

How to Read the Bible

Apocalyptic Literature

VIDEO NOTES

Apocalypse is a word that means “to uncover” or “reveal.” In the Bible, an apocalypse is when God pulls back the curtain to show the true nature of the world from a divine perspective. We see these apocalypses all throughout the Bible, like the prophet Isaiah’s vision of God’s throne room or Paul’s vision on the road to Damascus.

There are also whole sections of biblical books where a prophet describes extended apocalyptic dreams and visions, referred to as apocalyptic literature. Reading apocalyptic literature can be difficult. These passages are filled with strange images, poetic language, and symbolism. The key to understanding biblical apocalyptic literature is to look at the literary design that’s introduced in the book of Genesis and developed throughout the rest of Scripture.

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What is an Apocalypse?

Entire sections of the Bible are devoted to describing strange dreams or visions that reveal something vital to humans in the story. These visions uncover God's realm and change how the visionary sees their earthly circumstances. The biblical word used to describe these "uncoverings" is translated as "apocalypse." But these passages often get misunderstood because of our current understanding of what an apocalypse is.

The Vocabulary of Apocalypse

In contemporary culture, the words "apocalypse" or "apocalyptic" refer to the catastrophic end of the world. The dictionary definition of the English word describes it as, "the complete and final destruction of the world, as described in the biblical book of Revelation," or "an event involving destruction or damage on an awesome or catastrophic scale." (Dictionary.com)

This is not what these words mean in the Bible, and this popular definition leads us to drastically misunderstand and misread apocalyptic literature. In the biblical definition, an apocalypse is what happens when someone on earth is exposed to the heavenly, transcendent reality of God's realm, transforming their view of everything.

Apocalypse in the Hebrew Bible

In the Hebrew Bible, the word for apocalypse is *galah* (גלה) meaning, "to expose, reveal or uncover." Let's look at this word in a few passages.

Galah as Uncovering

The word *galah* does not always mean that God is revealing something. *Galah* is a Hebrew word that can refer to revealing or uncovering anything, like in Genesis 9 when Noah became drunk and lay *galah*, or uncovered/naked, in his tent.

Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay **uncovered** (*galah*) inside his tent.

GENESIS 9:20-21

Galah as Uncovering God's Perspective

The word is also used to refer to divine appearances, where God reveals himself and his purposes to a chosen individual. In Genesis 28:10-17, Jacob is running for his life into exile, but he experiences an apocalypse of the divine realm that gives perspective to his current circumstance.

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head **and lay down to sleep**. He had **a dream** in which he saw **a stairway/ramp resting on the land, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it**. There above it stood the Lord, and he said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." When **Jacob awoke from his sleep**, he thought, "Surely **the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.**" **He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."**

GENESIS 28:10-17

Genesis 35:6-7 refers back to Jacob's dream at Bethel in Genesis 28 as a *galah*, that is, a revealing of the divine realm to Jacob.

Jacob and all the people with him came to Luz (that is, Bethel) in the land of Canaan. There he built an altar, and he called the place "El Bethel" because it was there that God **revealed** himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother.

GENESIS 35:6-7

The purpose of Jacob's apocalypse is to reveal to him that his life has not gone off the rails but that his painful exile somehow fits within the purpose of God.

Notice also that the revelation to Jacob takes place through an altered state of consciousness in a dream. This is typical of apocalyptic moments in the Bible. Through dreams and visions, consciousness is expanded and heightened, so that the dreamer can become aware of ultimate reality in a way that seems normally inaccessible to humans. In this story Jacob becomes aware that his surroundings are a place where heaven and earth overlap, where God's presence and purpose are active and at work.

Galat Given to Israel's Prophets

In ancient Israel prophets were recognized as people to whom God had revealed himself and his purposes. Their role was to then share that revelation with Israel.

The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord. The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he **revealed** himself to Samuel through his word.

1 SAMUEL 3:19-21 (NIV)

Because *galah* means to uncover or reveal, many divine appearances are simply called visions or appearances of the divine.

Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of **Moreh** (moreh / vision = mareh)... The Lord **appeared** (wayyera') to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord who had **appeared** (nir'eh) to him.

GENESIS 12:6-7

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a **vision** (makhazeh), saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; your reward shall be very great."

GENESIS 15:1

Now when the sun was going down, **a deep sleep fell upon Abram**; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him... It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces.

GENESIS 15:12, 17

In biblical vocabulary, the opposite of revealed is hidden.

The **hidden** things belong to the Lord our God, but the things **revealed** belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

DEUTERONOMY 29:29

Apocalypse in the New Testament

In the New Testament Greek, *apokalupto* (ἀποκαλύπτω) means to uncover or reveal. This is a compound word meaning "to remove a cover from" (*apo* = "from" + *kalupto* = "to cover").

Kalupto: To Cover, Conceal

Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves **covered over** the boat. But Jesus was sleeping.

MATTHEW 8:23-24 (NIV)

No one lights a lamp and **covers** it in a clay jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, they put it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. For there is nothing hidden that will not be **visible**, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into **visibility**.

LUKE 8:16-17 (NIV)

Apokalupto: To Reveal What is Hidden

The true identity of Jesus was hidden to many who saw and heard him. Jesus recognized that an apocalypse was necessary to truly recognize him.

At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have **hidden** these things from the wise and learned, and **revealed** them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to **reveal** him."

MATTHEW 11:25-27

Paul's Apocalypse

In the letter to the Galatians, Paul describes his meeting with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus. He calls the meeting an apocalypse.

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin.

I did not receive it from any human, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by **apocalypse** from Jesus Christ.

For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to **apocalypse** his Son in/to me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.

GALATIANS 1:11-17

In the book of Acts, both Luke and Paul describe Paul's apocalypse in narrative form. Notice that the narrative does not call it an apocalypse but describes the vision in detail.

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, **suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him**. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when **he opened his eyes he could see nothing**. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days **he was blind**, and did not eat or drink anything.

ACTS 9:1-9 (NIV)

“About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly **a bright light from heaven flashed around me**. I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked. ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me. ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ I asked. ‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’ My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

ACTS 22:6-11 (NIV)

On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, **I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me** and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. **I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of the Satan to God**, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are made holy by faith in me.’

So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to **the vision from heaven**.

ACTS 26:12-19 (NIV)

Conclusion

In the Bible, an apocalypse is a moment in someone’s life where God reveals himself in such a way that the observer is overtaken by a divine vantage point on their life or human history. These moments almost always involve altered states of consciousness (dreams, visions) as a result of ascetic practices (fasting, meditating, prayer, isolation). In these moments of heightened awareness, the person comes to realize that their current situation or environment is actually permeated with divine presence and power. In an apocalyptic moment, heaven joins earth in the mind and heart of the visionary, and they are able to see reality in a way that others cannot.

Apocalyptic Stories in the Bible

The Bible is full of stories of people having apocalypses. Below is a list of stories found in the Bible and in post-biblical Jewish literature. These texts were generated out of a tradition of Jewish practices of prayer, fasting, and meditation that resulted in altered states of consciousness. In these moments, the biblical prophets experienced dreams and visionary states where they saw the real meaning of history and their lives. These passages are literary works that recount visions in a highly stylized form.

Biblical Apocalypses

- Adam in Genesis 2
- Abraham in Genesis 12, 15, 17, and 22
- Abimelech in Genesis 20
- Jacob in Genesis 28
- Moses in Exodus 3 and 19-24, 25-31, and Deuteronomy 32-33
- Samuel in 1 Samuel 3
- David in 2 Samuel 7
- Solomon in 1 Kings 3
- Micaiah in 1 Kings 22
- Isaiah in Isaiah 6
- Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1
- Ezekiel in Ezekiel 1, 8-11, 40-48
- Amos in Amos 8-9
- Zechariah in Zechariah 1-6
- Daniel in Daniel 1-7

Post-Biblical Jewish Apocalypses

(Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, i.e. second temple literature and later)

- 1 Enoch (consists of five distinct works): 3rd-1st century B.C.
- The Revelation to John: 1st century A.D.
- 2 Baruch: 1st-2nd century A.D. (after A.D. 70)
- 3 Baruch: 1st-2nd century A.D. (after A.D. 70)
- 4 Ezra: 1st-2nd century A.D. (after A.D. 70)
- Apocalypse of Abraham: 1st-2nd century A.D.
- Apocalypse of Zephaniah: 1st-3rd century A.D.
- 2 Enoch: 3rd-6th century A.D.
- 3 Enoch: 5th-9th century A.D.

The Biblical Cosmos and the Apocalyptic Imagination

Apocalyptic dreams and visions in the Bible can be hard to understand because we are entering into a personal dream or vision of an ancient Israelite. It's important to note that apocalyptic literature in the Bible is built on two fundamental ideas that influenced the biblical authors. The first is their understanding of the order of the cosmos, and the second is their understanding of humans as God's image.

The Apocalyptic Image of the Divine Throne Room

The biblical cosmos consists of three tiers: the heavens (above), the land (where we live), and the sea (the unordered and chaotic part of the cosmos). The primary realms of the biblical drama are the heavens and the land.

In Genesis 1, heaven and land are two distinct yet overlapping realms. The heavenly/higher realm is transcendent and the place where life, meaning, and order originate.

God Rules from his Throne in Heaven

The Lord has established **his throne in heaven**,
And his kingdom rules over all.

PSALM 103:19

This is what the Lord says:

"Heaven is my throne, and the land is my footstool.

Where is the house you will build for me?

Where will my resting place be?

Has not my hand made all these things, and so
they came into being?"

ISAIAH 66:1-2

The Lord is in his holy temple; **Yahweh's throne is in heaven**;
His eyes behold, his eyelids test the sons of men.

PSALM 11:4

God Rules from Heaven with Other Spiritual Beings

The heavenly realm is thought of as a divine throne room from which God rules. Other spiritual beings have access to God's throne room, and they are often referred to as "the hosts of heaven."

The Lord has established **his throne in heaven**,
And his kingdom rules over all.
Praise the Lord, you his **angels**,
You mighty ones who do his bidding,
Who obey his word.
Praise the Lord, all his **hosts of heaven**,
You his servants who do his will.

PSALM 103:19-21

Micaiah said, "Therefore, hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all **the host of heaven** standing by him on his right and on his left.

1 KINGS 22:19

The heavens will praise your wonders,
O Yahweh; your faithfulness also in **the assembly of the holy ones**.
For who in the skies is comparable to Yahweh?
Who among the sons of God is like Yahweh,
A God greatly feared in **the council of the holy ones**,
And awesome above all those who are around him?

PSALM 89:5-7

God's Rule is Good

It is from that divine throne room that God issues his decisions, which are based on his heavenly vantage point, wisdom, justice, and righteousness.

For the word of the Lord is upright,

And all his work is done in faithfulness.

He loves righteousness and justice;

The land is full of the loyal love of the Lord.

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,

And by the breath of his mouth all their host.

He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap;

He lays up the deeps in storehouses.

Let all the earth fear the Lord;

Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.

For he spoke, and it was done;

He commanded, and it stood fast.

The Lord nullifies the counsel of the nations;

He frustrates the plans of the people.

The counsel of the Lord stands forever,

The plans of his heart from generation to generation.

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord,

The people whom he has chosen for his own inheritance.

The Lord looks from heaven;

He sees all the sons of men;

From his dwelling place

He looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth,

He who fashions the hearts of them all,

He who understands all their works.

PSALM 33:4-15

“Christians have a long tradition of adjusting and translating from biblical to contemporary cosmologies, often without realizing it. In the history of Christianity, the ancient Israelite cosmology gave way to the Ptolemaic cosmology, which dominated Christian thought for centuries. [Ptolemaic cosmology was earth-centric, but envisioned the earth as a globe] Most Christians did not even notice that a shift had taken place. And once Copernican cosmology finally supplanted the Ptolemaic, Christians had little trouble adapting to that either...

Remember, in the biblical texts, the symbolic meaning of the image of heaven above had always been the most important thing about such language. Height or depth spoke of relative importance and rank... and for the biblical authors, the idea of heaven being ‘above’ rest of creation meant that heaven was the most important dimension of the created world, because from that high and exalted place God ruled over all things. Interpreting language of the high heaven non-geographically does not threaten the heart of this biblical teaching at all—the truth Scripture pointed to was always that heaven is invisible and inaccessible to humans, and yet is at the heart of creation because divine life and rule flow from it. Whether or not heaven is also literally above the sky or not is incidental to the truth that Scripture points towards.”

ROBIN PARRY, *THE BIBLICAL COSMOS: A PILGRIM’S GUIDE TO THE WEIRD AND WONDERFUL WORLD OF THE BIBLE*, PP. 180-181.

The Apocalyptic Image of the Divine Human King

The second foundational idea in the Hebrew Bible that helps us understand apocalyptic dreams and visions is that God created humanity in his image. While humanity failed to fulfill this role in the garden, God relentlessly works to restore humanity to their divine purpose outlined in Genesis 1.

The Image of God = Humanity as God's Royal Image

Humanity is created as God's image-idol and filled with divine wisdom in order to mediate God's rule over creation. The purpose of humanity's appointment as the divine image is royal rule over creation on God's behalf. This is a priestly role. Humanity in the garden is an incarnation of God's heavenly presence and rule on earth. We are all meant to rule like priests, kings, and queens over God's creation.

26 and God said, "Let us **make human in our image, according to our likeness;** and let them **rule** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all **the land**, and over every creeper that creeps on the land."

27 and **God created human in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.**

28 and **God blessed them**, and God said to them, "**Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the land**, and **subdue** it; and **rule** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living creature that creeps on **the land.**"

GENESIS 1:26-28

It is clear from Genesis 1 that God alone has the unique mastery and power over the chaotic nothingness and can speak reality into an ordered existence. But now humanity is appointed as God's delegated ruler, as an embodied physical image of the divine rule.

"The imago Dei refers to human rule, that is, an exercise of power on God's behalf in creation... This delegation of, or sharing in, God's rule suggests the image is 'representative,' designating the responsible office and task entrusted to humanity in administering the earthly realm on God's behalf... [However] the meaning of 'rule' goes well beyond our contemporary preconceptions. The royal metaphor...integrally includes wisdom and artful construction. The God who rules creation by his authoritative word is also the supreme artisan who constructs a complex and habitable cosmic structure... The humans are called to imitate or continue God's own creative activity by populating and organizing the remaining unformed and unfilled earth. God has, in other words, started the process of forming and filling, which humans, as God's earthly delegates, are to continue."

J. RICHARD MIDDLETON, THE LIBERATING IMAGE: THE IMAGO DEI IN GENESIS 1, PP. 88-89.

The Image of God = God's Idol Statue in his Cosmic Temple

The words "image" (Hebrew: *tselem* / צֶלֶם) and "likeness" (Hebrew: *demut* / דְמוּת) are most commonly used to refer to physical statues of stone or wood, and these words are usually translated to "idol" or "statue" in such contexts.

Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, "When you cross over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their figured stones, and destroy all their molten **images** and demolish all their high places;

NUMBERS 33:51-52

All the people of the land went to the house of Baal and tore it down; his altars and **his images** they broke in pieces thoroughly

2 KINGS 11:18

"To appreciate the full force of this image-of-God-in-humanity theology, we must have in mind the role of idols in ancient Near Eastern religion...where an idol is set up to be the real presence of the god. Because the god is really believed to inhabit the image, the image is the god, and its proper care and veneration guarantees the god's benefits and protection for the worshipping community... With this understanding of divine images assumed, [Genesis 1] has a sharply focused theological anthropology: humanity is the eyes, ears, mouth, being, and action of the creator God within his creation... This point gives the biblical prohibition of idolatry its strongest possible rationale: for humans to make an idol is foolish because it fails to appreciate that according to the original order of creation, it is humanity that functions in relation to God as do the idols in relation to their gods."

CRISPIN FLETCHER-LOUIS, "GOD'S IMAGE, HIS COSMIC TEMPLE, AND THE HIGH PRIEST," HEAVEN ON EARTH: THE TEMPLE IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY, PP. 83-84.

"[In Genesis 1] 'adam-beings are animate icons... the peculiar purpose for their creation is 'theophanic': to represent or mediate the sovereign presence of the deity within the central nave of the cosmic temple, just as cult-images were supposed to do in conventional sanctuaries. [This means that] humanity is an inherently ambivalent species, whose...existence blurs, by design, the otherwise sharp distinction between creator and creation."

S. DEAN MCBRIDE, DIVINE PROTOCOL: GENESIS 1:1-2:3 AS PROLOGUE TO THE PENTATEUCH, PP. 16-17.

Israel as God's Apocalyptic Image-Idol

The biblical story claims that an exalted humanity that is unified with God is the true source of divine wisdom and knowledge on earth. The wisdom of God empowers humans to learn and discern the truth about creation (cosmology) and history (the past and the future). Since all humanity neglected God, he chose the family of Abraham and made a covenant with them with the Torah (translated as law, teaching, statutes, judgements). The laws of the Torah (revealed in an apocalypse to Moses and the people at Mount Sinai) will fill Israel with God's wisdom, so that they won't need divination because their wisdom will be God's wisdom.

Because Israel is God's image, Israel is not to depict God with any other earthly image (human or animal) or consult the stars for communication of the divine will. Israel is Yahweh's image-idol.

See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do this in the land where you are entering to possess it. So keep and do them, for **that is your wisdom and your understanding** in the sight of the people who will hear all these statutes and say, "Surely **this great nation is a wise and understanding people.**"

Yahweh commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might perform them in the land where you are going over to possess it.

So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any **form** on the day Yahweh spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, so that you do not act corruptly and make a **graven image** for yourselves in the form of any figure, the **likeness of male or female**, the **likeness of any animal** that is on the earth, the **likeness of any winged bird** that flies in the sky, the **likeness of anything that creeps** on the ground, the **likeness of any fish** that is in the water below the earth. And beware not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.

But the Lord has taken you and **brought you all out of the iron furnace**, from Egypt, to be a people for his own possession, as today.

DEUTERONOMY 4:5-6, 14-20

"Human visions of, journeys to, and revelations of a world beyond quotidian, earthly space and time [in apocalyptic literature] are ultimately grounded in the belief that humanity is made to be God's tselem, that is, the Creator's living, divine, cult statue [whose wisdom] is grounded in the divine life. [This kind of human] is able to see the world as God sees it. She moves around the world as God and his servants (the angels) move around it. Revelations of cosmic and divine secrets come directly to and through the human being; not through divination and the techniques of pagan idolatry."

CRISPIN FLETCHER-LOUIS, 2 ENOCH AND THE NEW
PERSPECTIVE ON APOCALYPTIC, P. 127.

The Image of God and Ancient Astrology and Divination

The nations around Israel consulted diviners and sorcerers who read the heavens and patterns of the stars in order to discern the will of the gods. Israel's claim that they are God's image de-credits these other idols.

This is what the Lord says—your redeemer, who formed you in the womb:

I am the Lord, the maker of all things,

Who stretches out the heavens,

Who spreads out the earth by myself,

Who foils **the signs of false prophets**

And **makes fools of diviners,**

Who overthrows the learning of the wise

And turns it into nonsense,

Who carries out the words of his servants

And fulfills the counsel of his messengers,

Who says of Jerusalem, "It shall be inhabited,"

Of the towns of Judah, "They shall be rebuilt,"

And of their ruins, "I will restore them,"

ISAIAH 44:24-26

Go down, sit in the dust, Virgin Daughter Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, queen city of the Babylonians. No more will you be called tender or delicate.

You are wearied with your many counsels; Let now the **astrologers**, those who **prophesy by the stars**, those who predict by the new moons, stand up and save you from what will come upon you.

ISAIAH 47:1, 13

"Ancient astrology is divisible very roughly into 2 essentially different systems: (1) Omina, which studied celestial phenomena as signs or indicators of future terrestrial events... and (2) astrology proper, which studied the influence of the heavenly bodies on the course of events on earth.... The diviners regarded all natural phenomena as comprising a symbolic language of the gods which made possible knowledge of future events. By means of the system of schematic correlation of celestial sign (omen protasis) and terrestrial event (omen apodosis) the divine language was decipherable to the scholars. Because nature was not yet fully separated from divine forces, the correlations of natural phenomena and human concerns in the form of omens made direct and concrete links between human spheres of existence and the divine. The terrestrial events recorded in EAE apodoses are almost entirely public concerns. Uppermost are predictions concerning the prosperity or downfall of the king and his army, or the country as a whole and its enemies. Floods, crop failure, and pestilence also frequently appear."

FRANCESCA ROCHBERG-HALTON, "ASTROLOGY IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST," THE ANCHOR YALE BIBLE DICTIONARY, VOL. 1, P. 504.

"The signs of the earth together with those of the sky produce a signal, heaven and earth both bring us portents, each separately but not different, since sky and earth are interconnected. A sign that is evil in the sky is evil on earth, a sign that is evil on earth is evil in the sky.

When you look up a sign, be it one in the sky or one on earth, and if that sign's evil portent is confirmed, then it has indeed occurred for you in reference to an enemy or to a disease or to a famine. Check the date of that sign, and should no sign have occurred to counterbalance that sign, should no annulment have taken place, one can not make it pass by, its evil can not be removed, it will happen."

FROM A BABYLONIAN DIVINER'S MANUAL [EARLY 1000S B.C.], EDITED BY LEO OPPENHEIM, CITED IN ULLA KOCH-WESTENHOLZ, MESOPOTAMIAN ASTROLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION TO BABYLONIAN AND ASSYRIAN CELESTIAL DIVINATION PP. 137-138. [LINES 38-40 AND 43-44].

Apocalyptic dreams and visions are all rooted in the same foundational worldview. The biblical authors wrote from a belief that God rules from a divine throne room and desires for humans to have access to that throne room here on earth and that God's purpose for humanity is to be his rulers over the land on his behalf as his image.

The Apocalyptic Journey into the Heaven and Earth Place

Eden as the Apocalyptic Proto-Temple

The tabernacle, and later the temple, was a place where heaven and earth overlapped. In Genesis 2 and 3, God creates a garden where the first humans are to live. This garden, described as a garden in Eden, is a narrative image of the temple. God forms humanity in the "dust" realm of mortality, but he exalts and "rests" them in the heaven and earth place where they will live by God's wisdom. The garden in Eden is filled with earthly and heavenly creatures (humans and also cherubim, see Genesis 3:24). The garden shows Adam and Eve like royal priests placed to work within it as they trust God's wisdom.

A and Yahweh God formed the **human** of dust from the ground,
 and he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life;
 and the **human** became a living being.

B and Yahweh God planted a **garden in Eden**, toward the east/from of old,
 A' and he placed there the **human** whom he had formed.

B' and Yahweh God caused to sprout from the ground
every tree that is desirable to sight and good for eating;
 and **the tree of life** also in the middle of the garden,
 and **the tree of the knowledge of good and bad**.

and Yahweh God took the **human**
 and he rested him in the **garden of Eden** **to work it and to keep it**.

and Yahweh God commanded the **human**, saying,
 "From every tree of the garden
 you may surely eat;
 but from **the tree of the knowledge of good and bad**
 you shall not eat from it,
 for in the day that you eat from it
 you will surely die."

GENESIS 2:7-9, 15-17

In the garden humanity has the opportunity to rule with God's life and wisdom. However, they are deceived by a snake (Hebrew: *nakhash* / נחש) who lures the royal-priests to seize divine wisdom on their own terms. It is no coincidence that *nakhash* is a Hebrew homonym with the Hebrew word for divination, meaning, "to discern the divine will through signs and omens."

Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem; He did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord dispossessed before the sons of Israel. For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he erected altars for Baal and made an Asherah, as Ahab king of Israel had done, and **worshiped all the host of heaven** and served them...For **he built altars for all the host of heaven** in the two courts of the house of the Lord. He made his son pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and **used divination** (*nakhash*), and dealt with mediums and spiritists.

2 KINGS 21:1-6

In Genesis 3, humanity forfeits its divine calling to be the medium through which God's wisdom is mediated into the earthly realm. The evil agent of this loss is called "divination."

The Apocalyptic Lineage and Symbolic Eden-Spots

After humanity's exile from Eden, the seed of the woman is traced through the biblical story. These are people who become "new Adams" and "new Eves" and are chosen to be vehicles of divine wisdom in their own day. They are usually invited into the divine council of God to learn his purposes and become agents of his will on earth as in heaven.

These invitations often take place at sacred spaces ("thin places") where heaven and earth overlap, and they often involve altered states of consciousness (dreams and visions) that bring someone to the border of heaven and earth.

This is why every apocalyptic "journey" into the future or the transcendent cosmos involves a priestly human (an "Adam" figure) who is mirrored by a heavenly priestly figure (angel) and then brought into the divine throne room to discover the truth about reality.

The Patriarchs as Priestly, Apocalyptic Visionaries

Throughout the Torah, we see the patriarchs of the people of Israel encounter God's wisdom through apocalypses. Let's look at a few examples from the life of Abraham.

When Abram enters into the land, he goes to a grove of sacred trees where God appears to him.

Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to **the oak of Moreh** (Hebrew: moreh / "vision" = mareh)... The Lord **appeared** (Hebrew: wayyera') to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord who had **appeared** (Hebrew: nir'eh) to him.

GENESIS 12:6-7

The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "**Now lift up your eyes and look** from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered. Arise, **walk about the land** through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you." Then Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by **the oaks of Mamre**, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord.

GENESIS 13:14-18

Genesis chapter 15 recounts an apocalyptic vision where God appears to Abraham to give him a preview of the future enslavement and deliverance of his descendants.

In Genesis 18 and 19 Abraham is invited into the divine council.

Now **the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre**, while he was **sitting at the tent door** in the heat of the day. When **he lifted up his eyes and looked**, behold, **three men were standing opposite him**; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth, and said, "My Lord, if now I have found favor in your sight, please do not pass your servant by. Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree..."

GENESIS 18:1-4

Then the men rose up from there, and looked down toward Sodom; and Abraham was walking with them to send them off. The Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed? For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what he has spoken about him." And the Lord said, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to me; and if not, I will know."

Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while **Abraham was still standing before the Lord**.

GENESIS 18:16-22

Now **Abraham arose early in the morning and went to the place where he had stood before the Lord**; and **he looked down** toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the valley, and he saw, and behold, the smoke of the land ascended like the smoke of a furnace.

Thus it came about, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot lived.

GENESIS 19:27-29

Moses and Aaron as the Apocalyptic Prophet-Priest-King

Moses is called by God to reveal his wisdom to the enslaved Israelites and lead them out of bondage. Moses' first apocalypse happens in Exodus chapter 3 where God appears to him in a burning bush on Mount Sinai/Horeb and calls him into his role as Israel's "new Adam."

Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. **The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a S'neh tree**; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed.

EXODUS 3:1-2

God repeatedly calls Moses to assume the role as a new Adam, but Moses' fifth objection to God's commission makes God angry, and Moses forfeits his role. Instead, Moses and his brother Aaron will together represent the full image of God. Moses as the royal-prophet and Aaron as the royal-priest.

Throughout the Torah, both brothers are depicted as apocalyptic visionaries who ascend into heaven and earth places to learn God's will and to represent Israel as a new Adam who can return to Eden. Moses ascends into the heavens to see God's glory and receive the Torah and the blueprints for building a micro-Eden.

Then Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. **The glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai**, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day he called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. And to the eyes of the sons of Israel **the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire** on the mountain top. **Moses entered the midst of the cloud as he went up to the mountain**; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

EXODUS 24:15-18

Moses is the foundational apocalyptic visionary who begins to look like the restored Adam, a royal-priest glowing with God's life.

It came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony were in Moses' hand as he was coming down from the mountain), that **Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone** because of his speaking with him. So when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, behold, **the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid** to come near him. Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers in the congregation returned to him; and Moses spoke to them. Afterward all the sons of Israel came near, and he commanded them to do everything that the Lord had spoken to him on Mount Sinai. When Moses had finished speaking with them, **he put a veil over his face**. But whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take off the veil until he came out; and whenever he came out and spoke to the sons of Israel what he had been commanded, the sons of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone. So Moses would replace the veil over his face until he went in to speak with him.

EXODUS 34:29-35

He said,

"Hear now my words:

If there is a prophet among you,
I, the Lord, shall make myself known to him **in a vision**.

I shall speak with him **in a dream**.

Not so, with **my servant Moses**.

He is faithful in all my household;
With him **I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings**,
And he beholds the form of the Lord.

Why then were you not afraid

To speak against my servant, against Moses?"

NUMBERS 12:6-8

Israel's apocalyptic prophet Moses brings God's perspective regarding Israel's place in the cosmos (the sacred center) and their place in history (his eschatological vision).

Now write down this song and teach it to the Israelites and have them sing it, so that it may be a witness for me against them.

DEUTERONOMY 31:19 (NIV)

Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, that I may speak these words in their hearing and call the heavens and the earth to witness against them. **For I know that after my death you will act corruptly** and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and **evil will befall you in the latter days**, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger with the work of your hands.

Then Moses spoke in the hearing of all the assembly of Israel the words of this song, until they were complete.

DEUTERONOMY 31:28-30

The Prophets as Apocalyptic Visionaries

The prophets were people who were called to relay God's message and vantage point to the people of Israel. In the Bible, the prophets have parallel apocalyptic experiences to Moses. They find themselves in a heaven and earth place among the divine council, they are frightened by the heavenly presence, and they are commissioned as messengers.

When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble?
When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it?
Surely the sovereign Lord does nothing
Without **revealing** (Hebrew: *galah*, Septuagint: *apokalypse*)
his council-plans
To his servants the prophets.

AMOS 3:6-7 (NIV)

Isaiah

Isaiah describes his apocalypse in Isaiah chapter 6.

In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of his robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said,

"Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts,

The whole earth is full of his glory."

And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke...

Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

ISAIAH 6:1-4, 8

Jeremiah

Jeremiah distills his visions and dreams into an opening chapter that describes his apocalyptic encounter with Yahweh.

The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiyah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, to whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the exile of Jerusalem in the fifth month.

Now **the word of the Lord came to me** saying,

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
And before you were born I consecrated you;
I have appointed you a prophet to the nations."

Then I said, "Alas, Lord God! Behold,
I do not know how to speak,
Because I am a youth."

But the Lord said to me,

"Do not say, 'I am a youth,'
Because everywhere I send you, you shall go,
And all that I command you, you shall speak.

Do not be afraid of them,

For I am with you to deliver you," declares the Lord.

Then the Lord stretched out his hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me,

"Behold, I have put my words in your mouth."

JEREMIAH 1:1-9

Jeremiah reflects on the fact that genuine prophets of Yahweh are those who have stood among the divine council.

Thus says the Lord of hosts,

“Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you.

They are leading you into futility;

They speak a vision of their own imagination,

Not from the mouth of the Lord.

They keep saying to those who despise me,

‘The Lord has said, “You will have peace.”’

And as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart,

They say, ‘Calamity will not come upon you.’

But **who has stood in the council of the Lord,**

That he should see and hear his word?

Who has given heed to his word and listened?

Behold, the storm of the Lord has gone forth in wrath,

Even a whirling tempest;

It will swirl down on the head of the wicked.

The anger of the Lord will not turn back

Until he has performed and carried out the purposes of his heart;

In the last days you will clearly understand it.

I did not send these prophets,

But they ran.

I did not speak to them,

But they prophesied.

But **if they had stood in my council,**

Then they would have announced my words to my people,

And would have turned them back from their evil way

And from the evil of their deeds.

JEREMIAH 23:16-22

Ezekiel

Ezekiel also has an apocalypse described in Ezekiel chapters 1 through 3.

(On the fifth of the month in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile, the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and there **the hand of the Lord came upon him.**)

As I looked, behold, a storm wind was coming from the north, a great cloud with fire flashing forth continually and a bright light around it, and in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire.

EZEKIEL 1:2-4

Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance; and on that which resembled a throne, high up, was **a figure with the appearance of a human.** Then I noticed from the appearance of his loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of his loins and downward I saw something like fire; and there was a radiance around him. As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was **the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.** And when **I saw it**, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking.

EZEKIEL 1:26-28

Then he said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet that I may speak with you!" As he spoke to me **the Spirit entered me** and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me.

EZEKIEL 2:1-2

So **the Spirit lifted me up and took me away**; and I went embittered in the rage of my spirit, and **the hand of the Lord was strong on me.** Then I came to the exiles who lived beside the river Chebar at Tel-abib, and I sat there seven days where they were living, causing consternation among them.

EZEKIEL 3:14-15

Daniel and the Son of Man

Daniel chapter 7 is an amalgamation of the many apocalyptic images we've explored so far. Daniel's dream in this chapter begins with imagery drawn directly from Genesis 1--a dark, chaotic ocean being stirred up by a cosmic wind, from which emerges fantastic living creatures.

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel saw a dream and visions in his mind as he lay on his bed; then he wrote the dream down and related the following summary of it. Daniel said, "I was looking in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. And four great beasts were coming up from the sea, different from one another."

DANIEL 7:1-3

The animals symbolize kingdoms and rulers who will oppress Israel for a divinely allowed period of time until God's Kingdom comes.

I kept looking
Until thrones were set up,
And the Ancient of Days took his seat;
His clothing was like white snow
And the hair of his head like pure wool.
His throne was ablaze with flames,
Its wheels were a burning fire.
A river of fire was flowing
And coming out from before him;
Thousands upon thousands were attending him,
And myriads upon myriads were standing before him;
The court sat,
And the books were opened.
Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful
words which the horn was speaking; I kept looking until
the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given
to the burning fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their
dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was
granted to them for an appointed period of time.
I kept looking in the night visions,
And behold, with the clouds of heaven
One like a Son of Man was coming,
And he came up to the Ancient of Days
And was presented before him.
And to him was given dominion,
Glory and a kingdom,
That all the peoples, nations and men of every language
Might serve him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
Which will not pass away;
And his kingdom is one
Which will not be destroyed.

DANIEL 7:9-14

Daniel sees the heavenly throne room of God and the divine council, and he hears and sees a divine decree. He sees that these beastly kingdoms will come to an end, and in their place there will be an exalted "son of Adam," or son of man.

Key Takeaways

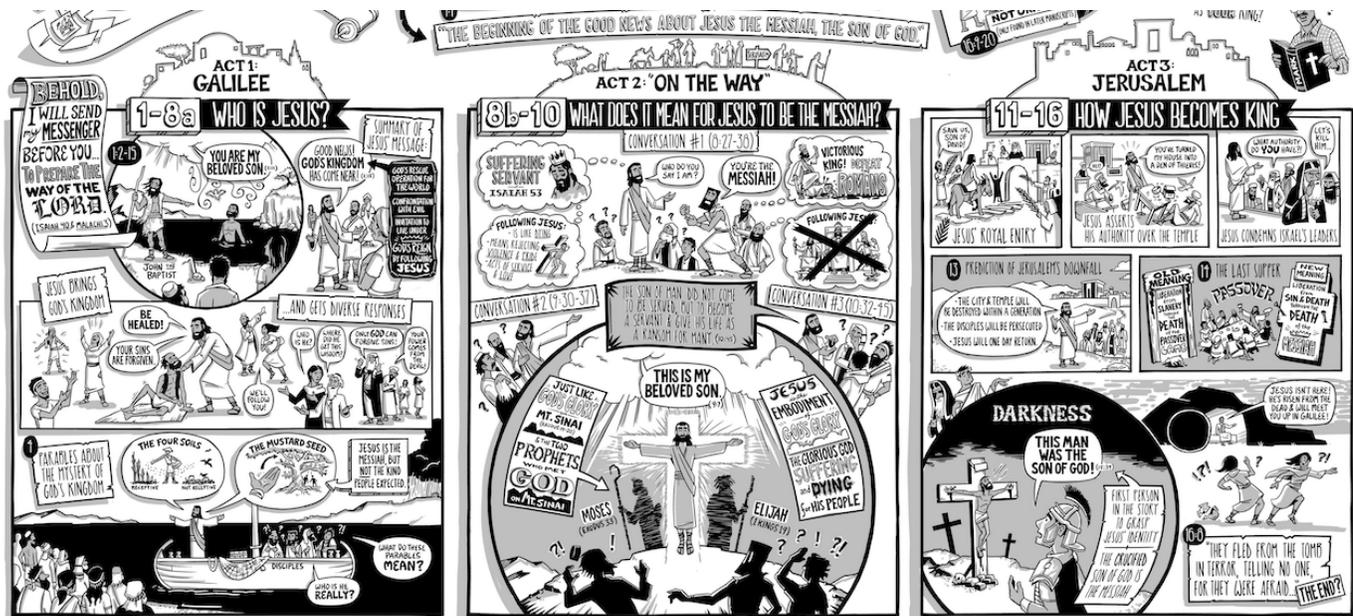
The son of man figure from Daniel 7 is the new Adam who has come to restore humanity to their calling in the garden. The son of man is also the new Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Aaron, the ultimate royal prophet-priest who ascends to the divine throne to take his seat in authority over heaven and earth. The human figure seen sitting on the throne (Exodus 24, Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1, Daniel 7) is a human-Yahweh figure, who is the true bridge between heaven and earth.

Jesus as the Apocalyptic Son of Man

Jesus is introduced as this true son of Adam, the royal-priestly image of God who shares in Yahweh's identity and is filled with divine wisdom and will bring divine perspective to heaven and earth.

Jesus as the Priestly-Royal Son of Man

Mark's Gospel account is designed in three sections. Each section has a key moment where the identity of Jesus is revealed.



These three “revelation” stories are strategically located in each section (see C. Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*) and have strong parallels that clue the reader into seeing the importance of Jesus’ true identity in Mark’s account.

Baptism (1:9-11)	Transfiguration (9:1-13)	Crucifixion (15:21-41)
Heavens torn (Greek: <i>schizo</i>) Dove descends	Garments turn white Cloud descends	Sanctuary veil torn (Greek: <i>schizo</i>) Darkness spreads
Voice from heaven	Voice from cloud	Jesus’ great voice
“You are my son, the beloved, with you I am pleased”	“This is my son, the beloved, listen to him”	“Truly, this man was the son of God”
John the Baptist as Elijah	Jesus appears with Elijah	“Is he calling Elijah?”

“[Mark’s introduction] sets up a dramatic irony that serves as the mainspring of the story: we as readers know the identity of Jesus from the first line, but none of the characters in the story know it—except, as we shall see, the demons. Consequently, Mark is not at all like a detective story, where the reader must assemble clues to figure out Jesus’ true identity; rather the story’s suspense arises...from the awful tension between the reader’s knowledge and the ignorance of the actors.”

RICHARD B. HAYS, *THE MORAL VISION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT*, P. 75.

Jesus’ baptism, transfiguration, and resurrection are all moments where we see Jesus’ true identity. Below is the narrative of Jesus’ transfiguration.

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and brought them up on a high mountain by themselves. And **he was transformed before them; and his garments became radiant and exceedingly white**, as no launderer on earth can whiten them. Elijah appeared to them along with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles, one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified. Then **a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son, listen to him!”** All at once they looked around and saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone.

As they were coming down from the mountain, he gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead. They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant.

MARK 9:2-9

Jesus Recreating Eden

In Mark 1, there is a short narrative image of Jesus restoring Eden and assuming the identity of the Son of Man. Notice that Jesus refuses the temptation and is described as being with the animals.

At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

MARK 1:12

Jesus as the Angelic Mediator of Divine Mysteries about God's Kingdom

Much of Jesus' teaching revolves around the message of God's Kingdom. Often presented in parables, Jesus' Kingdom messages were meant to conceal the message from those who weren't able to receive it and reveal the message to those who were. His teaching provided "mini-apocalypses" as he revealed truths about God's divine purpose for humanity.

And he was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the Kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, so that while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and not understand, otherwise they might return and be forgiven."

And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word."

MARK 4:11-14

"Mark, supremely among the gospels, highlights the notion of a secret to be penetrated, of a mystery to be explored and grasped. From this point of view, the whole book is 'apocalyptic.' But a classic apocalypse...was not a book about the end of the world or of history. It was a book which, in a complex blend of image and metaphor, told the story of Israel's history, brought it into the present, and pointed forward to the moment when the forces of evil would be routed and the liberation of Israel would finally take place... In Mark 4, Jesus offers his parables in classic apocalyptic style, with this difference: the interpreter is not an angel, but Jesus, and the seers are not the great prophets of old, but disciples who are to spend much of Mark's story being told off for their incomprehension and who will eventually run away and abandon Jesus altogether. Instead of simply telling the story of Israel by means of apocalyptic imagery, Mark has told the story of Jesus telling the story of Israel by such means. To this extent, Mark's Gospel is, as it were, a meta-apocalypse."

N.T. WRIGHT, THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD, PP. 393-394.

In Mark 13, Jesus describes his arrival and rejection in Jerusalem as the culmination of Israel's story in its confrontation with Babylon. He uses apocalyptic imagery in his description. Notice how Jesus depicts the fall of Jerusalem as the fall of Babylon and Edom from Isaiah.

JESUS AND JERUSALEM	ISAIAH, THE FALL OF BABYLON/EDOM, AND THE EXALTATION OF THE SON OF MAN
<p>But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.</p> <p>MARK 13:24-25</p>	<p>For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not flash forth their light; The sun will be dark when it rises And the moon will not give its light. Thus I will punish the world for its evil... Therefore I will make the heavens shake, And the earth will be shaken from its place At the fury of the Lord of hosts In the day of His burning anger.</p> <p>ISAIAH 13:10-11, 14 THE FALL OF BABYLON</p>
	<p>And all the host of heaven will wear away, And the sky will be rolled up like a scroll; All their hosts will also wither away [Hebrew] or All the stars will fall [Greek Septuagint] As a leaf withers from the vine, Or as one withers from the fig tree.</p> <p>ISAIAH 34:4 THE FALL OF EDOM</p>
	<p>And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And he came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before him. And to him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve him.</p> <p>DANIEL 7:13-14 THE DEFEAT OF THE BEAST</p>

“Mark’s whole telling of the story of Jesus is designed to function as an apocalypse. The reader is constantly invited by the gospel to do what the disciples are invited to do with the parables, that is, to come closer and discover the inner secret behind the strange story... The coming of God’s kingdom does not mean the great vindication of Jerusalem, the glorification of the Temple, the real return from exile envisaged by the prophets... It means, rather, the desolation of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and the vindication of Jesus and his people. Jerusalem and its hierarchy have now taken on the roles of Babylon, Edom, and Antiochus Epiphanes in this stark retelling of their story... Mark has written a Christian apocalypse in which the events of Jesus’ life...form the vital theater in which Israel’s history reaches its moment of apocalyptic crisis.”

N.T. WRIGHT, THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD, PP. 395-396.

The Revelation: The Apocalypse of John the Visionary

The last book of the New Testament contains a series of visions that reveals God's purposes for humanity and all of creation. In Greek, the book is called The Apocalypse of Jesus Messiah (Revelation 1:1). In modern English we refer to the book as The Revelation because an apocalypse is "revealing." The Revelation is a letter addressed to seven churches in Asia Minor in the 1st century (see Revelation 1:1-3).

"[The Revelation] is a far more elaborate and studied composition than any extemporaneous prophecy could have been. Revelation is a literary work composed with astonishing care and skill. We should certainly not doubt that John has remarkable visionary experiences, but he has transmuted them through what must have been a lengthy process of reflection and writing into a thoroughly literary creation which is designed not to reproduce the experience so much as to communicate the meaning of the revelation that had been given to him... Revelation is a literary work designed for oral performance (see Rev 1:3), but as a complex literary creation, dense with meaning and Old Testament allusions, it must be qualitatively different from the spontaneous orality of most early Christian prophecy."

RICHARD BAUCKHAM, THE THEOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION, PP. 3-4.

"John's work is a prophetic apocalypse in that it communicates a disclosure of a transcendent perspective on this world. It is prophetic in the way it addresses a concrete historical situation, that of Christians in the Roman province of Asia towards the end of the 1st century AD. And it brings to its readers a prophetic word of God, enabling them to discern the divine purpose in their situation and to respond appropriately... But John's work is also apocalyptic, because it offers prophetic insight into God's purpose by disclosing the content of a vision in which John is taken out of this world, so to speak, in order to see it differently. Here John's work belongs to the apocalyptic tradition, in which a seer is taken in a vision into God's throne-room in heaven to learn the secrets of the divine purpose...and to see this world from a heavenly perspective. John is given a glimpse behind the scenes of history, to see what's really going on in the events of his time and place. He is also transported in vision into the final future of the world, so that he can see the present from the perspective of its final outcome... The effect of John's visions, one might say, is to expand his reader's world, both spatially (into heaven) and temporally (into the future). Or, to put it another way, he is opening their world to divine transcendence."

RICHARD BAUCKHAM, THE THEOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION, PP. 6-7.

Numerically Significant Repeated Phrases

Revelation is a carefully crafted literary work with repeated patterns and phrases throughout.

Seven Blessings	1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14
Seven "Lord God the Almighty"	1:4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6; 21:22
Seven "He who sits on the throne"	4:9; 5:1; 5:7; 5:13; 6:16; 7:15; 21:5
Seven "Witness/testimony" + Jesus	1:2; 1:9; 12:17; 17:6; 19:10 (2x), 20:4
Seven "Christ"	1:1; 1:2; 1:5; 11:15; 12:10; 20:4; 20:6
Seven "people, tribes, languages, nations"	5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15
14 (2x7) "Spirit": Seven in the messages to the churches in chs. 2-3 and seven elsewhere	1:10; 4:2; 14:13; 17:3; 19:10; 21:10; 22:17
14 (2x7) "Jesus": Seven in the phrase "witness of Jesus"	1:2; 1:9; 12:12; 17:6; 19:10 [2x]; 20:4
28 (4x7) "Lamb": Seven "God and the lamb"	5:13; 6:16; 7:10; 14:4; 21:22; 22:1; 22:3

How to Read Apocalyptic Literature

The main biblical apocalypses are the books of Daniel and Revelation, with many narratives about apocalypses in the rest of the TaNaKh (Zech 16, Ezekiel 1-3, 8-10, 40-48, Isaiah 6, and Amos 7-9).

Five Interpretive Strategies for Reading Apocalyptic Literature

There are five strategies to interpreting apocalyptic texts.

1. Predictive / Futurist
2. Preterist
3. Poetic / Theopoetic
4. Theopolitical
5. Pastoral / Poetic

Each approach is located on the matrix below from Michael Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, p. 64.

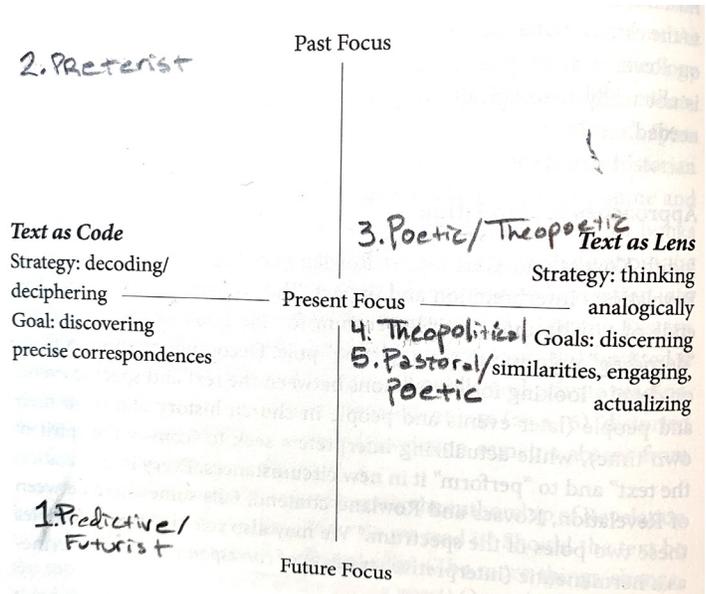
The Matrix has four quadrants broken up by a vertical axis and a horizontal axis.

Vertical axis: Is the book about the past, present, or future?

Horizontal axis: Is the book a code or a lens?

Code: Is the book a secret code that can only be deciphered when the events described take place?

Lens: Is the book giving us images and symbols from the past that can be used to understand the events of any age from present into the future?



Common Pitfalls and Proposed Solutions

PITFALLS	PROPOSED SOLUTIONS
Failing to recognize the literary style of apocalyptic literature, as well as its purpose	Understand how apocalyptic texts work through symbolism, poetic style, and appeal to the imagination
Failing to take the 1st century context of Revelation seriously	Understand how the book addressed 1st century Christians in Asia Minor as the book's first and primary context
Claiming arbitrary "fulfillment" of the symbols and images in our own day, based on the (presumptuous) assumption that our own day is the real context of the book's message	Interpret the book's symbols within their biblical and 1st century setting as the first context of meaning, then look for analogies in our own day
Treating Revelation like a puzzle-code that must be assembled in pieces to predict future events of our own day	Reading the book as a literary work whose message unfolds when it's read in sequence
Interpreting the symbols based on what they mean to us in our context	Interpreting the symbols by connecting them to their roots in the Hebrew Bible and in 1st century Roman culture
Failing to hear the book's prophetic challenge and pastoral message to the seven local churches named in Revelation 2-3 and how the book's message has spoken to Christian interpreters throughout history	Remembering that modern, predictive-futurist interpreters (<i>Late Great Planet Earth</i> , <i>Left Behind</i>) are not the only or best interpreters of the book.

Key Steps for Reading Apocalyptic Literature Wisely

It's important to read apocalyptic work as a whole book. Then we can see how the themes and ideas develop while looking for the most repeated or "anchor" images and words, like the heavenly throne, the lamb, the dragon, the beast, etc.

Take time to identify symbols and look for where they appear in the Hebrew Bible and then in the 1st century Greco-Roman cultural context. Then look for how the symbols are interpreted within the book itself.

SYMBOLS IN THE REVELATION	INTERPRETATION WITHIN THE BOOK
1:8 Alpha and Omega, the one who was, who is, and who is coming	The risen Jesus
1:20 Seven stars and lamps	Angels and churches
8:3 Angel with censer	Prayers of the saints
11:7 Great city, Sodom, Egypt	Where the Lord was crucified
13:6 God's tabernacle	Those dwelling in the heavens
17:9-15 Seven dragon heads	Seven mountains and kings
19:8 The fine linen of the bride	The righteous deeds of the saints
19:11-16 One on a white horse, the Word of God	The risen Jesus

"The purpose of [apocalyptic literature] is to persuade the readers and hearers, both ancient and contemporary, to remain faithful to God in spite of past, present, or possible future suffering, whatever form that suffering may take... Here we learn that covenant faithfulness is possible because of Jesus and worthwhile because of the glorious future God has in store for us and for the entire created order. In the face of an immoral and idolatrous imperial culture of national allegiance and violence, [apocalyptic literature] offers the hope of God's future deliverance, by showing us that God is sovereign now. The combination of future assurance and the present reality of God's kingdom means that life now can and should be lived as a life of worship and faithfulness to God and to the Lamb."

ADAPTED FROM MICHAEL GORMAN, READING REVELATION RESPONSIBLY, P. 75.

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