their sight you shall lift the baggage upon your shoulder, and carry it out in the dark; you shall cover your face, that you may not see the land; for I have made you a sign for the house of Israel... Say, 'I am a sign for you: as I have done, so shall it be done to them; they shall go into exile, into captivity.'"

(Ez 12:6,11)

He cut his hair, burnt one-third of it, kept another third within the city and struck it with a sword, and let the rest be scattered by the wind (ch 5). These curious actions performed in silence became all the more terrifying when explained : "This is Jerusalem !" (Ez 5:5)

Ezekiel's style of writing, too, is predominantly apocalyptic. He clothes his ideas in the imagery of very ancient, sacred traditions: In chapter 1 he uses the 'Cherubim' tradition of Genesis (3:24) and Exodus (37:7) but the description here is elaborate and frightening; even Noah, Daniel and Job, the righteous trio would not be able to help others during the time of desolation (14:12ff); the creation story of Gen 2:2-3:24 finds its overtones in Ez 28:11-19; Ezekiel prophesies against Gog of Magog (38:1- 39:6).<sup>4</sup>

What made Ezekiel change his apocalyptic style of action into the apocalyptic form of writing ? We can discern two compelling causes of this change: influence of the visions of the earlier prophets and his own ecstatic experience. Amos had a series of visions accompanying his commissioning: of locusts (7:1-3); of fire (7:4-6); of the plummet (7:7-9); of the fruit basket (8:4-14) and of the altar (9:1-6). So did Isaiah. He saw the heavenly court (ch 6). Secondly, Ezekiel's visions described in chs 1-3, 8-11, and 37 must have had a tremendous influence on him.

Ezekiel as a priest of Jerusalem exercised considerable influence on the apocalyptic literature. War

between Yahweh and his world-wide enemies is a theme common to both ancient liturgy and the apocalyptic literature. The ancient liturgy presided over by the priests celebrated Yahweh's victory in liturgical settings, as depicted in psalms (Ps 7:6-9; 9:5-8; 18; 82; 93; 95, etc.)

Thou hast rebuked the nations, thou hast destroyed the wicked;  
thou hast blotted out their name for ever and ever.

The enemy have vanished in everlasting ruins;  
their cities thou hast rooted out;  
the very memory of them has perished.

But the Lord sits enthroned forever,  
he has established his throne for judgement;  
and he judges the world with righteousness,  
he judges the people with equity. (Ps 9:5-8)

The apocalyptists envisaged an eschatological struggle between good and evil, conducted almost in terms of a liturgical ceremony, with the final victory centered in Jerusalem. The books of Zechariah and Joel clearly bring out this phenomenon (Zech 2:5-9; 3:1-10; 4:1-3, 11-14; 8; 9:8,9-10; 12-14).

'...For I will be to her a wall of fire round about, says the Lord, and I will be the glory within her.'

Ho! ho! Flee from the land of the north, says the Lord; for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heavens, says the Lord. Ho! Escape to Zion, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon. For thus said the Lord of hosts, after his glory sent me to the nations who plundered you, for he who touches you touches the apple of his eye: "Behold, I will shake my hand over them, and they shall become plunder for those who served them..." (Zech 2:5-9)

"And in that day

the mountains shall drip sweet wine,  
and the hills shall flow with milk,

and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water;  
and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord  
and water the valley of Shittim..." (Joel 3:18-21)

These struggles are often described in mythological terms. The post-exilic Jews were narrow-minded and chauvinistic.

Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the Lord, the God of Israel, they approached Zerubabel and the heads of fathers' houses and said to them, "Let us build with you; for we worship your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, who brought us here." But Zerubabel, Joshua, and the rest of the heads of fathers' houses in Israel said to them, "You have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the Lord, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us." (Ezra 4:1-5)

It must have been Ezekiel's use of mythological allusions - cherubim (chs 1-3), garden of Eden (28:11-19) and the giants of primeval age (chs 38-39) that gave legitimacy to the use of mythological elements in the apocalyptic literature without any eyebrows being raised. Ezekiel was also instrumental in the continuity of the P tradition of the Pentateuch - scholars see a definite Ezekielian touch in the closing chapter of Leviticus (ch 26). This factor is important because the abundant use of Pentateuch in apocalyptic literature: the creation story, names of pre and post-diluvian patriarchs, the disappearance of Enoch, the universal covenant replacing the Sinai covenant and the tables of nations are the apocalyptists' favourites.

**Deutero-Isaiah:** The influence of Deutero-Isaiah (chs 40-55) on the post-exilic thought does not seem to be great, though he is the other great prophet of the exile. It may be due to the nonrealisation of his utopian dreams or his too great demands on the faith of the people.

**He heralds the glorious salvation:**

A voice cries:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up,

and every mountain and hill be made low;

the uneven ground shall become level

and the rough places a plain.

And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,

and all flesh shall see it together,

for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." (Is 40:3-5)

**He announces that the kingdom of God is at hand:**

Get you up to a high mountain,

O Zion, herald of good tidings;

lift up your voice with strength,

O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,

lift it up, fear not;

say to the cities of Judah,

"Behold your God!" (Is 40:9)

**He asserts that it is the poor and the lowly, rather than the Davidic family, who will have the prominent place in the new restored kingdom (Is 42:6-7; 43:1-7; 55:3-5).**

**But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob,**

**he who formed you, O Israel:**

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;

**I have called you by name, you are mine.**

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;

When you walk through fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you.

For I am the Lord your God,  
the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour,  
I give Egypt as your ransom,  
Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.

Because you are precious in my eyes,  
and honoured, and I love you,

I give men in return for you,  
peoples in exchange for your life.

Fear not, for I am with you;  
I will bring your offspring from the east,  
and from the west I will gather you;

I will say to the north, Give up,  
and to the south, Do not withhold;

bring my sons from afar  
and my daughters from the end of the earth,  
every one who is called by my name,  
whom I created for my glory,  
whom I formed and made." (Is 43:1-7)

He sees every divine promise as on the point of fulfilment. Thus, he praises God for his justice  
(Is 41:2,16; 42:6)

"I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness,  
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;  
I have given you as a covenant to the people,  
a light to the nations." (Is 42:6)

From his opening statement (Is 40:5,8) to his final conclusion (Is 55:10-11), he dwells at length on the invincible power of the divine word. Note the effectiveness of the imagery.

"... And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,  
and all flesh shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

The grass withers, the flower fades,  
but the word of our God will stand for ever. (Is 40:5,8)

"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
and return not thither but water the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and prosper in the thing for which I sent it." (Is 55:10-11)

Finally look at this passage.

But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me,  
my Lord has forgotten me."

"Can a woman forget her suckling child,  
that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?

Even these may forget,

yet I will not forget you.

Behold, I have graven you on the palm of my hands;

your walls are continually before me....

Kings shall be your foster fathers,

and their queens your nursing mothers.

With their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you,

and lick the dust of your feet." (Is 49:14-16,23)

The people are in the exile. They are reduced to slavery. And the prophet wants them to believe that Yahweh loves them, cares for them, salvation is at hand and that they are on top of the world. What a demand to make!

But many of the apocalyptic features appear in his writing. According to him, the secrets of the eschatological age are first spoken in the divine assembly of Yahweh and his angels. They then echo upon the earth so that the prophet may hear them. He hears Yahweh commanding his angels to carry the good tidings to his people:

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,

and cry for her

that her warfare is ended,

that her iniquity is pardoned,

that she has received from the Lord's hand

double for all her sins. (Is 40:1-2)

Yahweh is supreme in his majesty and his wisdom surpasses all. This is explained with reference to the majesty and mystery of creation (Is 40:10,12-24).

Behold, the Lord God comes in might,

and his arm rules for him;  
behold, his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him. (Is 40:10)

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand  
and marked off the heavens with a span,  
enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure  
and weighed the mountains in scales  
and the hills in a balance ? (Is 40:12)

Yahweh possesses fullness of life; knows every secret of earthly events; no one can know his ways.

Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary,  
his understanding is unsearchable. (Is 40:28)

It is Yahweh who destroys and recreates: he caused the exile; he will also effect a complete renewal, new creation.

"Your first father sinned,  
and your mediators transgressed against me.

Therefore I profaned the princes of the sanctuary,  
I delivered Jacob to utter destruction  
and Israel to reviling." (Is 43: 27-28)

"Remember not the former things,  
nor consider the things of old.

Behold, I am doing a new thing;  
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (Is 43:18-19)

The new creation is described in mythological language. It is seen as the victory of Yahweh over other gods:

Bel bows down, Nebo stoops, ...

They stoop, they bow down together,

they cannot save the burden,

but themselves go into captivity. (Is 46:1-2)

This utter defeat of the gods makes the prophet turn to the theme of Yahweh as creator again and again (40:28; 41:20; 42:5; 45:6-7)

Have you not known ? Have you not heard ?

The Lord is the everlasting God,

the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary,

his understanding is unsearchable. (Is 40:28)

These factors, viz., the theme of the 'day of the Lord', with its terror and hopes, involving both Jews and Gentiles; the anticipation of a new covenant as fulfilling, even surpassing, the Mosaic covenant; the actualisation of history as found in deuteronomic tradition; the opposition to Zadokite priesthood; Ezekiel's signs and symbols along with uncanny visions, and his role in the continuity of the P tradition; Deutero-Isaiah's vision of battle among gods, with Yahweh as the supreme creator who accomplishes his designs with his omnipotent word falling on earth from the heavenly council resulted in the emergence of a new form under the traumatic exilic experience; the crucible of the exile gave rise to a new literary genre.

**The Post-exilic Age (BC 539 onward)** : Post-exilic thinking strengthened this new movement further by incorporating in it such features as weird symbolism, unearthly and cosmic visualisation, reference to

antiquity as well as announcement of imminent eschatological age. This period may be divided into two parts: the Persian age and the Hellenistic age.

**The Persian Age (539-332 BC):** The Persian age has a threefold influence on the apocalyptic movement: an anti-Gentile spirit, end of prophetism and the eschatological psalms. The post-exilic Jewish community was intolerant towards its neighbours. This exclusiveness is depicted in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. They did not want their help even in building the temple.

"You have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the Lord..."  
(Ezra 4:3).

Ezra prohibited mixed marriages; he commanded the people to send the 'foreign women' away.

"Now then make confession to the Lord the God of your fathers, and do his will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives." (Ezra 10:11)

"In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab ... And I contended with them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair; and I made them take oath in the name of God, saying, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such women...?" (Neh 13:23-26)

About BC 351 the Jews revolted against Persia. Artaxerxes III Ochus (358-338 BC) put down this mutiny with severity. During this period we find anti-Gentile apocalyptic outbursts from Isaiah (ch 24-27), Ezekiel (ch 38-39), Trito-Isaiah (63:1-6), Obadiah, Zechariah (ch 9-12) and Joel.

"I have trodden the wine press alone,  
and from the peoples no one was with me;  
I trod them in my anger  
and trampled them in my wrath;  
their lifeblood is sprinkled upon my garments,

and I have stained all my raiment.

For the day of vengeance was in my heart,

and my year of redemption has come.

I looked, but there was no one to help;

I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold;

so my own arm brought me victory,

and my wrath upheld me.

I trod down the peoples in my anger,

I made them drunk in my wrath,

and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth." (Is 63:3-6)

The last prophecy we hear is that of Malachi (c 460 BC). But he is subservient to the Jerusalem priest and his hopes centre around the Temple. Even Haggai and Zechariah who prophesied about 80 years earlier too were similar in this respect (Zech ch 3-5). Formerly, the prophets braved the wrath of the priests to announce God's judgement but no more is the case. The prophets have clearly 'degenerated' into apocalyptic visionaries. Prophecy is dead, as the author of I Maccabees poignantly admits (I Mac 4:46; 9:27; 14:41).

So they tore down the altar, and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until there should come a prophet to tell what to do with them. (4:46)

Ezekiel, too, records the demise of prophetism; and so does the author of the book of Lamentations.

Disaster comes upon disaster, rumour follows rumour; they seek a vision from the prophet, but the law perishes from the priest, and counsel from the elders. (Ez 7:26)

Her gates have sunk into the ground;

he has ruined and broken her bars;

her king and princes are among the nations;

the law is no more,  
and her prophets obtain  
no vision from the Lord. (Lam 2:9)

The eschatological Psalms such as Psalms 95-98 do not refer Davidic line but proclaim Yahweh's universal kingship.

The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice;  
let the many coastlands be glad!  
Clouds and thick darkness are round about him;  
righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.  
Fire goes before him,  
and burns up his adversaries round about.  
His lightnings lighten the world;  
the earth sees and trembles.  
The mountains melt like wax before the Lord,  
before the Lord of all the earth. (Ps 97:1-5)

In short, the Persian period continues in the Ezekielian framework as far as the apocalyptic style is concerned. The priestly domination continues. The external observance of laws becomes very important: circumcision, Sabbath observance, fasting, and following dietary laws are considered the mark of a true Jew. They thought that as the result of the faithful observance of these laws, God will make Jerusalem the world capital; and through the outpouring of the spirit, he will shake the earth and thus fulfill all the ancient promises. Extravagant symbolism is generally employed as, for instance, in Zechariah Chs 1-6.

**The Hellenistic Age (332 BC-63 AD):** During this period, Judaism separated itself into two principal groups, groups which were at each other's throat: the Jerusalem priesthood, later to be known as the

Sadducees, and a fervent lay sect, later to be called the Pharisees. The latter believed in resurrection and retribution after death which found expression in the apocalyptic literature (2 Mac 7; Dan 12:1-3).

"... you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life..." (2 Mac 7:9)

"And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." (Dan 12:2)

It took another century and a half for the apocalyptic form to break free from the parameters set by Ezekiel and establish itself in a transcendent extravaganza of symbolism. Only an occasion of violence could explain such a forward thrust in imagery and expression found in Daniel ch 7-12. Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BC), the Seleucid ruler, tried to force the Jews in Palestine to abandon their ancient religious and cultural practices and adhere to the common pagan worship of the realm. The popular resistance to this attempt resulted in a bloody persecution, ultimately leading to the Jewish revolt as depicted in the 1-2 Maccabees. The chapters written between 168 and 164 to encourage the Jews to remain faithful to their religion consist of four apocalypses. The literary style employed in these chapters manifests clearly the spirit and features of the apocalyptic form: surreal imagery, explanations of heavenly secrets by angels, battle between superhuman forces of good and evil, expectation of a sudden and glorious breakthrough of the heavenly kingdom, attribution of the writing to an ancient person (here, Daniel of the Babylonian exile).

Thus we see that apocalyptic is an exilic and post-exilic development of prophetic style. The continuity with Biblical prophecy is evident in the apocalyptic literature. It has been said that the apocalyptic was really an attempt to rationalise and systematise the predictive aspect of prophecy. To a certain extent it may be called the 'heir of prophecy'.<sup>5</sup> Like the prophets, the apocalyptists see in the unfolding of history a purpose. The evil in the world may confound and confuse man but the divine will cannot

be frustrated; the present ungodly phase and the consequent trials and tribulations will be replaced by the just and righteous rule of God established after vanquishing the evil forces and their agents. There are, however, significant variations: of message and of method. The prophet thought in terms of the 'here and now'. His message, more often than not, is a cry against social, economic, or political injustice; a summon to shun evil and do justice, to obey God and do away with idols. To him it was the present world and the present system that had to be reformed and refined; it was in this world that God's kingdom would come and His will would ultimately be done. He was a man of history. He believed that God worked out His designs and accomplished His plans in and through the various persons and events of history. The prophet was an optimist. He condemned the present injustice in the harshest and sternest unequivocal terms but always believed that if the people concerned heeded to his warnings and mended their ways, the catastrophe would not befall them or the present hardships would pass away. Hence, he constantly attempted to reform and renew the present set up all the while hoping that a change of heart and a change of ways were possible. The apocalypticist, on the other hand, was fully convinced that the present world was so corrupt that it was beyond reform, beyond redemption; no mending was ever possible. He, therefore, looked forward not to the recreation of the present world but to its complete destruction and the creation of a new world. In this sense, we may call him a pessimist, one who saw no cure to the present ailments, the gangrene affecting the present world having too far advanced. Yet, we must concede that he did not despair for he knew that the new age of unlimited blessedness was sure to come. The prophet received his message directly from the deity in the form of an oracle and, to a large extent, communicated it orally, the written form being later codification. On the contrary, the apocalypticist received his message in the form of a revelation and conveyed it in writing. The *raison d'être* of the apocalyptic being a literary production is not difficult to understand. The prophetic message was in plain speech and direct so that the people who saw or heard the prophet understood what he did or spoke then and there. But the apocalyptic, frequently expressed through the fabric of elaborate visions and revelations full of obscure images and weird symbols, required serious study and reflection to comprehend it. Further, the prophet

generally spoke in his own name but the apocalypticist, for the most part, had recourse to pseudonymity: attributing his work to a person of antiquity, like Daniel, Enoch, Ezra, Baruch, Noah, Moses, the Twelve Patriarchs, etc., to give authority and dignity to the message contained in his work and to review the past history as future.

### **The Canonical and the Non-Canonical Apocalypses**

The apocalyptic literary form flourished between c 200 BC and 100 AD. Numerous apocalypses appeared during this period. The canons of the Old Testament and the New Testament were still open then. But, for some reason, not more than one each found its way into the canons of the Old Testament and of the New Testament : the Book of Daniel and the Book of the Apocalypse (Revelation), respectively. Nevertheless, in both the sections, we find important passages of the apocalyptic genre (Ez 40-48; Is 24-27, 34-35, 56-66; Zech 9-14; Mk 13; Mt 24; Lk 21; I Thes 4; and I Cor 15).

Many of those 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 Old Testament Apocalypses available are:

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

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

Sibylline Oracles (2nd century BC to 7th century AD)

The Treatise of Shem ( 1st century BC)

The Apocryphon of Ezekiel (1st century BC to 1st century AD)

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

The Fourth Book of Ezra (late 1st century AD)

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

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

**The Questions of Ezra (date unknown)**

**The Revelation of Ezra (before 9th century AD)**

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

**2 Baruch or The Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch (early 2nd century AD)**

**3 Baruch or The Greek Apocalypse of Baruch (1st to 3rd century AD)**

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

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

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

**The Apocalypse of Daniel (9th century AD)**

**The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (2nd century BC)**

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

**The Testaments of the Three Patriarchs**

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

**Testament of Isaac (2nd century AD)**

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

**The Testament of Moses (1st century AD)**

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

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

In the New Testament times we have apocalypses ascribed to two Jamses, the Virgin Mary, Paul, Peter, Philip, Stephen, and Thomas. Only the Apocalypse of Peter (written in 125-150 AD) won any significant acceptance and importance, probably owing to its vivid description of the punishment of the wicked.

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  4. According to Gen 10:2, Magog was the son of Japheth, a descendant of Noah.
  5. Bauckham, R., *op cit*, p 74
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