

APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

Ezekiel falls into a genre of literature called apocalyptic. But what is apocalyptic literature? It's really difficult to define for a couple of reasons:

- Texts do not self-identify as apocalyptic until John's Revelation.¹
- Scholars do not agree on a definition of apocalyptic.

The denotative meaning of apocalypse is 'unveiling' or 'revelation' which is the definition of the Greek term *apokalupsis* (*apokalupsis*).

It's used by John in his opening line: "The revelation (*apokalupsis*) of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants..."

This word and variants are found in many biblical passages.²

Arguably, the whole Bible is apocalyptic in this sense of being revelation from God.

However, for scholars of ancient literature, the connotative meaning is writing that is like the works of Daniel & Revelation.

The problem has been trying to agree about what characterizes these books.

Several issues muddy efforts to land on a definition of the genre.

- Most scholars want a definition that includes pseudepigraphal Jewish & Christian writings³ as well as similar materials in Gnostic, Greek, Latin & Persian literature from 250 BC to 250 AD.
- An investigator's theory of apocalyptic origins tends to color their preferred definition of apocalyptic literature.⁴
- No text is purely apocalyptic.

They typically incorporate prophetic, poetic, biographic or sapiential materials as well.⁵

All definitions must either include the additional styles or treat apocalyptic as a genre apart from its typical literary context.

What are some definitions of apocalyptic?

¹ "...no ancient text uses the self-designation apokalupsis ("revelation") until the end of the first century CE." Argall, Randal A. (1995) *1 Enoch and Sirach. A Comparative Literary and Conceptual Analysis of the Themes of Revelation, Creation and Judgment.*, p.1-2, Number 08 in the series, *Early Judaism and its Literature*, Series Editor William Adler issued by the Society of Biblical Literature, Scholars Press, Atlanta Georgia

² The words, 'reveal' & 'revelation' appear in Mt.11:25,27; 16:17; Lk.2:32; 10:21,22; Ro.2:5; 16:25; 1Cor.1:7; 14:6,26,30; Gal.1:12,16; 2:2; Eph.1:17; 3:3; Phil.3:15; 1Pet.1:7,13; 4:13; etc.

³ These are texts falsely said to be authored by OT or NT characters. Most were written within 300 years of Christ. Examples include: 3 Maccabees; 4 Maccabees; Assumption of Moses; Ethiopic Book of Enoch (1 Enoch); Slavonic Book of Enoch (2 Enoch); Book of Jubilees; Greek Apocalypse of Baruch (3 Baruch); Letter of Aristeas; Life of Adam and Eve; The Gospel of Thomas; Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah; Psalms of Solomon; Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch (2 Baruch); Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs

⁴ For instance, one could hardly expect an investigator who believes apocalyptic arose as a literature of crisis at the time of the Maccabean revolt to adopt definitions of apocalyptic that might include Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah or Malachi even if elements of apocalyptic are present. Russell might be an example of this.

Similarly, the currently disreputable belief that Persian Zoroastrianism gave rise to Jewish apocalyptic is not likely to produce a definition of apocalyptic that's inclusive of Old Testament scriptures pre-dating Persian influence.

⁵ "In addition, most examples placed by modern scholars under this rubric...are mixed compositions and utilize many different literary forms." Argall, Randal A. (1995) *1 Enoch and Sirach. A Comparative Literary and Conceptual Analysis of the Themes of Revelation, Creation and Judgment.* p. 4, Number 08 in the series, *Early Judaism and its Literature*, Series Editor William Adler issued by the Society of Biblical Literature, Scholars Press, Atlanta Georgia.

"...one does well to remember that the ancient apocalyptic writers did not distinguish rigidly between genre, perspective and ideology, and from this it follows that such categories should be used only with great sensitivity to the integrity and complexity of the compositions themselves." Hanson, Paul D. (1992) *Apocalypses and Apocalypticism.*

- Some believe that the definition of apocalyptic is simply, "...literature that looks like the revelation of John."⁶
 - Literature that focuses on eschatological themes.⁷
 - Ezekiel 1-3 and Zechariah 1-6 have all the stylistic elements typical of apocalyptic...yet they are disqualified.⁸
 - Isaiah 24-27 is eschatological, though lacking in certain stylistic features...so, it's apocalyptic.
 - Literature with particular stylistic features.⁹
So, they'd include the early chapters of Ezekiel & Zechariah while omitting Isaiah entirely.¹⁰
 - Still other investigators look for some combination of elements that is unique to apocalyptic.¹¹
 - Pseudepigrapha scholar, J. H. Charlesworth, said the following about apocalyptic in an interview,
 - What is an apocalypse? Well, it is a writing that claims to disclose hidden secrets either by taking an individual literally into the heavens above or into the future and then to bring the person back and to explain what is seen or experienced. The function, then, is to explain the meaning of the present and the meaning of suffering by going to another world or another time and then coming back and explaining it.
 - An apocalypse must have an invitation and it also has to have a means. So in the apocalypse of John, you have the invitation, "Come up hither," and then you have the explanation of how the individual goes to the various heavens and sees things that are about to happen on Earth. In the book we call the Book of Enoch, the individual has a dream and then goes up in a dream state. And then in another apocalypse called the Second Book of Enoch, the individual is awakened and then taken by hand by angels into the various heavens. So, you need the trip into another world or into another time zone and then the portent is what is seen and what is about to happen. It explains the meaning of life in the here and now on this Earth.¹²
- So, Charlesworth's view is that apocalyptic is a kind of literature that claims to give spatial (heaven) or temporal (the distant future) perspective on the author & audience's current difficulties.

⁶ Paul Hanson writes, "The first two verses of the book of Revelation contain *in nuce* (i.e. in a nutshell) the narrative structure of the genre: *a revelation* is given by God through an otherworldly *mediator* to a *human seer* disclosing *future events*. V.3 contains an added feature commonly found (or implied) in apocalypses, namely, an *admonition*."; *Apocalypses and Apocalypticism*. In: The Anchor Bible Dictionary, Volume 1, pp. 279-282; Charlesworth seems to agree with this point.

⁷ Mounce says apocalyptic is always eschatological; Robert H. Mounce (1977) *The Book of Revelation*, from the New International Commentary on the New Testament

⁸ e.g. Charlesworth & Rennie; Russell would regard these as proto-apocalyptic, perhaps owing to the absence of eschatological materials.

⁹ e.g. symbolic imagery, dream-vision, and the presence of angelic or otherworldly beings

¹⁰ e.g. Hanson, Collins & Collins

¹¹ "The genre is not constituted by one or more distinctive themes but by a distinctive combination of elements, all of which are also found elsewhere." Collins, John J. (1984) *The Apocalyptic Imagination. An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity*. p. 9.

¹² Charlesworth is the George L. Collord Professor of New Testament at Duke University. The quote was taken from an interview between Charlesworth and Planet News; See <http://www.theology.edu/revappen.htm>

It has the combined elements of a particular purpose (e.g. encouraging the downtrodden) and style (e.g. an otherworldly trip). Sanders believes that Jewish apocalypses combine the themes of revelation and reversal and serve social function – to encourage the downtrodden.¹³ However, as Collins suggests, this definition ends up including most of the Bible.¹⁴

Most scholars feel that, “There can be no understanding without at least an implicit notion of genre.”¹⁵ But, insisting on a definition for apocalyptic literature seems to have as many problems as not having one.

- Any definition introduces bias into text selection.¹⁶
- Any definition introduces bias into text interpretation.¹⁷

My inclination is to resist defining apocalyptic because of the problems with definition & how definitions affect text selection and interpretation. Also, the application of a genre definition frequently obscures the context for apocalyptic material – that it is contiguous and consistent with its historic and prophetic context. Thus, it has the potential to damage the texts it intends to study

However, in spite of the problems, there are common elements in the material termed, ‘apocalyptic’ that are worth examination. For the sake of study let’s adopt and loosely hold a definition used by many:

“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 which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world; such a work is intended to interpret present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behavior of the audience by means of divine authority.”¹⁸

These elements seem reasonable and, taken together, seem to include and exclude appropriate texts.

However, since this definition is designed to summarize, not just Jewish but many other apocalyptic traditions, it might be helpful to develop a more focused classification for Old Testament scriptures. So, let’s include an element typical of biblical apocalyptic, indeed all biblical prophecy - the sovereignty of God over humanity; especially in judgment and redemption.

Given all this, and limiting our definition to biblical material, a working definition of apocalyptic literature might be the following:

Biblical apocalyptic literature is narrative material containing visions or dreams about God’s future judgment and redemption.

What is the origin of apocalyptic literature?

¹³ Sanders, E. P. *The Genre of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypses* In: *Apocalypticism* ed. D. Hellholm, pp. 447-459.

¹⁴ Collins, John J. (1984) *The Apocalyptic Imagination. An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity.* p.8

¹⁵ Collins, John J. (1984) *The Apocalyptic Imagination. An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity.* p.7.

¹⁶ See Appendix E

¹⁷ For example, Collins has concluded that apocalyptic is mytho-poetic, that it is intended to express emotions not facts. *Ibid.*, p.13-14; His sense of the genre is certainly going to influence his interpretation of the texts he includes.

¹⁸ Collins, J. J. (1979) *Apocalypse. The Morphology of a Genre*, Semeia 14, Missoula; this is based on his group’s analysis of a variety of Jewish, Christian, Gnostic, Greek, Latin & Persian literature from 250 BC to 250 AD. See also, Collins, Adela Yarbro (2000) *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism.* Koninklijke Brill NV.p.6

The question heading this section may seem a little odd to conservative Christians. They might respond with, "God, of course!" However, academics would find this answer unacceptable because:

- It is not a natural explanation. Which many academics prefer.
- It doesn't take cultural & linguistic issues into consideration¹⁹
- It does not consider possible reasons for the strange features of this form of revelation
- Apocalyptic scholars are concerned about more than biblical literature.

Sociological influences

Failure of prophecy – Some believe that apocalyptic arose as a response to failed prophecy. God's promised restoration and ongoing blessing of Israel in prophetic literature appeared to have failed and so apocalyptic authors pushed the promised blessings of God to future times and transcendent places.

Against this,

- ▶ Prophetic material contains blessings of God that are pushed to future times and transcendent places as well. This may explain why those holding this view tend to include future oriented prophetic material in their lists of apocalyptic literature.²⁰
- ▶ Additionally, it would be false to say that prophetic literature just predicts blessings for Israel because many of these texts predict a time of difficulty and even Diaspora following the return and rebuilding of Jerusalem.²¹

Failure of wisdom – This is the belief that apocalyptic arose as a response to failed sapiential promises of temporal blessing for fidelity to God. As Antiochus persecuted faithful Jews, apocalyptic authors pushed the promised blessings of God to future times and places.

However, against this,

- ▶ the wisdom literature itself is rich with the problem of the suffering faithful particularly in Ecclesiastes, Job and Psalms.
- ▶ In fact, this is a significant theme with which the authors of this literature interact.

Oppression – Both of the previous positions suggest that apocalyptic is the response to failure of earlier literary traditions in the face of the suffering under Antiochus and thereafter. What is common to both is the influence of oppression on the genesis of the genre and so many believe that these hostile sociological conditions are necessary to explain the advent of apocalyptic.

Of course, this explanation is not sufficient because

- ▶ many cultures have endured oppression without producing apocalyptic and
- ▶ even the Jewish culture had difficult periods before and after the Greek/Roman oppression that did not produce such literature.

¹⁹ Biblical revelations are interjected into human experience and culture. So, it wouldn't be surprising for a revelation to possess the trappings of the language and culture into which it is given. For example, the address of YHWH to Abraham takes the form of a Suzerain vassal treaty. God's role as *goel* closely matches the kinsman redeemer roles of patriarchs. For those who do not believe in inspiration, this may be the entire explanation for the origins of apocalyptic.

²⁰ The inclusion of significant portions of Isaiah as apocalyptic, for instance.

²¹ Interestingly, the first part of Zechariah is full of symbolic visions while the second half is straight prophecy and yet many researchers regard the second half as apocalyptic rather than the first half, partly because of the placement of judgment and diaspora prophecies in the midst of restoration and blessing prophecies.

Besides these specific critiques there are overall critiques of the sociological approach to etiology.

- There's an unwillingness to even consider an hypotheses of origin involving divine revelation,
- We know so little about the social milieu of the apocalyptic writers that hypotheses of origin should be automatically suspect.
"...There is no automatic connection between apocalypticism and social movements. In many cases we know very little of the social matrix in which apocalyptic literature was produced...we should beware of inferring social movements too readily from literary evidence."²²

Foreign cultural influences

Babylonian influence – Some believe that because Daniel operates as a Babylonian wise man who can interpret dreams, suggesting a Babylonian influence upon his prophecies.

Also, Collins writes,

"There is...general similarity between the methods of apocalyptic revelation and of divination, in so far as both involve interpretation of mysterious signs and symbols and both carry overtones of determinism."²³

Two Akkadian texts, the *uruk prophecy*²⁴ and the *dynastic prophecy* are typical of a certain kind of Babylonian prophecy and it is this form that is thought to be related to apocalyptic.²⁵

This prophetic literature is *vaticinia ex eventu*, prophecy after the fact, something naturalistic scholars attribute also to Daniel.

One author concludes that because of the presence of eschatological elements in these works, "...there is good reason to suggest, even though it cannot be proven, that apocalyptic literature has its origin the Mesopotamian literary genre called Akkadian prophecies."²⁶

What he apparently means by eschatological are the comments at the end of the *Uruk Prophecy* that a king would arise whose dominion would be 'like the gods' and eternal.

However, the text seems to indicate that the eternity is due to a succession of kings rather than a single eternal king.²⁷

Also, it is not clear to anyone when the Uruk prophecy was written.

Against this:

²² Collins, John J. (1992) *Early Jewish Apocalypticism*. In: The Anchor Bible Dictionary, Volume 1, pp. 284

²³ Collins, John J. (1984) *The Apocalyptic Imagination. An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity*, Crossroad Publishing Company; this seems like a very slight correlation to me.

²⁴ Grayson, A. Kirk (1992) *Akkadian "Apocalyptic" Literature*. In: The Anchor Bible Dictionary, Volume 1, p. 282. Doubleday. p. 282; This author says that the date of these prophecies is not clear.

However, he also says that the genre of Akkadian prophecy was present before 1000 BC but he is vague at this point.

How is it clear that Akkadian prophecy was established prior to 1000 BC? Is he conflating omen texts and oracles to kings with this 'apocalyptic' type to bolster his claim?

Additionally, all his examples are taken from the Uruk prophecy. Is this prophecy the only one demonstrating 'apocalyptic' features?

²⁵ Akkadian omen literature and oracles are not like apocalyptic literature and are excluded from this argument.

²⁶ Grayson, op. cit. p. 282.

²⁷ "His reign will be established forever, The kings of Uruk will exercise dominion like the gods."

- The differences between OT apocalyptic and Babylonian prophecies are substantial.
The Akkadian material is not revelation through visions,
There are not experiences of spiritual realms (e.g. heavenly tours) and
There is no eschatology involving the judgment of the dead.²⁸
- Finally, even where there is some apparent correlation, no causal connection can be shown.

Persian influence – for a considerable period of time, scholars believed that materials in Zoroastrian²⁹ texts was so similar to Jewish apocalyptic as to be, undoubtedly, the literary source for the genre.

The reason is that the sacred texts including the Gathas,³⁰ the Younger Avesta,³¹ the Khorda Avesta³² & Pahlavi³³ contain references to

- ▶ demons,
- ▶ a satanic-like being (Ahriman or Angra Mainyu),
- ▶ angels and
- ▶ eschatological beliefs in hell, heaven, judgment, resurrection, apocalypticism and a fiery trial.³⁴

However, this conclusion requires that Zoroastrian beliefs precede OT texts; that the parallels are close and that there is evidence showing that the OT is dependent on Zoroastrian texts. Yet, consider the following:

Satan – is subordinate, not equal to God in the OT;

Satan appears in OT texts that predate the most reasonable Zoroastrian dates (e.g. Job 1 & 1 Chronicles 21:1)

Angels – there are angelic references in very early Jewish scriptures; they are not like bounteous immortals or yazatas who were worshipped.

Resurrection – while such a doctrine is not clearly taught in the Torah (a.k.a. Pentateuch), neither is it taught in the oldest extant Zoroastrian texts and can't reasonably be held to have appeared until the 300's BC; also, the conceptions of the resurrection aren't the same, the Zoroastrian concept involves re-creation and a fiery ordeal.

Apocalypticism – while a few scholars try to early date Persian apocalyptic genre, the Persian texts concerned with this topic date to the 9th century AD (e.g. bahman yasht, zat-sparam & ardaf viraf)...thus, most scholars doubt the

²⁸ Collins, op.cit. p. 22.

²⁹ Zoroastrianism is named for its founder Zoroaster (Gk.) or Zarathustra (Persian) who claimed to have received 8 visions about Ahuramazda and the Immortals.

He's difficult to locate historically but most scholars believe he lived in the 600-500's BC.

Most believe this was a dualistic religion with Ahuramazda (a.k.a. Ohrmazd) opposed by the evil spirit Angra Mainyu (a.k.a. Ahriman).

Its theology is directly related to Vedic texts from India. The Rig Vedas describe asuras and devas where the devas were venerated and the asuras regarded as demonic. In Iran the reverse took place.

³⁰ cannot be dated...incorporated into the younger avesta; difficult to translate and interpret

³¹ Describes Ahuramazda's creation of the lesser divinities (yazatas), however, in the text Ahuramazda himself is identified as a yazata. Recorded c. 531-579 AD; possibly composed (i.e. not written) c. 425 BC

³² A collection of hymns that serves as a daily prayer book (c. 309-379 AD)

³³ 55 texts containing poor Islamic translations of the Avestas; cosmology & eschatology texts (c. 800-900 AD)

³⁴ Yamauchi, Edwin (1990) *Persian and the Bible*, pp. 458-466, Baker Book House.

connection. The so-called Isaianic apocalypse should be dated no later than the 500's bc and this antedates the earliest possible Persian millennial concepts by a century or more.³⁵

Judgment by fire (Is.5:24; 30:27; Joel2:3; Zeph.1:18; 3:8 & Zech.12:6) appears in OT texts but is a judgment rather than a purification.

There are many Persian loan words in Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther but almost none are related to Persian religion.

Thus, virtually all scholars reject this earlier notion that Persian religion effectively produced apocalyptic literature amongst the exilic & post-exilic Jews.

"...at the end of the sixth century, the basic schema of apocalyptic eschatology has evolved in Israel...recourse to late Persian influence is therefore unnecessary and unjustifiable in the search for the origins of...Jewish apocalyptic"³⁶

"...Iranian "influences" on the culture and religion of Babylonian Jewry, and...Palestinian Jewry, have been for the most part exaggerated and overrated."³⁷

"...at the end of the 6th century, the basic schema of apocalyptic eschatology has evolved in Israel...recourse to late Persian influence is...unnecessary and unjustifiable..."³⁸

In fact, some argue the reverse, that Jewish apocalyptic influenced the subsequently recorded Zoroastrian texts.³⁹

Still, some maintain that Zoroastrianism must have at least influenced Jewish apocalyptic genesis.⁴⁰

Hellenistic influences – Some scholars believe Greek & Roman literature had some influence upon apocalyptic development.

- ▶ For instance, in the Cumaean prophecies⁴¹ history was divided into a set number of periods.
- ▶ A motif of 4 kingdoms is found in some Roman materials.⁴²
- ▶ Descriptions of otherworldly journeys are found in Homer's *Odyssey*,⁴³ Plato's *Myth of Er* in the Republic,⁴⁴ the *Aeneid*, book 6 of Virgil.⁴⁵
- ▶ *Vaticinia ex eventu* prophecies of the fall of Greek rule are found in the demotic chronicle.⁴⁶

However, for the purpose of studying Old Testament apocalyptic, these materials largely follow rather than precede Jewish apocalyptic and

³⁵ The Oracles of Hystaspes, perhaps based on Iranian oral tradition, may be dated to 200-100 BC. These speak of millennial periods and of the arrival of a savior who will end the lawlessness of the Romans.

³⁶ W. Miller (1976) *Isaiah 24-27 and the Origin of Apocalyptic* (Missoula: Scholars) from Yamauchi, p. 462

³⁷ J. Neusner (1968) *Jews and Judaism under Iranian Rule*, from Yamauchi, p. 465; Neusner is, according to Yamauchi, "the scholar with the greatest knowledge of the Jews under the Parthians and the Sasanians...".

³⁸ Miller, W. (1976) *Isaiah's Apocalypse. Isaiah 24-27 and the Origin of Apocalyptic*, Missoula: Scholars.

³⁹ Gignoux, P. (1987) *Apocalypses et voyages extra-terrestres dans l'Iran Mazd—en*. p.355 as reported by Collins (1992) p. 285

⁴⁰ Collins, op.cit. p.23

⁴¹ The Cumaean Sybil was the priestess presiding over the oracle at Cumae, located near Naples, Italy; c.20's BC

⁴² 4th Sibyl (c.late 1st century AD)

⁴³ c. 850 BC

⁴⁴ c.400 BC

⁴⁵ 19 BC

⁴⁶ ...as early as 4th century or as late as the 2nd century BC.

In those texts that pre-date the oldest Jewish apocalyptic, the material is really substantially different.

Jewish antecedents - Old Testament apocalyptic is deeply rooted in Judaism.

In fact, OT apocalyptic is uninterpretable without an understanding of the history of Israel and her literature.

Topical antecedents

God's direct judgment and redemption - expulsion of Adam and Eve; the Noaic flood; Sodom & Gomorrah; the Exodus

Messianic hopes - seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15); a prophet like Moses (Deut.18:15,18); shall rule the nations (Nu.24:15-19; c.f. Jer.48-49 repeats it so it's not David); Davidic (2 sa.8:7-18-29)

God dwelling amongst his people - Shemites (gen.9:27); "I will dwell..." (Ex.29:45; 1Ki.6:13)

Eternal presence with god - Ps.23:6

Supernaturalistic antecedents

Dreams/visions - numbers 12:6 indicates it would be normative for prophets to receive revelation in dreams; Abraham (genesis 15:1); Abimelech (genesis 20:1ff); Jacob (genesis 28:12; 31:11), Joseph (symbolic dreams gen.37; 40; 41); the Midianite soldier (symbolic dream judges 7:13); Solomon (1ki.3:5,15); Balaam (num.24:4,16); Samuel (1sam.3:15)

Visitations - Abraham and the covenant (gen.15:17); Abraham and the two visitors (gen.18:16f); Jacob wrestling (gen.32:24f); Moses & bush; shekinah of God (ex.19-20); Moses sees God (ex.33:17 - 34:35)

Translation - Enoch (gen.5:24); Elijah (2 ki.2:1f)

Audition - nu.12:7ff *vox deus* with Moses; Moses & bush (ex.3:2); Sinai (ex.33:17 - 34:35); Elijah (1 ki.17-19)

Angels - genesis 3:24; 16:7-11; 19:1ff; 21:17; 22:11; 31:11; ex.3:2; 14:19; nu.22:22ff; judges 6:11ff; 13:3ff; 2sam.24:17f; 1ki.19:5; 2ki.19:35;

Fallen angels - serpent (gen.3:1ff); Satan (1 chron. 21:1; job)

Jewish prophecy

What is Jewish prophecy?

- Biblical prophecy is an oral⁴⁷ or written⁴⁸ revelation from god through a person - the prophet.
- This revelation is primarily a morally based truth(s).
Predictive prophecy may be present but is often secondary to the truth claims - that they are from God.
Some find it helpful to distinguish prophetic 'forth-telling' from prophetic 'foretelling'.
- There are no real parallels with the prophecy of other near eastern cultures.
 - Babylonian omen texts (2000 BC) - books that examined ancient events with the intent of *finding cause and effect relationships between events* (e.g. Eclipses & disasters; entrails & the future).

⁴⁷ Oral prophets included Nathan, Gad, Shemaiah, Ahijah, Elijah, Micaiah, Elisha, Oded and so forth. Oral prophets could be recorded by others. For instance, in 2 Chronicles 21:12ff Jehoram received a letter from Elijah the prophet which is recorded by the author of 2Chronicles.

⁴⁸ All apocalyptic is literary according to contemporary scholarship; see Grayson, A. Kirk (1992) *Akkadian "Apocalyptic" Literature*. In: The Anchor Bible Dictionary, Volume 1, p. 282. Doubleday. p. 282

Reading entrails - a priest would open up a sheep and correlate his necropsy findings with future events.

- Mari prophecy – Mari was a city along the Euphrates, not in the Bible but important to biblical studies because of 20,000 clay tablets found there. Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, etc. are mentioned showing, at least, that such names were common during the period of the biblical accounts.

These tablets record oral prophecies for or against a royal house.

Their prophets would go into trances and they would speak...warning of disaster, etc..

However, there is *never an ethical or moral basis for a prophecy.*

Most of these are also directed toward the royal house not the common people.

- Other Akkadian prophecy – *Uruk prophecy & dynastic prophecy*; these are different than the previous two and perhaps a bit more like Jewish prophecy but they cannot be dated at this point and so hard to compare with the appropriate Jewish literature.

Sometimes, though not always, revelation from God is signified through the use of characteristic terms or expressions.⁴⁹

- *Massa* (lit. Burden; isa.13:1; 14:28) or *ne'um* (lit the declaration of; isa.15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1, 11, 13; 22:1; 23:1; 30:6) are translated 'oracle' A Hebraic oracle is a message from God.

These are frequently directed toward humans through the agency of a prophet.

Pagan oracles are usually places and so some translators inappropriately translate the Hebrew word *dabar* as oracle since it is a place designation (Isaiah 14:22; 49:18; 54:17; 56:8).

- *Naba/nibba, neba, nebua* (lit. To flow forth) are translated 'prophesy' or 'prophecy' respectively (isa.30:10; 47:13 used of pagan prophecy)

This carries that idea of a message from God flowing from the prophet.

- *Hazah* or *haszon* is the verb form of seer and is often translated 'vision'.

This does not mean that the experience was necessarily visual, however

Gen 15:1 the word of the lord came to Abram in a vision, saying...;

1sam.3:10-15 an auditory experience that Samuel called a vision;

Isaiah 2:1 the word that Isaiah...saw) (isa. 1:1; 21:2; 22:1,5; 29:7,11)

What is a prophet?

Is Elohim (the one of God) - called, empowered, belonging to and in relationship with god.

Hozeh or *ro'eh* (seer) - clear insight or recipient of special visions/revelations from God,

Not what he thinks, hopes, speculates or believes will serve his personal interests but what he receives from god is communicated.

⁴⁹ Many times expressions like, "says YHWH" or "says the holy one of Israel" appear in the text without being highlighted with the terms 'vision', 'prophecy' or 'oracle'.

At other times the simple act of a prophet speaking or writing is itself tacit indication that they are prophesying.

More challenging, however, are descriptive passages that bear an uncanny resemblance to events subsequent to the written revelation but bear absolutely no indicators suggesting that the author intended the text to be predictive (e.g. Psalm 22).

Early in biblical history there were prophets from the Levitical priesthood (i.e. forth-telling).

Deuteronomy 18 suggests the existence of an actual office of prophet that could be distinct from the priesthood.

As the priesthood fell away from God, prophets arose within Levi (Jeremiah/Ezekiel) and other tribes to warn Israel away from her apostasy.

What is the purpose of prophecy?

1. To stimulate dependence on God rather than self or alliances
2. To articulate conditional promises - continued blessing depended upon their continued fidelity and submission to God.
3. To articulate unconditional promises - he would make the nation an agent of blessing to the whole world and that the nation would survive any and all trials.
4. To clarify the audiences need for God's redemption (1Ki.8:46; Ps.14:2-3; 130:3; Prov.20:9; Isa.53:6; 59:4, 12-16; 64:6; Hab.2:4 & Mic.7:2) and a godly walk.
5. To authenticate these messages through predictive prophecy (Deut.18; Isa.42:9; 44:7-8; e.g. 2Ki.7). The penalties for false prophets were a little steep (Deut.18:20) and the effects of false prophecy on people could be very severe, so a definitive test of authenticity was needed.

How does apocalyptic relate to prophecy?

- According to some, apocalyptic is inferior revelation compared with prophetic literature.⁵⁰
 - Those holding this opinion note that the clarity of revelation appears to diminish from prophetic to apocalyptic literature.⁵¹
 - They notice an increasing distance from God along the same continuum.⁵²

For instance, in Jeremiah 1:11f God asks the prophet what he sees and when the prophet responds, God says, “you have seen well.”

Amos 3:7 says that God does nothing without revealing it to the prophets.

Yet, in Zechariah 4:1-5 they detect divine sarcasm directed toward Zechariah when he cannot explain the meaning of the apocalyptic vision he’s just received.

- ▶ However, against this, Zechariah contains both prophetic and apocalyptic material as does Joel, Isaiah and Daniel.
- ▶ Also, Jeremiah wasn’t asked to interpret his vision. What he saw was the same as what Zechariah saw – a symbolic vision.

These arguments seem to hang on the thinnest of threads.

Koch believes that scholars are embarrassed and perplexed by apocalyptic because of its use by fanatical millenarian groups rather than by its inferiority to prophetic literature.⁵³

While there are differences between prophecies and apocalyptic visions there must be some explanation other than inferiority.

- New Testament explanations of occult prophecies indicate that the obscure material, both prophetic and apocalyptic, was hidden because it served a future audience not the contemporaneous one and because God wanted it hidden from his enemies.⁵⁴
- Additionally, differences between prophecy and apocalyptic appear to be related to the content & timing of the apocalyptic predictions rather than the supposed inferiority of the genre.
- Finally, regarding apocalyptic as inferior also undermines the whole concept of inspiration.

In what sense is an inspired revelation inferior to some other inspired revelation?

Is its veracity suspect or only its interpretability?

⁵⁰ This is the view of the Christian Old Testament scholar Sam Meyer at O.S.U.; This follows from the tradition of Wellhausen & Shlirer who considered apocalyptic an inferior product of late Judaism. From Collins, John J. (1984) *The Apocalyptic Imagination. An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity*. p. 1.

⁵¹ In such a view, apocalyptic is designed to hide truth from those who cannot see. Everything needs interpretation and much is never interpreted in a manner that effectively clarifies.

⁵² The presence of a mediating angelic being implies increased distance from God, in their view. In prophetic material God asks the prophet what he sees. In apocalyptic the prophet asks the angel what he’s looking at.

⁵³ Thus, he proposed distinguishing between apocalypticism (i.e. a social ideology) and apocalyptic as a type of literature. Koch, Klaus ((1970) *Ratlos vor der Apokalypik*, GJtersloh; Mohn; translated *Rediscovery of Apocalyptic* (1972) Studies in Biblical Theology.

⁵⁴ Mark 4:11; Romans 11:25; 16:25; 1 Corinthians 2:7f; Ephesians 3:3-9; 1 Peter 1:10-12.

- Apocalyptic is prophetic...and is contiguous with other prophecy.
 - All the apocalyptic texts also contain straightforward prophecy.
 - Apocalyptic makes the same revelatory claim as prophecy.
 - It has the same forth-telling and foretelling functions as prophecy.

Although, often the foretelling does not appear to serve the role of validation for the prophets own audience but for a future audience – the one who will experience the predictions.⁵⁵
 - In terms of content, both forms report a future Day of YHWH involving direct judgment, purging, cleansing and redemption.
 - Both anticipate a time of temporal and spiritual blessing.

Theological influences

Let's assume that God provided the experiences to the apocalyptic prophets. Why are these revelations unique?

Well, on the one hand the revelations are not as distinctive as some would suggest. Even though apocalyptic materials include visions or visitations, they often contain the same introduction to their revelation as the other Jewish prophecies, "The word of the Lord came to me saying...."

Apocalyptic is intensely symbolic and often requires angelic or divine explanation but there is no clear explanation about why this kind of revelation is so cryptic.

The content of apocalyptic is often focused on God's future direct intervention in judgment and redemption but interestingly, these future interventions look an awful lot like God's past interventions. That is, they seem fantastic but God's intervention is often fantastic.

There's a very real sense in which Christians stand in relationship to the *eschaton* (i.e. the end of human history) as the OT prophets stood in relationship to messianic prophecies – mysteries about which we only know the outlines (1 Peter 1:10-12).

The details will likely remain unclear for those who will not experience the predicted events but will be undeniable thereafter.

For just such a reason and being mindful of the errors of the Sadducees, Pharisees and zealots of Christ's day we must be willing to leave the unclear unclarified until the fullness of time.

⁵⁵ In many cases, even the meaning of the foretold events is not clear to an audience before the fact. It is sometimes unclear whether a vision is to be taken as an actual description or symbolic representation of some future person, place or event.