

Addendum 1: Prophecy and apocalyptic in the Old Testament

In noting the organic relation between the hope of the NT and the OT, we inevitably enter the debate between prophecy and apocalyptic. The degree to which Jesus and the early church shared the world view of both apocalyptic and prophetic second-temple traditions is a determining factor in handling the sources that witness to their teaching. Firstly, we must briefly look at the differences between these two OT streams.

In characterising the OT hope, scholars observe two streams: the prophetic and the apocalyptic.¹ Hanson (1979) labels the two streams: apocalyptic eschatology and prophetic eschatology (:10). For him, the continuity resides in their 'essential vision of restoration' (:12). This duality in the OT has traditionally been divided along historical and transcendent lines. Prophecy tends to view the future as being affected within the structures of mundane reality, having a tendency toward integration (Hanson 1976:30). Apocalyptic, on the other hand, conceives of God's final saving acts, 'not as the fulfillment of promises within political structures and historical events, but as deliverance out of the present order into a new transformed order' (Hanson 1976:30). The now famous definition of apocalyptic genre also defines apocalyptic in terms of this transcendence:

An apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a *transcendent reality* [italics mine] which is temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world (Collins 1984:4).

Hanson's bifurcation is a helpful descriptive contribution to OT eschatology. It seems unwise though to view these two aspects as two stereotyped independent aspects of the OT hope, for there are sections which approximate to apocalyptic in prophetic books which cannot be interpreted as extrinsic material. Even if we say that apocalyptic evolved out of the prophetic (Collins 2000:42; Hanson 1979), there remains a tendency to segregate related elements of one eclectic and comprehensive picture.² This tendency to compartmentalise has developed from a history-of-

¹ See Hanson 1979:1-12 and Aune 2000:47. For an overview of Hanson's important contribution, see 1979: 429-444.

² Hanson must be credited with the move to find the genesis of apocalyptic in the prophetic, yet he fails to integrate the two into one eclectic picture, keeping the divide. Although he unites the two in

religions approach to the OT study, where the hope of Israel evolved from a simple tribal religion to an eclectic and accreted national hope. Apocalyptic is then seen to be extrinsic and alien to the original faith of Israel, an aberration which needs to be 'demythologised'. Von Rad (1975:301-308), divorcing apocalyptic from authentic OT faith on the grounds of its a-historicity, represents the one end of the extreme - apocalyptic is not classical Yahwehism. However, the primary problem with this bifurcation is that one still excludes prophetic elements from apocalyptic and *visa versa*.¹ One ends up playing havoc with the text, attributing any apocalyptic elements as later additions to the text. Hanson (1979:10) himself attempts to avoid a 'cleft stick' approach, noting that apocalyptic is 'the mode assumed by the prophetic tradition once it had been transferred to a new and radically altered setting in the post-exilic community'. One wonders then what prophetic content that mode has. The end result of such an approach is seen in Hanson (:440), who plays off different eschatological views within the history of Israel. Accordingly, in the post-exilic period we have the theology of the Chronicler which is vastly different from the eschatological theology of 'Trito-Isaiah', Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi. This tendency to polarise the OT picture is the result of isolating various aspects of the one eclectic picture.

The desire to categorise has been grounded on the correct observation that there is a development within OT eschatology whereby the 'apocalyptic tradition' has become more self-conscious. Collins affirms that 'it is possible to trace the evolution of some literary forms from prophecy to apocalypticism (2000:42; also Aune 2000:47). He is correct. There is a patent intensifying of those native and incipient apocalyptic elements, manifesting itself in such acute forms that it can legitimately be called apocalyptic eschatology (e g Daniel 7-12). Thus Beale (1999:37) calls apocalyptic 'an intensification of prophecy'. Dumbrell (1997:395) correctly notices that 'apocalyptic systematised what the Israelite prophets had only glimpsed - the totality of history and history yet to be unfolded...to which faithful Israel was the key.' He also perceptively observes that 'what was implicit in the earlier biblical reviews of history, namely, that there is a hidden meaning in history, is made explicit in apocalyptic writings' (1994:141). Dunn helps clarify these salient characteristics of apocalyptic:

their 'essential vision of restoration' (:12), he views them as two separate perspectives.

¹ See Hanson's definitions of the two (1979:11) and note the inevitable compartmentalising (also p 431).

But in apocalyptic the picture is painted on a larger canvas, with bolder, more sweeping brush strokes. At each characteristic point of apocalyptic there is a radical heightening of the eschatology which leaves prophecy behind. The discontinuity...is much sharper....The utter pessimism...more radical....The end-time suffering more terrible, the judgments and salvation are final, the End much closer, the reliance on divine intervention by a divine agent more absolute....These can all be seen as extensions of prophecy, but also mark the boundary between prophecy and apocalyptic (1977:315-316).

Dunn avoids the descriptive tendency of inserting a cleavage between apocalyptic and the more 'prophetic' perspective. He also seems to support the idea that apocalyptic can be seen as intrinsic to the faith of Israel (as Ladd 1958a:81), an ingredient that was potentially present from Israel's earliest periods. Yet most concur that apocalyptic is an intensification of those traditional elements due to peculiar historical, theological and sociological factors.¹

It seems advisable, in categorising, to have an inclusive picture of the OT hope, incorporating diverse streams that were more prominent at one or another period. The accenting of those apocalyptic elements was probably conditioned by socio-political circumstances, a fact helpfully brought out by Hanson (1979). Religious apostasy, social anomie and Gentile political domination were the historical conditions that extruded the 'new look' of Israelite faith. If 'apocalyptic is an attempt to overcome the discrepancy between the harsh realities of everyday life and the promises of God' (Beker 1990:21), then we can understand how this imagery reached its acme in the exilic and post-exilic period.² This theology is conditional and suited to the times, thus tending to be more transcendent, deterministic, dualistic and essentially optimistic (Rowley 1948:408).³ Rowland (1982:14) identifies the salient theme in

¹ The 'Zion theology' of the Davidic and Solomonic periods (Krause 1986:78-82; Strong 1996:1314-1321) saw a flowering of the salient apocalyptic elements, which intensified in the first temple Isaian period and reached a zenith in the Danielic and post-exilic period. This particular period, with its national glory and 'non-apocalyptic' social conditions, supports our thesis that prophetic and apocalyptic are mutually inclusive.

² Scholars seem too quick to unite canonical and extra-canonical apocalyptic, not observing the transfiguration and aberration that is a salient feature of the latter. In this thesis, we are primarily concerned with canonical apocalyptic, which was the matrix and benchmark for all later apocalyptic writings. The area of greatest difference is in the latter extra-canonical apocalyptic writings and their foregrounding of the termination of this world, pseudonymity, numerology, cosmic travel and heightened angelic dialogue. These writings are often mystical apocalypses of world-weary visionaries - an element alien to canonical apocalyptic (see Collins 2000:41). Although later extra-canonical apocalyptic posited a terminal and universal conflagration and destruction, this cosmic element of destruction is less clear in canonical apocalyptic. It is noticeably absent from Daniel or Zechariah and need not be read into many of the other OT texts of ostensible 'cosmic conflagration'. This latter emphasis can be seen as an extrapolation from certain Scriptures that contain hints of such an event (e.g. Is 65:17).

³ For a scholarly introduction to the nature of apocalyptic, plus a detailed bibliography, see Collins 1984:2-24.

apocalyptic as an interest in that which is secret - 'the theme of the direct communication of the heavenly mysteries in all their diversity'. In these writings, 'truths which are beyond man's capacity to deduce from his circumstances are revealed by means of the manifestation of the divine counsels' (:17). Being a more heavenly 'downloading' of information, the apocalyptic universe is thus highly nuanced as pessimistic, symbolic, periodised, and villainised. Also, 'the apocalyptists were interested in the total course of history, as opposed to the strictly national-Israel interest of the prophets' (Dumbrell 1994:140), their language being primarily in the 'idiom of the cosmic realm' (Hanson 1979:12). Important to note is the fact that their envisioned future does rise out of the present historical situation but is disjunctive with it – thus information is given less personally (the prophet's personality was often part of the message) than directly (angels, visions, dreams). The apocalyptic medium tended to be primarily 'direct', something probably necessitated by sociological, theological, political (Daniel, Zechariah) and ethical factors.

We offer the following definition of apocalyptic: Apocalyptic is concerned with that aspect of the faith of Israel that views Yahweh's relationship to this world in cosmic, dualistic and deterministic terms, coming to a particular focus in his ultimate and final acts which are his response to the present demise of both Israel and the world.

...and 'coming or arrival' in the sense of his actual presence, etc. In the Old Testament and David had an initial period of apostasy, so the duration covering Jesus' visible period is shortly brief. Thus, when they speak of the 'end of the age', they do not mean the end of our present-day world, but rather the end of the present evil age of Israel's unfulfilled promise and of the new age of Messianic glory and Israel's vindication. Thus in these narratives, we hear of the *destruction of Israel's sin*, the *fall, completion and arrival of his kingdom*.

In this portion of Scripture, according to Wright, we have a combination of the warnings and promises which we have seen to characterize Jesus' ministry all through. His words had warned of a judgment on impudent Israel, and a vindication for his followers. If we understand both Jesus' and John's writings regarding a coming judgment (Lk 21: 26-28; Mt 24:26) to refer to a coming national disaster involving the destruction of the nation by Rome, the story makes for far better reading and is more

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Addendum 2: Wright's understanding of Mark 13

Wright's impressive grasp of the issues in NT theology and his systemic appraisals have become standard reading for understanding contemporary NT scholarship. His preterist view of Mark 13 has been articulated in his book *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1996).¹ Below follows a précis of his theological understanding of Mark 13.

According to Wright, most popular Christian readings of the text in question have certainly shared Schweitzer's understand that Jesus predicted the end of the world. It is thus commonplace to think that the 'parousia' in Mark 13 means 'second coming', and/or Jesus' downward travel on the clouds. On the contrary, instead of entering into an alien world of future cosmic apocalyptic events, what we find in Mark 13 and its parallels is (according to Wright), essentially, a well-known Jewish story retold. Jesus as a prophet is taking up his place along with Isaiah, Jeremiah and the other prophets, and is foretelling a future historical military invasion of Jerusalem. What the Babylonians did to Jerusalem in 587 BCE, an invading army will do to Jerusalem again. This will certainly occur within the generation of Jesus' contemporaries. If we read Matthew, Mark and Luke within their first century Jewish context, the disciples' initial question (Mt 24:3) is thus not a question about the 'Parousia', but a question about Jesus' 'coming' or 'arrival' in the sense of his actual enthronement as king. As Josiah and David had an initial period of humility, so the disciples expected Jesus' humble period to shortly end. Thus, when they spoke of the 'end of the age', they did not mean the end of our space-time universe, but rather the end of the present evil age of Israel's unfulfilled promises and of the new age of Messianic glory and Israelite vindication. Thus in these narratives, we hear of the *denouement* of Jesus' story, the full completion and arrival of his kingdom.

In this portion of Scripture, according to Wright, we have a combination of the warnings and promises which we have seen to characterise Jesus' ministry all through. His words had warned of a judgment on impenitent *Israel*, and a vindication for his followers. If we understand both Jesus' and John's warnings regarding a coming judgment (Lk 3:7; Mt 23:36) to refer to *a coming national disaster* involving the destruction of the nation by Rome, the story makes for far better reading and is more

¹ This précis is taken from chapter 8: Stories of the Kingdom (3): Judgment and Vindication, 320-368 *passim*.

consonant with the OT portrayals of national judgment. The brooding presence of Rome is typologically seen as the new 'Babylon', ready to implement God's judgment on an impenitent nation. Thus Jesus' warnings belong perfectly within the context of a Palestine under threatening and heavy-handed Roman rule *and could, in principle, have been articulated at any time in Israel's history*. These warnings to his present generation cast Jesus in a classic prophetic profile; even passages that traditional scholars have taken to refer to 'hell', can be seen as metaphorical references to the historical events of 70 CE. What has commonly been seen as 'apocalyptic' can now be reinterpreted to be an embellished and reconfigured prophetic element.

This predicted event is drawn with three primary OT colours: those texts that speak of the destruction of God's people; the 2nd century Maccabean crisis; and (as shocking as it is) from those texts which deal with the judgment of God *on Babylon* (Is 13, 14; Ezk 32 and Jl 2, *et al*). This shows the shocking direction in which the imagery in Mark 13:14-23 is moving - texts taken from the OT where they had to do with the divine judgment *on pagan nations*. If we interpret Jesus' words through the lens of these OT accounts, Wright says, we can then begin to understand the nature of this metaphoric and hyperbolic language. The prophets employed cosmic imagery (sun, moon, stars) to bring out the full theological significance of cataclysmic socio-political events. As we might say of a stormy day 'all heaven broke lose', so the prophets spoke hyperbolically. They used categories of cosmic disaster in order to invest the coming of the socio-political disaster with its full theological significance. However, this is not a 'mere metaphor' of colourful apocalyptic language - metaphors have teeth, though they do not walk on all fours! So, Mark 13:24 is spoken in a similar way to Isaiah 13:6-9, where the prophet is effectively saying, 'Babylon will fall - and what an earth-shattering event that will be!'. We must avoid all crass literalism and not unjustly take these verses to refer to the literal end of the world. This is patently seen in Luke's account, where he cashed out the apocalyptic imagery in Mark for the sake of his predominantly Gentile readers.

As for the words about the 'coming of the son of man with the clouds of heaven' (Daniel 7), Wright interprets them metaphorically to be a retelling of Israel's national story, which would climax in the judgment of her true enemies and the vindication of her true representative(s). We must avoid all thought of the end of the space-time world. *It is rather a symbol for a mighty reversal of fortunes within history and at a*

national level. This 'coming' vindication of the Son of Man would occur at the temple's destruction, where Jesus would 'come' to *Jerusalem as the vindicated, rightful king*, not physically though, but metaphorically through the public destruction of Jerusalem and the consequent public vindication of his disciples as the true Israel (who will be spared the judgment). That this 'coming' has to do with Jesus' vindication is clearly seen in Daniel 7, where the Danielic figure comes *from earth to heaven*, thus receiving his vindication after suffering. This is the obvious way of reading the chapter and has been ignored for so long.

Finally, all the above helps us to interpret Mark 13:24-27 and Matthew 24:27-28 as events occurring within the present world order of 70 CE. They will certainly be felt and perceived as 'cosmic' and 'earth-shattering', but will not be literally true. As lightening flashes from east to west, so the destruction of Jerusalem will be dramatic and visible. The Romans, like vultures (or better 'eagles') will gather around the carcass of Jerusalem and pick it clean. The angels (or better 'messengers') will then call the elect, who are spread out over the globe, to believe in the heavenly vindicated Son of man.

What are some of the promises of Wright's proposal? Firstly, he integrates and focuses all the elements of the discourse on one event - the simultaneous destruction and vindication. The organising idea for the whole discourse, including the verses on the 'Son of man', is the *destruction of Jerusalem*. This avoids the unnecessary prevarication of a 'lack of temporal depth' in Jesus' discourse. Wright thus retains the insoluble tie within the narrative between the destruction of the temple and the 'coming of the son of man'. Secondly, his whole emphasis on a prophetic rather than an apocalyptic understanding balances much 'meltdown' mentality, for, 'the kingdom of god [sic] has nothing to do with the world itself coming to an end' (1992:285).¹ 'Wright's work does a great service in reminding us of the historical nature of the so-called apocalyptic hope in ancient Israel' (Saucy 1997:121). His whole undertaking repeatedly underscores this point, and it is a valuable contribution to NT eschatology. This prophetic recasting of Mark 13 insightfully links the previous *logia* of the coming wrath with the destruction of Jerusalem. Jerusalem and her unrepentant are certainly heading for eschatological judgment. This provides a helpful backdrop for

¹ The disciples' question as to 'the end of the age' (Mt 24:3) can be understood in temporal terms inclusive of this historical age (see Lindblom 1978:361, Von Rad 1975:114 and Wright 1996:345-346).

the whole of Jesus' ministry and his urgent appeal to accept the grace of God dawning in him.

What are some of his pitfalls? Firstly, the Lukan modifications of Matthew and Mark (Conzelmann 1960:95-136) are not compatible with Wright's overall thesis. Luke clearly divorces the destruction of the temple from the latter Parousia *whilst maintaining the same Marcan terminology* (Lk 17:22-37; 21:25-36).¹ To then say that the same words are used in two different senses is self-defeating. Secondly, the nature of Wright's 'parousia' is esoteric and even more theologically ambivalent than the 'mysterious' nature of Christ's historical ministry. He notably struggles to bring out the significance of this patently 'private' vindication. His reinterpretation is not congruent with Jesus' former statements of his apocalyptic (not prophetic) future coming and public glorious vindication (Mk 8:38; Mt 7:22, etc). Matthew 25:31-46 is clearly correlated with Matthew 24, and speaks of a public 'apocalyptic' unveiling of the Son of man. Wright's proposal thus lacks contextual continuity. It seems most likely that Mark 13:24-27 is a 'depiction of the parousia as a theophany of the Son of man' (Beasley-Murray 1993:167). To reduce the meaning of Matthew 24:27 ('like lightning') and v 30 ('the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky') down to the level of mere historical events, strains at the natural meaning of patently apocalyptic language. Important to note in this discourse is that 'it is in the openness of Christ's coming to universal observation as contrasted with the secrecy and deception that the words of this verse [Mt 24:26] and the next find their real force' (Biederwolf 1972:337). We also note Bruce's response to this preterist identification of the abomination with the Roman standards in the temple court while the holy place was going up in flames: 'the temple court was not "the holy place", and there was no demand that the Jews should join in the worship of the Roman standards: Besides, by the time that this act of sacrilege took place, it was too late for those in Judea to "flee to the mountains"' (1982:181). Thirdly, Wright's understanding of metaphorical language and how the OT is used by Jesus is questionable.² His exegesis raises the question of the literary status of the cosmic *logia* and the degree of substance in each

¹ Nolland (1993b:105) views these verses as describing events *after* the destruction of Jerusalem.

² Casey (1998:97) accuses Wright of misunderstanding apocalyptic and eschatological language as mere metaphor. To him Wright provides 'a completely unsatisfactory replacement of what the text says with something more convenient'. Also Saucy 1997:119-124 and Allison 1994 for criticisms of Wright.

metaphor.¹ Any supernatural or 'extra-ordinary' event can probably be interpreted as *mere* hyperbole, yet to do so is to severely downplay their semantic force. If one presupposes the impossibility of a cosmic disruption or conflagration, then one will downplay the univocal tones and trump up the equivocal ones. Apocalyptic imagery cannot be reinterpreted to refer to continuous historical events but should rightly be viewed as an attempt to articulate the spatial dualism (vertical axis) of God's creation. To exhaust the apocalyptic imagery of Mark 13 by reconfiguring the language to mean merely the hyperbolic presentation of the historical destruction of Jerusalem evacuates the literary referent. Finally, this preterist interpretation of Mark 13 dehistoricises the personal elements of the Parousia by interpreting these words as the 'going' of the Son of man to the Father in heaven, collapsing this Christological event into the event of 70 CE.² Although Wright does see a future return of Christ (1992:459-464), his reinterpretation of Mark 13 opens the door for a radical 'reconfiguring' of the Parousia – it could refer to another theologically significant event that has no necessity for the personal presence of Christ. He effectively interprets the discourse as a unit yet 'de-apocalypticises' the return of Christ by his prophetic reading of the text.

¹ Van Hoozer (1998:130) reminds us that 'metaphors, like texts, are determinate enough to convey stable meaning without being exhaustively specifiable...[they] are neither wholly univocal nor wholly equivocal'.

² Was Jesus only vindicated in 70 CE?; did the new age begin then? The answer is no. His vindication was in his resurrection. The preterist interpretation of Mark 13:27 as meaning evangelism is a desperate attempt to avoid the natural meaning of these apocalyptic words. Also, this school has to interpret Mark 13:5-13 solely in terms of the evangelism of the church prior to 70 CE. This is possible but not probable, given Jesus words 'but the end is still to come' in verse 7.

Diagram 1. Midpoint extension

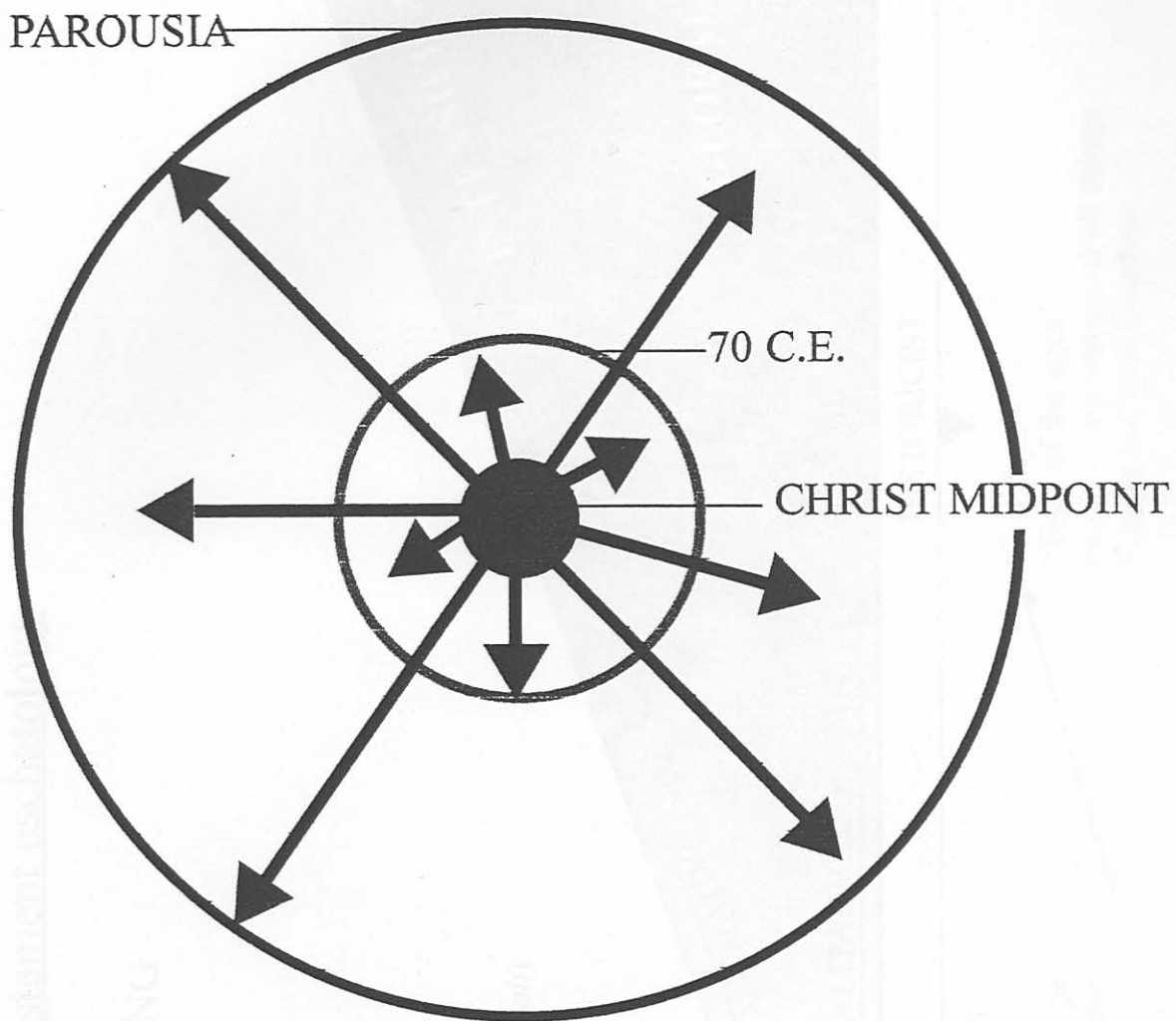


Diagram 2. A synoptic model for integrating the temporal factors of New Testament eschatology

