

# Visions of the End: Daniel and Apocalyptic Literature

## Lecture 23 Transcript

<https://oyc.yale.edu/religious-studies/rlst-145/lecture-23>

### *Overview*

The Book of Ruth, in which a foreign woman enters the community of Israel and becomes great-grandmother to none other than King David, expresses a view of gentiles entirely opposed to that of Ezra and Nehemiah. Other prophets of the Restoration period are discussed, including Third Isaiah who also envisions other nations joining Israel in the worship of Yahweh. This period also sees the rise of apocalyptic literature in works like Zechariah, Joel and Daniel. Written during a period of persecution in the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE the book of Daniel contains many features and themes of apocalyptic literature, including an eschatology according to which God dramatically intervenes in human history, destroying the wicked (understood as other nations) and saving the righteous (understood as Israel).

### *1. The Book of Ruth*

- [1] *Professor Christine Hayes:* All right, let's go ahead and get started; there's a lot to cover. But I want to try to unite a lot of these disparate parts of the Bible, the many small books clustered here at the end that we'll be considering. I'm going to try to unite them by elaborating certain themes as we move through them. But as you can see, from this giant chart, there's quite a bit.
- [2] First, let's begin with the Book of Ruth. The Book of Ruth is set in the days of the Judges; that's the opening line of the book. It tells you that this happened in the days of Judges, but it was certainly written later, and whether it was post-exilic or pre-exilic is not certain, so we're going to be asking the questions of a canonical critic.
- [3] Whatever its origin, how did this book function for Second Temple Jews? As the story of a foreign woman, whose foreign status is continually emphasized throughout the book, (Ruth the Moabite, Ruth the Moabitess) — as a foreign woman who acts nobly and enters the community of Israel by choice, this story would have stood in opposition to the negative view of foreigners, the ban on intermarriage and the purely genealogical definition of Israelite identity that was promulgated by Ezra and Nehemiah in the post-exilic period.
- [4] So in the story you have a famine in Judah and that causes a Bethlehemite man, Elimelech and his wife Naomi, and their two children to leave Judah. They're going to reside in the country of Moab, where the Moabites live, and their two sons marry Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth.
- [5] You have to consider the effect that these opening verses would have had on an ancient Israelite listener or reader. Moab was a hostile neighbor on Israel's southeastern border. And the Moabites were hated for their ill-treatment of the Israelites when they were traveling to the Promised Land. Their lack of hospitality had already led to a prohibition of intermarriage in the Torah itself. So the Moabites and Ammonites are two foreign groups that are explicitly prohibited from entering the congregation in Deuteronomy 23.
- [6] The Israelites' low opinion of the Moabites is also expressed in Genesis in the very degrading story of Moab's descent from the incestuous relationship between Lot and one of his daughters, after the fall of Sodom. And yet here we read, in the opening lines of this story [of] a man from Bethlehem, who travels to Moab, and his two sons marry Moabite women!
- [7] Then in short order Elimelech and his two sons (who are appropriately named Sickness and Death, by the way, in Hebrew) they die. And the Israelite widow, Naomi, is left now with no blood relation, no blood male relation, only her

two Moabite daughters-in-law. And Naomi weepily tells the girls that they should return to their father's home. She's poor, she'll never be able to support them as a poor widow, she has no further sons to give to them, and clearly they have no legal or moral obligation or tie to Naomi. And we'll pick up the story then in chapter 1:11:

But Naomi replied, "Turn back, my daughters! Why should you go with me? Have I any more sons in my body who might be husbands for you? Turn back, my daughters, for I am too old to be married. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I married tonight and I also bore sons, should you wait for them to grow up? Should you on their account debar yourselves from marriage? Oh no, my daughters! My lot is far more bitter than yours, for the hand of the Lord has struck out against me." They broke into weeping again, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law farewell. But Ruth clung to her. So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has returned to her people and her gods. Go follow your sister-in-law." But Ruth replied, "Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus and more may the Lord do to me if even death parts me from you." When [Naomi] saw how determined she was to go with her, she ceased to argue with her; and the two went on until they reached Bethlehem.

[8] All of the names in this story are wonderfully symbolic. Sickness and Death – it's like they walk on the stage with a big sign saying "I'm in a bit part and I'm ready to die." Orpah's name means the back of the neck because she turns her back on her mother-in-law as well. It's a wonderful story with lots of name symbolisms.

[9] But by the force of sheer conviction, Ruth joins herself to the people of her mother-in-law. Back in Judah, Ruth supports her mother-in-law and herself by gleaning the fallen sheaves behind the reapers in the field. Because according to the Pentateuch, the sheaves that fall behind the reapers must be left for the poor

to collect; you don't go back and collect them. So Ruth gleans, and she gleans in the field of a kinsman named Boaz, and he's described as a man of substance and she's very diligent and she soon comes to his attention.

[10] He's very kind to her, he looks out for her safety among the rough field workers. He provides water for her. He's heard of what Ruth has done for Naomi; how she left her home and left her family to come to a people that she really didn't know, and he blesses her. He says, "May the Lord reward your deeds. May you have a full recompense from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have sought refuge!" chapter 2:12.

[11] He increases his generosity; he shares his meal with Ruth and gives her from the heaps of grain in addition to the gleanings that she's collecting. So Naomi is very delighted with Ruth's gleanings, they more than suffice for their needs. But she's even more pleased to learn that Ruth seems to have found favor in the eyes of Boaz. He's been very kind and generous, and she points out: you know he is among our redeeming kinsmen. Now the term here, the Hebrew term is *goel*. *Goel* means redeemer. In fact, in a lot of the Christian language later, this is the word they're using when they talk about "my redeemer liveth." It's simply this word *goel*, and the *goel* is a person who as the nearest relative or as a close relative, has certain legal obligations to another person.

[12] Those obligations — the primary obligations are three: (1) To redeem the person or their property if they've been sold to a stranger due to poverty. So to redeem them from debt servitude essentially. So your *goel* should do that for you. (2) To marry a childless widow. So if a man dies and his wife is childless the *goel* is supposed to marry her, provide seed, and the firstborn son will be named after the name who is dead. So he's supposed to marry a childless widow and produce offspring for the deceased; usually, that falls first to the brother; And then (3) in the case of the blood redeemer, also the redeemer is supposed to avenge the blood of a kinsman. So if you are killed your redeemer is supposed to seek vengeance for you.

[13] Boaz is a somewhat distant relative, but Naomi believes he's the answer to their dual problem of poverty on the one hand, and Ruth's

widowhood on the other hand. So in chapter 3 she urges Ruth to make a visit to Boaz. He's winnowing barley on the threshing floor and Ruth is supposed to bathe herself, anoint herself, dress up and go out at night to the threshing floor.

- [14] You should know that biblically, threshing floors tend to be places of revelry at the end of the harvest time and they are often frequented by prostitutes. But Naomi seems to be planning Ruth's seduction of Boaz. She instructs Ruth not to reveal herself until Boaz has finished eating and drinking, and when he lies down, Ruth is to approach him and uncover his feet — this is possibly a sexual euphemism — and lie down, and he will tell her what she is to do.
- [15] So Ruth follows these instructions exactly. In 3:7-11:

Boaz ate and drank, and in a cheerful mood went to lie down beside the grainpile. Then she went over stealthily and uncovered his feet and lay down. In the middle of the night, the man gave a start and pulled back — there was a woman lying at his feet! "Who are you?" he asked. And she replied, "I am your handmaid Ruth. Spread your robe over you handmaid, for you are a redeeming kinsman." [a goel] He exclaimed, "Be blessed of the Lord, daughter! Your latest deed of loyalty is greater than the first, in that you have not turned to younger men, whether poor or rich. And now, daughter, have no fear. I will do in your behalf whatever you ask, for all the elders of my town know what a fine woman you are."

- [16] So Ruth's request is that Boaz act as her redeemer and spread his robe over her, which is a formal act of protection and espousal. And Boaz assures her that he will redeem her. He then goes on to point out, however, that there is another kinsman who is actually a closer relation, and therefore has the first right of refusal, and Boaz will settle the matter legally in the morning. And we're left wondering what transpired in the night.
- [17] In chapter 4 we read the legal proceeding by which the other kinsman is freed of his obligation and his claim to Ruth and this then clears the way, enables Boaz to marry her. But

the punchline to the whole story is yet to come and that occurs in chapter 4, verses 13-17,

So Boaz married Ruth; she became his wife, and he cohabited with her. The Lord let her conceive, and she bore a son. And the women said to Naomi, "Blessed by the Lord, who has not withheld a redeemer from you today! May his name be perpetuated in Israel! He will renew your life and sustain your old age; for he is born of your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons." Naomi took the child and held it to her bosom. She became its foster mother, and the women neighbors gave him a name saying, "A son is born to Naomi!" They named him Obed; he was the father of Jesse, father of David.

- [18] So David, God's anointed king over Israel; David, with whom God covenanted that his house should reign forever; David, from whose line would come the messianic king to rule in the final age — This David is said to be the direct descendant, the great grandson of a foreign woman from a country of idol worshippers, and a Moabitess no less.
- [19] So it seems that this very short and very moving story represents a strand of thought that stood in opposition to the line of thinking found, for example, in Ezra's call for a ban on intermarriage as the only means of insuring faithfulness to Israel's God. Not only is Ruth, the Moabitess, not guilty of abominable practices, she is the ancestress of Yahweh's chosen monarch. And she's praised in the story by all who know her as a paragon of hesed, this quality of steadfast love and covenantal loyalty that binds the members of the covenant community to one another and to God. Ruth, the Moabitess, stood by an elderly widow to whom she had no real legal obligation and she was accepted into the covenant community.
- [20] The acceptance of foreigners is well documented in post-exilic Judaism, despite Ezra's polemical efforts to exclude foreigners from the community. It's important to remember that Ezra's reforms never became normative for the entire community. Post-exilic, and later rabbinic Judaism, never adopted the purely genealogical definition of Jewish identity. They allowed for the phenomenon of conversion and marriage into

the covenant by persons of foreign birth who accepted the God of Israel; a possibility that Ezra completely forecloses.

[21] Ezra's extreme views were popular among sectarian groups, so Ezra and exclusivism is championed, for example, in writings that are found at Qumram. It exerted some influence on early Christian bans on marriage, absolute bans on marriage between believers and unbelievers, but it's the Book of Ruth that features prominently in the Jewish conversion ceremony to this day.

## 2. *The Last Prophetic Books*

[22] We have a different kind of acceptance of foreigners that's voiced by prophets of the restoration period. So these are prophets, fifth century — late sixth and fifth century. We're going to look now briefly at some of the last prophetic books, and these are writings that date to the time of the first generations of returned exiles and on.

[23] Earlier prophets in the pre-exilic period — the classical prophets we've already looked at — they had spoken of a remnant that would be restored and would be restored gloriously to its land, but the returned exiles faced a life of great hardship. The reality of poverty and the difficulties in rebuilding the temple, and the hostility of the Judeans who had remained behind, as well as the hostility of the surrounding peoples, the absence of any real political independence under a Davidic King — all of these things fell far short of the early prophets' glorious descriptions of this restored remnant.

[24] So new prophets in the period of the Restoration have to address the community's disappointment. The short Book of Haggai contains the words of the Prophet Haggai, spoken primarily to Zerubabbel, (Zerubabbel is the governor of Judea). Haggai prophesies around 520, and he declares that all of the difficulties the community was facing, the agricultural setbacks and the famines, these were all signs of God's displeasure that the temple hadn't been completed.

[25] Zerubabbel is convinced by this, the people return to their task enthusiastically, and as we know, the temple is rebuilt as Haggai promised. He says it's a humble structure but soon it's

going to be filled with treasures flowing in from all nations. And the promises of the Restoration that were made by the prophets of old are just around the corner.

[26] So Haggai longed for a rebuilt temple. But not only that, also for the re-establishment of Judah's independence under a Davidic King. And he held out hope for Zerubabbel, the governor, who was, after all, a descendant of David, through the last king that went into exile. He hoped that he would serve as God's messiah, or appointed king. That hope is even stronger in the work of Haggai's contemporary, the prophet, Zechariah.

[27] Zechariah is 14 chapters long, and the first eight chapters contain the prophecies of the historical Zechariah around 520 or so. The last chapters — chapters 9 through 14, this is known as Second Zechariah — these chapters contain obscure writings from a later hand and they are of a very different type or genre. They are written in the apocalyptic vein, so we won't talk about those now, we'll consider those momentarily. I'm going to be talking about apocalyptic for the last half of the lecture. So for right now I'm interested, however, in the first eight chapters which represent the oracles of the historical prophet Zechariah around 520.

[28] He preached and prophesied for about two years. He urges in these chapters the rebuilding of the temple. The first six chapters contain a series of elaborate and symbolic visions, eight different visions that are revealed by an angel and/or a divine messenger. That's a mode of revelation that's going to be standard in apocalyptic literature, as we'll soon see. Earlier prophets received a word or a vision but as we move towards apocalyptic literature and later literature, prophets often receive messages from God through an angel or a messenger.

[29] These visions focus hope on Zerubabbel, the governor, and on the priest Joshua, the high priest Joshua. And the idea is that they'll rule in a kind of diarchy as monarch and priest. At the same time, however, it seems that the Persians got rid of Zerubabbel. He was ousted perhaps because messianic hope was starting to gather around Zerubabbel. So Zechariah's prophecies seem to be adjusted to refer solely to Joshua. Although they originally referred to Zerubabbel, and although chapter 6 in particular seems to refer originally to

Zerubbabel, it is altered so that it now depicts Joshua as a shoot or a branch from Jesse's stock — Jesse's stock, meaning a Davidide. (David's father was Jesse; so to say a root from Jesse's stock is to say a Davidide.) It says that Joshua will rebuild the sanctuary; he will wear the royal insignia, although he is the priest. The elevation, however, of the high priest is a feature of the post-exilic period. It's a feature of Judah in the post-exilic period, the high priest coming to take [on] some of the trappings of royal office.

[30] Chapters 7 and 8, declare God's promise to turn and to do good things in Jerusalem and the House of Judah, so long as the people will turn from their unjust and evil ways. And Zechariah points forward to the glorious day when all the nations of the world will eagerly come to seek the Lord in Jerusalem and to entreat his favor.

[31] So we read in Zechariah 8:23, "Thus said the Lord of Hosts: In those days, ten men from nations of every tongue will take hold — they will take hold of every Jew by a corner of his cloak and say, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you,'" and thus this Restoration period, you can see, features prophets who envision other nations joining Israel in the worship of Yahweh. They will come to rally around and join Israel in the worship of God in Jerusalem.

[32] The last wave of prophetic writings that we have addresses the disappointment and the disillusionment of late sixth- and fifth-century Judeans. What was the message of these writings? The basic message was that the earlier prophets, their promises of future glory for the restored remnant — these were all true. The future just isn't now. It's only going to happen in the eschaton, the final day. Only then will the glory of Jerusalem and a messianic ruler be restored, and the hope that has to sustain the community through the bleak present is therefore an eschatological hope, a hope that focuses on an ideal account of the end, (eschatology = an account of the end). Because in the end of days everything will be set right. So as we move later into the period, we find increasingly the hope for the community is thrust off into the future, in an eschatology.

[33] Parts of Third Isaiah depict the bitter reality of life in post-exilic Judah and advance in

eschatology. You remember the Book of Isaiah, which is 66 chapters, we divided into three parts: 1 through 39, which is the historical Isaiah; then we have Second Isaiah; and then Third Isaiah, we're dealing with now — that's chapters 56 to 66.

[34] The anonymous prophetic author of these chapters denounces the failings of the exiles, but does hold out an eschatology; a doctrine of final things that depicts what's going to happen in the end of days. This kind of eschatology differs from the depiction of Zion's future glory that we had in the early classical prophets. The earlier prophetic pronouncements generally referred to a re-establishment of Judah's fortunes in historical time, but eschatological works like Third Isaiah look beyond historical time. They're looking to a time of a new heaven and a new earth, when Judah's sins will be forgotten. The land will become an earthly paradise transformed, and blessed with peace and prosperity and length of days.

[35] This is from Isaiah 65:17-25,

For behold! I am creating  
A new heaven and a new earth;  
The former things shall not be  
remembered,  
They shall never come to mind.  
Be glad, then, and rejoice forever  
In what I am creating.  
For I shall create Jerusalem as a joy,  
And her people as a delight; ... Never  
again shall be heard there  
The sounds of weeping and wailing.  
No more shall there be an infant or  
graybeard  
Who does not live out his days.  
He who dies at a hundred years  
Shall be reckoned a youth,  
And he who fails to reach a hundred  
Shall be reckoned accursed.  
...For the days of My people shall be  
As long as the days of the tree,  
My chosen ones shall outlive

The work of their hands.  
 They shall not toil to no purpose;  
 They shall not bear children for terror,  
 But they shall be a people blessed by the Lord,  
 And their offspring shall remain with them.  
 Before they pray, I will answer;  
 While they are still speaking, I will respond.  
 The wolf and the lamb shall graze together,  
 And the lion shall eat straw like the ox,  
 And the serpent's food shall be earth. In all My sacred mount  
 Nothing evil or vile shall be done — said the Lord.

[36] See this interesting notion of a completely new, transformed heaven and earth. The lion is vegetarian again, the serpent no longer is — there's not this animosity between the serpent and humans as was decreed at the end of Genesis with the curse on the serpent. They're going to just be eating earth and there will be no danger.

[37] Third Isaiah also sounds this theme of openness, reassuring foreigners and eunuchs who have joined themselves to Yahweh that they'll be welcome in the Holy Temple to serve God and to offer sacrifices. Now, this is significant. Again, remember that Deuteronomy 23 right in the heart of the Pentateuch, bans eunuchs specifically, and certain foreigners — Moabites, Ammonites — from entering the congregation. Remember also that Ezekiel explicitly excluded foreigners from the restored temple in his visions at the end of the book. This is also clearly the policy of Ezra and Nehemiah. They had an Ammonite who had his lodgings or office or room in the temple — they had him thrown out of that area in the temple.

[38] Third Isaiah seems to oppose such restrictions. Isaiah 56:3-7:

Let not the foreigner say,  
 Who has attached himself to the Lord,

“The Lord will keep me apart from his people”;

And let not the eunuchs say,

“I am a withered tree.”

For thus said the Lord:

“As for the eunuchs who keep My sabbaths,

Who have chosen what I desire

And hold fast to My covenant —

I will give them, in My House

And within My walls,

A monument and a name

Better than sons or daughters.

I will give them an everlasting name

Which shall not perish.

As for the foreigners

Who attach themselves to the Lord,

To minister to Him,

And to love the name of the Lord,

To be His servants —

All who keep the Sabbath and do not profane it,

And who hold fast to my covenant. ...I will bring them to My sacred mount

And let them rejoice in My house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and sacrifices

Shall be welcome on My altar;

For My House shall be called

A house of prayer for all peoples.”

[39] So on this issue clearly the post-exilic community was quite divided.

### 3. Features of Apocalyptic Literature

[40] Now, there's only one biblical book, which pretty much in its entirety, belongs to the genre of literature known as apocalyptic. Not in its entirety, but it is the most significant and through-going apocalyptic book in the Bible.

[41] The term apocalyptic derives from the Greek word *apocalypsis*. An *apocalypsis* is a revealing, so something that's apocalyptic is a

revealing. Apocalypse is a revelation of things to come, and as apocalypses generally predict the end of historical time and the beginning of a new world order, they are generally concerned with eschatology; so apocalyptic works tend to be eschatological.

[42] That doesn't mean all eschatological work is apocalyptic. Apocalyptic literature within the Bible, and then much more significantly outside the Hebrew Bible, is characterized by certain distinguishing features which I've thrown up in brief note form over here. So apocalyptic literature is always eschatological, deals with the end of time. But to be apocalyptic a work has to have certain kinds of features and not all eschatologies have these features.

[43] This is what they are. Most apocalyptic writings are pseudonymous. They're generally attributed to important figures of the past, Enoch or Abraham or someone. They tend to also feature a revelation by a heavenly messenger, an angel who comes in a vision or a dream to deliver some sort of message. In general, the message is highly symbolic. It's coded and often the symbolism is quite bizarre. You'll have surreal images of beasts and monsters and usually these depict foreign nations.

[44] The visions tend to be chronological. They tend to be a systematic chronology of past, present and future events that represent the march of history, in coded form again, and so it tends to require interpretation. And that's usually given by the divine messenger, who reveals the symbolic chronological code.

[45] Fourthly, apocalypses tend to predict a series of catastrophes. These are signs of the coming of the end, that final point in the march of history that's being laid out. You have motifs from ancient myths very often used to describe these catastrophes. I'll come back to that in a minute.

[46] Apocalypses also tend to be what I call morally dualistic. They tend to divide humankind into two mutually exclusive groups; the righteous which is always a tiny minority, and the wicked, which is always the vast majority. There's going to be some final public judgment and the righteous will be saved and the wicked will be destroyed.

[47] In this respect, especially later apocalypses show the influence of Persian thought. Persian thought is also quite dualist in nature, with oppositions of light and darkness, or good and evil, and life and death and so on. So there does seem to be some Persian influence and of course we're well into the Persian period at this point.

[48] A sixth feature is that God generally appears in apocalyptic literature as an enthroned king. He brings all of history to a crashing end, and demonstrates his sovereignty. He confounds the wicked; he does all of these things at the same time. He confounds the wicked and establishes himself as the sovereign and enthroned king, in control.

[49] Seventh, apocalyptic literature, as I briefly mentioned before, often incorporates mythological motifs and imagery, especially the motif of a battle between God and primordial, chaotic elements. And that will often be the imagery that's used in depicting the final battle with the godless or the wicked.

[50] Apocalypses also generally depict a judgment of the individual dead, followed by everlasting life or punishment. So again, apocalypses develop quite substantially outside the writings of the Hebrew Bible; and in the Bible, we have a few scattered apocalyptic elements and then much of the Book of Daniel. And so we don't see the idea of life after death really in the Hebrew Bible until this very late apocalyptic book of Daniel.

[51] The idea is very influential in the Dead Sea Scrolls (they are very dualist) and in the writings of the New Testament of course. So a belief in personal immortality, a belief in a general resurrection of the dead — these arise from a negative view of this world as a place where justice can be obtained. So apocalyptic writers examined the world they lived in; they drew the conclusion that reward and punishment were going to be made in an afterlife. They were certainly not doled out in this life, as Israel suffered.

[52] This is a marked break from the general conviction of the Hebrew Bible that human life is limited to this world, and that the fundamental concern of humans and God is morality in this life and not immortality in another.

[53] I think apocalyptic literature can be described as a literature of hope and despair. It's a literature of despair or pessimism because its basic premise is that this world holds out no promise for the righteous. It's a literature of hope or optimism because it affirms that God will intervene. He will intervene in human history, he'll set everything right, he'll interrupt the natural order, he's going to destroy this broken world as we know it, and he'll do so in order to rescue the righteous and humiliate the wicked, and if you've already died don't worry there will be a resurrection, it will all be made right. But this hope for supreme and ultimate vindication is thrust off into the future. So apocalyptic constitutes yet one more response to the traumatic events, the crises, and the disappointments of Israel's history.

[54] In a second we'll get to Daniel, but there are a few apocalyptic passages of varying length in other post-exilic books. I'll just touch on them very quickly. Second Zechariah and, a little bit, the book of Joel, just to prepare us for Daniel.

#### 4. *Apocalyptic Passages in Post-Exilic Books*

[55] Second Zechariah. Now, these are chapters 9 through 14. We talked about the historical Zechariah, chapters 1 through 8, so this is Second Zechariah, chapters 9 through 14, and it's a collection of diverse oracles, probably fifth-century or later, that contain these strange visions and predictions. Their meanings cannot always be fathomed, but they seem to focus on the Day of the Lord, and the restoration of Jerusalem, and the rise of a new and humble king who will reign in peace, really over a new world order.

[56] Chapter 14 is a vision of this global battle that will bring history to an end. God is going to bring all the nations to Jerusalem where they will plunder the city, they will kill almost all of the inhabitants and then at the last moment when things look the most desperate, God will intervene and he'll fight for Israel and exact revenge on her enemies. And it's after this final battle that God will transform the earth into a paradise. So Israel's enemies will rage against one another, the surviving nations will pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Again, Jerusalem now is elevated above all cities, and these nations will come to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh at

his temple, and Yahweh will be sovereign over the world.

[57] Joel, a very short little book, probably the latest prophetic book, also contains apocalyptic material. The versification of Joel varies tremendously in different English translations, so I'm using the verse markings that are in the Bible you have. But if you consult another Bible some of them only have three chapters, some have four — it can be confusing.

[58] But we can divide Joel into two parts. Up to chapter 2, verse 27 — that's the first part, from 1:1 to 2:27 (or 1:2 really). And that contains a description of a military invasion. It's symbolized by an army of locusts. And this invasion — this army of locusts — is interpreted as a divine punishment that is necessary or that must come before the day of the Lord. The second part of Joel which begins in verse 28 of chapter 2 [=3:1] is a fully apocalyptic description of the final day of terror.

[59] Reading from chapter 3:3-4,

Before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes,

I will set portents in the sky and on earth:

Blood and fire, and pillars of smoke;

The sun shall be turned to darkness

And the moon to blood.

[60] Before the great and terrible Day of the Lord comes — but the righteous are going to survive. This is pointed out in chapter 3:5, "But everyone who invokes the name of the Lord shall escape; for there shall be a remnant on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, as the Lord promised." As we move into chapter 4 of Joel, the Day of the Lord is envisaged as a judgment day for all peoples. So this is increasingly the view of the eschaton: a final battle and also a judgment day, and that judgment day will then issue in a new age. This is an idea that the book of Daniel will elaborate on in a minute, not to mention the apocalyptic writings that are outside of the Hebrew Bible.

[61] In this judgment day, God will summon all of the godless nations to the valley of judgment, Jehosaphat which means "God will judge", so the Valley of Jehosaphat. And here the final

battle between good and evil will take place, and after that God's people will be blessed and the Holy City will never again suffer shame. [4:1-2]:

For lo! in those days  
And in that time,  
When I restore the fortunes  
Of Judah and Jerusalem,  
I will gather all the nations  
And bring them down to the Valley of Jehosaphat,  
There I will contend with them  
Over My very own people, Israel,  
Which they scattered among the nations.

[62] Towards the end, then, of the book we read,

Let the nations rouse themselves and march up  
To the Valley of Jehosaphat;  
For there I will sit in judgment  
Over all the nations roundabout.  
Swing the sickle,  
For the crop is ripe;  
Come and tread,  
For the winepress is full,  
The vats are overflowing!  
For great is their wickedness.  
...  
But the Lord will be a shelter to His people,  
A refuge to the children of Israel.  
...  
And Jerusalem shall be holy;  
Nevermore shall strangers pass through it.  
And in that day,  
The mountains shall drip with wine,  
The hills shall flow with milk,  
And all the watercourses of Judah shall flow with water;  
A spring shall issue from the House of the Lord  
And shall water the Wadi of Acacias.

...

But Judah shall be inhabited forever,  
And Jerusalem throughout the ages.

[63] So we see a lot of eschatological features in the Book of Joel. You have, first of all, the series of disasters; they signal the impending wrath of God. You have a cosmic battle in which Yahweh triumphs over Israel's enemy. And we see in apocalyptic literature in general, a facile equation of the righteous and the wicked with Israel and other nations. Then also we have this outpouring of blessings on God's people, city, and land. And finally, God's continued protection and presence; and nations who are not Israel's enemies join in the worship of God in that final time.

[64] Again, note the important difference between classical prophecy and the apocalyptic literature. Both of them speak about final things; both of them speak about an end-time. But the classical prophets did not in general expect that the course of human affairs would come to an end. Only that Israel's rebellion would end or that Israel would live under a perfect king anointed by God. In the apocalyptic imagination history itself is a closed process; it will end, and then a new age, a new world order would begin. And the present age and the new age are qualitatively distinct. The present age is under the dominion of evil powers. We see it particularly in the apocalyptic writings outside of the Bible and in the New Testament. That power that has dominion over the present age is Satan. Satan is the arch enemy of God. The age to come will be free of all evil, moral corruption, and death; Satan will be defeated. But God himself is the one who has to do this. God must intervene to bring the present age to a crashing halt and initiate this new world order.

##### 5. *The Book of Daniel, Chapters 1-6*

[65] So let's turn now to Daniel for a full apocalyptic work. Daniel also can be divided really into two parts and the first six chapters have often been described as heroic fiction. They're a bit like the book of Esther that we'll be talking about on Wednesday. Just a good story. (Esther particularly has a lot of irony and is very, very funny.) But like the book of Esther, Daniel features a Jew who lives in a Gentile court and he's saved from disaster. I've

listed the kings who are discussed in the Book of Daniel. These chapters tell of Daniel's adventures under two Babylonian kings, Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar; the text says two Babylonian kings, Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar; a Median king Darius who happens to be unknown to history, a Persian king Cyrus — that's a whole lot of years!

[66] The historical inaccuracy of the work, right? You have the chronology of more than a century being telescoped here! There're other inaccuracies. Belshazzar was actually never a king; he was sort of a prince regent. He was defeated by Cyrus, not by Darius, so there are tremendous historical inaccuracies and this is a sign that this was written at a much later time, looking back when the history of a period 300 years ago was very confused. There's no clear historical knowledge of the Babylonian and Persian period. So the book, we know, was written quite late, perhaps the end of the third century, those first six chapters.

[67] We have a better idea about the remainder of the book. Chapters 7 through 12 are fully apocalyptic in genre and they were composed between 167 and 164 — I don't know if I wrote that up there, yeah, 167 and 164 BCE. This was a time when Jews were suffering intense persecution at the hands of the Seleucid King of Syria, Antiochus Epiphanes, Antiochus IV. And so Daniel is the latest book of the Hebrew Bible.

[68] It was chronologically the latest book, written between 167 and 164 BCE. But the author writes in code. He writes in code so that some hostile person would not be able to understand. The author disguises his references to contemporary historical events and personalities in these visions, these symbolic visions that are attributed to a remote era of the past.

[69] Let's go back and look at the contents of these two sections. In chapters 1 through 6, Daniel is represented as a loyal Jew who's living in the exile in Babylonia, sixth-century exilic period among idol worshippers. He refuses to bow down to any other god. He observes the dietary laws and he prays facing Jerusalem. He seems to occupy a position of some honor in the court. He has the power to interpret dreams and to predict the future, and although he's severely tested, he remains true to Yahweh and Yahweh

aids him in more than one miraculous escape from danger. The main themes of this first section of the book of Daniel are Daniel's interpretations of the dreams of these kings (Nebuchadnezzar) and his allegiance to his God.

[70] In chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream of a huge statue. It has a head of gold, has a torso and arms of silver, the belly and the thighs are of bronze, the legs are of iron, and the feet are of mixed iron and clay. I've kind of given you a little grid and in a minute we're going to have another symbolic dream that's going to use animals to represent the same things that are being represented here by the metals.

[71] So you have this statue with these metals and iron and clay feet. Then a great stone that's uncut by human hands flies from heaven and smashes the clay feet of the statue, and the statue crumbles and this stone becomes a mountain that fills all the earth. Daniel decodes the dream's symbolism; and it's a historical symbolism, the march of history. Each metal represents a kingdom that ruled the Ancient Near East. Daniel only explicitly mentions gold as Babylon, but we can figure out the rest. Silver is Media, bronze is Persia, and iron is Alexander's Greece, right, Macedonian Greece that conquered the Ancient Near East in the 330's, and brought Hellenism, and introduced the Hellenistic period into Ancient Near Eastern history.

[72] After Alexander's death, his empire was divided into smaller Hellenistic kingdoms. The ones of greatest relevance to us are Ptolemaic Egypt and Seleucid Syria because as you can imagine Palestine is caught between those two great powers. So it's going to be fought over by those two great powers.

[73] So you have Egypt ruled by the Ptolemies; you have Syria ruled by the Seleucids; they're wrangling for control of the land of Israel that's lying between them. So the iron and clay feet of the statue in Daniel's dream represent these lesser Hellenistic kingdoms of Egypt and Syria that succeeded Alexander's empire and are a mix of Hellenistic and Eastern elements. The stone from heaven represents the future kingdom of God. It's going to come and destroy these godless kingdoms and fill all of the earth forever.

- [74] Chapter 3 tells the story of Daniel's three companions who refuse to worship a giant gold statue and they get themselves thrown into a fiery furnace. When they emerge unscathed the king is greatly impressed and so he acknowledges the God of Israel.
- [75] In chapter 4 there's a second dream. It's interpreted by Daniel as a sign that Nebuchadnezzar will be struck down seven times. He's going to lose his reason, he's going to lose his throne, until he realizes that God is the source of all divine and human power. When this in fact comes to pass — Nebuchadnezzar seems to suffer a fit of insanity that drives him from society — the king then praises the God most high as the universal king.
- [76] In chapter 5, Daniel's enemies at court trick the Median king (now Darius, so we're moving to different kings). They trick him into issuing an edict against those who pray to anyone but the king. This is a problem for Daniel. Daniel violates the edict, of course, and he's arrested and he's thrown into a den of lions. But he emerges unharmed, and the result is, again, that the foreign king, in this case Darius now, recognizes the supremacy of Yahweh and orders all in his kingdom to revere the Jewish God.
- [77] There is, of course, no historical merit to these stories of Babylonian and Persian kings acknowledging or adopting the God of the Jews who lived in exile among them. These stories seem to give voice to the hope or the fantasy that a cruel and impious monarch might be taught humility by Yahweh. They also provide a model for life in the Diaspora. Jews can live in the Gentile world but they must never forget God and his laws.
- [79] Chapter 7 again represents the succession of kingdoms, the Babylonian, the Median, the Persian, the Macedonian Empires, but this time as beasts. So you have a lion, a bear, a winged leopard and an ogre. The ogre has horns and the horns of this ogre then represent these two lesser Hellenistic kingdoms, the Ptolemies of Egypt and the Seleucids of Syria. The boastful little horn is the Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanies, himself.
- [80] In a second vision, the "ancient of days," — this is the term that's used, it seems to be God in a white robe and a beard seated on a fiery chariot throne, but — "the ancient of days" confers glory and kingship on one like a Son of Man.
- [81] Now in Daniel, this phrase, the Son of Man — which generally means mortal as opposed to divine in the Bible, but — in Daniel the phrase seems to refer to a figure that's in human form, but more than a human. Probably an angel like Michael or Gabriel. (Both of them are represented as leaders against the forces of Persia and Greece.) And this figure establishes an everlasting kingdom to replace the bestial kingdoms that have preceded it.
- [82] So the Son of Man overwhelms the little horn Antiochus, who is said to be making war on saints (that's a code for loyal Jews), who is said to have been trying to change their law and abolish their religion — and we know that these were parts of the persecution in 167 to 164 by Antiochus. He tried to stop worship in the sanctuary and so on.
- [83] In a third vision then, the horn that represents Antiochus is said to trample the land of splendor (Israel), to challenge the army of heaven, to remove the perpetual sacrifice (Antiochus did halt the sacrificial service in the temple) and to set up an "abomination of desolation" on the sacrificial altar (and we know that Antiochus set up some kind of pagan altar on the sacrificial altar in the temple in Jerusalem and erected a statue of Zeus in the sanctuary). So this depiction of the persecution under Antiochus is presented here, but it's presented in veiled form for reasons of safety.

## 6. *The Book of Daniel, Chapters 7-12*

- [78] Then we move into the second half of the Book of Daniel, chapters 7 to 12. As we move into this part of Daniel we switch from the third person into the first person, so Daniel 7 to 12 is written in the first person and it's fully apocalyptic. Here Daniel has a series of visions and dreams that are interpreted for him by an angel, and again, that's a classic feature of the apocalyptic genre. And these visions, again, survey Ancient Near Eastern history from the sixth to the second centuries.
- [84] In chapter 9 we have a moving prayer for deliverance. The Angel Gabriel assures Daniel that the end is near, and that the end was even predicted by Jeremiah who had said that

Jerusalem would lie desolate 70 years, you will recall.

through Christianity, it came to have a very far-reaching impact on Western civilization.

[85] Now, Jeremiah prophesied — I'm going to do some math now, so this is dangerous. Jeremiah prophesied in the early sixth century and the chapters of Daniel were written many centuries later, someone can figure it out, in the 160's. So was Jeremiah prophesying falsely when he said that God would deliver Israel from her enemies and establish a kingdom in Judah in 70 years? No, not according to the book of Daniel, because in the book of Daniel it's said that Jeremiah also was speaking in a code. Jeremiah meant that 70 weeks of years, which is to say 490 years, would pass before the consummation of all things. And the last week was the reign Antiochus Epiphanes: we are in the last week of these years now.

[90] The Book of Daniel is a response to specific historical circumstances. It's a response to the crisis of persecution and martyrdom that was going on in the second century. That was a new kind of crisis that led to a new kind of response, because the earlier crises of 722 and 586 — they could be explained as punishment for sin and faithlessness. But now in the second century, Jews were dying not because they were faithless but precisely because they were faithful; because they refused to obey the decrees of Antiochus and to violate their law and covenant and they were dying. So this new phenomenon of martyrdom, really for the first time, required new responses and the book of Daniel provides a fully apocalyptic response. Remain faithful, wait, Daniel urges, know that this will all be set right by God, not in this world but in an ultimate and cataclysmic triumph of life and faith over death and evil, and it will be soon.

[86] So the writer is maintaining that he is living in the last days, in the final moments of the last week of years, and this is very typical of apocalyptic literature. The time is at hand, we are in the final stage, this is now all the birth pangs of the Messiah, these terrible things that are being visited upon us, and God is soon going to win victory through a mighty act and introduce the Messianic Age, ending Israel's long years of desolation.

[91] Daniel emphasizes God's firm control of history and so bolsters loyal Jews who are suffering indignities and torture and even death all around him because of their faith.

[87] So apocalyptic literature sees history as determined. It's a closed drama that must be played out, requiring no action on the part of humans except faithful waiting. God's kingdom will come solely by God's power, but it has to be preceded by this time of trouble. These troubles are nothing but the birth pangs of the Messianic Age and the faithful whose names are recorded in God's book will be rescued.

[92] So we've seen the zealous fifth-century response of Ezra and Nehemiah to the fateful events of Israel's history. They believed Israel's rededication to God and the covenant involved as a first step, cessation of intimate relations with foreigners, separation from their abominable practices. We've seen very different views that would integrate foreigners in the worship of Yahweh. We've seen also the later emergence of apocalyptic as an expression of present despair and future hope that entailed the divinely orchestrated and cataclysmic defeat of the wicked enemies who persecuted Israel. And in the last lecture we're going to look at two books of the Hebrew Bible that take very different approaches, the Book of Esther and the Book of Jonah.

[88] Chapter 12 imagines a resurrection of the dead as a compensation to those who died under the persecutions of Antiochus. It's a clear attempt to deal with the injustice that mars this world, and it's the only passage of the Bible to explicitly espouse the idea of an individual life after death, and as I say, breaks with a longer Israelite tradition that's vague or silent on this issue.

[93] [end of transcript]

[89] Not all Jews accepted the idea, but it would be essential to the rise of Christianity which is deeply indebted to apocalyptic thinking. And

[94] References

[95] Unless otherwise noted, all biblical citations have been quoted from "Tanakh: The New JPS

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