

John J. Collins. *Apocalypse, Prophecy, and Pseudepigraphy: On Jewish Apocalyptic Literature.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015. 399 pp. \$34.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-8028-7285-2.



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Commissioned by Matthew A. Kraus (University of Cincinnati)

The study of apocalyptic literature has progressed very far over the last fifty years, and no one is more responsible for the advances than John J. Collins. In this book, he presents us with twenty essays (most previously published; some new), organized into five categories: the relationships between apocalypse and prophecy, the apocalypse genre, conceptions of the End, the function of pseudepigraphy, and ethical and political problems of apocalyptic literature—with three to five essays in each section. Each essay not only presents Collins's conclusions but also explores how other scholars have reacted to his conclusions—so the book functions somewhat as a history of recent scholarship. This is nowhere more evident than in the introduction, which traces the discussion of the genre apocalypse from the seminal definition of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) genre project (1979) to the present, as a kind of autobiographical reflection that is both entertaining and informative—almost worth the price of admission all by itself.

The first section contains three essays that explore proto-apocalyptic elements of Jewish prophecy. It includes a rather technical discussion of the eschatology of Zechariah, a survey of apocalyptic elements in the prophets, and a broadly accessible discussion of the transformation of prophecy in the Second Temple period. Collins makes a clear case that apocalypticism is "a new thing" (p. 67). Unlike the classical prophets, the apocalypses envision a final judgment with life beyond the grave, a mythical-poetic interpretation of history that is increasingly pessimistic, and the textualization of the divine message that unmoors it from specific historical circumstances.

The second section builds on these conclusions by considering variations within the genre of apocalypse. It contains essays on Enochic Judaism and the Qumran community, *Jubilees* (a hybrid), the Sibylline oracles (influenced by apocalypses), the *Gabriel Revelation* (a recently published apocalyptic text), and 4 Ezra (which both propounds and mitigates the ethnocentrism of the idea of election). The theme of this section, if

there is one, is to demonstrate the great variety of expectations about the future in Second Temple Judaism.

The third section considers three important themes typical of Jewish apocalyptic literature: the Temple, otherworldly journeys, and the after-life. The fate of the Temple was central to the development of eschatological thinking and the outpouring of apocalyptic literature in times of stress: its destruction by the Babylonians, its defilement in the time of the Maccabees, and the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans. Apocalypses written near the end of the first century CE (4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, and 3 Baruch) do not pine for its rebuilding, as did many Jews, rather they envision a future in which either the heavenly Temple itself is manifested or there is no temple at all because God is directly present in the midst of the people. (Both tendencies are evident in the Christian Apocalypse of John.)

While journeys to the other world are as old as the epic of Gilgamesh, something new happens in the Hellenistic age, beginning with the Enochic literature (with its focus on the journey itself) and culminating in the apocalyptic literature of the first and second centuries CE: the novel belief that mortals could enter the immortal realms. Explicit belief in the resurrection of the dead at the end of history emerges only in the book of Daniel and the Enoch literature, where it serves primarily as a theodicy. Those who are raised will be judged, either vindicating their faithfulness or condemning them for their injustice.

Section 4 consists of three essays that explore the purpose and function of pseudepigraphical literature, with special attention to Enoch, Ezra, and the Sibylline discourse. One obvious benefit of writing in the name of some ancient prophet is that it allows the actual author to construct an elaborate prediction of history from the time of the ancient hero down to the writer's present, giving weight to the actual predictions of the actual author. It is just in this seam that Collins suggests

we can find clues to the historical existence of the diverse groups that created and preserved this literature. A second benefit of pseudepigraphy is that it allows the communities to think that they stand in continuity with the ancient past even though a radically new ideology is forming a new kind of community.

The final section contains four essays probing the ethical and political implications of apocalypticism. The first essay argues that while apocalyptic literature may exist with and reinforce traditional obedience to the Torah (2 Baruch), it has a strong tendency to sectarianism (the Enochic literature, Daniel, and the Dead Sea Scrolls). Politically then, there is also a strong tendency toward isolation and/or opposition to the present political system. The second essay takes up the question whether apocalyptic literature is fundamentally resistance literature, and finds that too simple a formulation. The resistance envisioned in most apocalyptic writings is not a call to militancy but a call to a new way of life built on individual responsibility and hope of eternal life. The final two chapters present an insightful discussion of the violent rhetoric of apocalyptic discourse and the ethical implications of apocalyptic dualism with its "conviction that the believer is absolutely right and the enemy is absolutely wrong" (p. 339). While I find his solution (that such images "can be harnessed either for good or for evil" [p. 342]) a little too sanguine, these chapters raise important questions and bring the whole book to a satisfying conclusion.

There is much to like in this book. It provides an up-to-date and nuanced discussion of important aspects of Jewish apocalyptic literature by a careful and accomplished scholar. It provides both a broad sweep of the Second Temple era (see the excellent overview in chapter 10) and close examination of details of individual writings (including little-known works like the Gabriel Apocalypse in chapter 8). It provides a clear and insightful update of the progress made in understanding

apocalyptic literature over the last several decades.

There is little to fault. I could wish he had done more with the Zoroastrian precursors and the modern heirs of apocalyptic worldviews, but that is probably asking too much. Indices of modern authors and ancient texts are included, but there is no subject index, limiting one's ability to compare treatments of topics over the various essays. The substantial (thirty-page) bibliography provides excellent coverage of the general field but is far stronger on the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha than on Jewish-Christian writings.

The book and the individual essays are well organized, with clearly stated intentions and summary conclusions. And for a collection of essays it is remarkably unified. It provides an authoritative and comprehensible survey of the world of ancient apocalyptic literature. Paired with Collins's earlier book, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (2nd edition, 1998), this book should be on everyone's reading list.

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