

# THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the  
21st-Century Church

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## Go Deeper Excursus 12

### Expectation of the Coming Kingdom in the Intertestamental Period

The following survey explores some passages related to the expectation of the coming kingdom between the close of the Old Testament canon and the first century as a background for the New Testament. I make no attempt at being exhaustive; the purpose is to trace the basic contours of eschatological expectations of the messianic age and the Messiah figure himself as the New Testament era dawns.

#### 1 Enoch 1–36 (Book of the Watchers) (Fourth—Third Century BC)

The *Book of Enoch* (1 Enoch) begins with a prophecy of the end-times, “not for this generation, but for a remote one which is for to come” (1 En. 1.2).<sup>1</sup> That is, while the text is fictionally situated in the pre-flood days of Enoch, the opening prophecy is intended for a distant generation, most likely referring to the *ultimate* end of the world. Enoch calls this “the day of tribulation” (1 En. 1.1). This future judgment is summarily treated as a great theophany, in which God himself treads upon the earth (1.4), which trembles, quakes, and even melts in his presence (1.4–6). While all people are judged (1.7), “with the righteous He shall make peace, and will protect the elect, and mercy shall be upon them. And they shall all belong to God, and they shall be prospered, and they shall all be blessed” (1.8). Thus, while judgment comes upon the wicked, the righteous are protected and prosper on the earth. At this point 1 Enoch 1.9 appears, which is quoted by Jude, indicating not only the familiarity with 1 Enoch and its imagery, but to some degree an agreement with its appropriateness in summing up even the early Christian expectation of judgment and blessing.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Translation from Robert Henry Charles, ed., *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913).

<sup>2</sup> The language of 1 En. 1.9 is also similar to that of Zech 14:5, which is quoted by Did. 16.7, where the subject is the Lord Jesus Christ coming with all his saints.

With regard to the restoration of the righteous and elect, 1 Enoch describes that glorious coming age in terms quite similar to those of the Old Testament prophets and their language and imagery of the new covenant: “There shall be forgiveness of sins, and every mercy and peace and forbearance: there shall be salvation unto them, a goodly light” (1 En. 5.6); “For the elect there shall be light and joy and peace, and they shall inherit the earth” (5.7); “And then there shall be bestowed upon the elect wisdom, and they shall all live and never again sin, either through ungodliness or through pride: but they who are wise shall be humble” (5.8); “And they shall not again transgress, nor shall they sin all the days of their life, nor shall they die of (the divine) anger or wrath, but they shall complete the number of the days of their life. And their lives shall be increased in peace, and the years of their joy shall be multiplied, in eternal gladness and peace, all the days of their life” (5.9). The imagery here matches the descriptions of the messianic age in Isaiah and other Old Testament books (see Go Deeper Excursus 11), which are likely the sources for 1 Enoch.

The pronouncement of judgment related to the coming flood leaps forward to the “judgment that is for ever and ever” (1 En. 10.12), followed by a description of the ultimate and eternal period of restoration and blessing:

Destroy all wrong from the face of the earth and let every evil work come to an end: and let the plant of righteousness and truth appear: and it shall prove a blessing; the works of righteousness and truth shall be planted in truth and joy for evermore. And then shall all the righteous escape, and shall live till they beget thousands of children, and all the days of their youth and their old age shall they complete in peace. And then shall the whole earth be tilled in righteousness, and shall all be planted with trees and be full of blessing. And all desirable trees shall be planted on it, and they shall plant vines on it: and the vine which they plant thereon shall yield wine in abundance, and as for all the seed which is sown thereon each measure of it shall bear a thousand, and each measure of olives shall yield ten presses of oil. And cleanse thou the earth from all oppression, and from all unrighteousness, and from all sin, and from all godlessness: and all the uncleanness that is wrought upon the earth destroy from off the earth. And all the children of men shall become righteous, and all nations shall offer adoration and shall praise Me, and all shall worship Me. And the earth shall be cleansed from all defilement, and from all sin, and from all punishment, and from all torment, and I will never again send them upon it from generation to generation and for ever. (1 En. 10.16–22)

Later, in Enoch’s vision of the seven mountains, the archangel Michael notes, regarding a great and glorious mountain, “This high mountain which thou hast seen, whose summit is like the throne of God, is His throne, where the Holy Great One, the Lord of Glory, the Eternal King, will sit, when He shall come down to visit the earth with goodness” (1 En. 25.3). Then, regarding the tree of unparalleled beauty and fragrance—the tree of life, he writes:

And as for this fragrant tree no mortal is permitted to touch it till the great judgement, when He shall take vengeance on all and bring everything to its consummation for ever. It shall then be given to the righteous and holy. Its fruit shall be for food to the elect: it shall be transplanted to the holy place, to the temple of the Lord, the Eternal King. Then shall they rejoice with joy and be glad, and into the holy place shall they enter; and its fragrance shall be in their bones, and they shall live a long life on earth, such as thy fathers lived: and in their days shall no «sorrow» or plague or torment or calamity touch them. (1 En. 25.4–6)

### **1 Enoch 85–90 (Animal Apocalypse) (Second Century BC)**

The section of 1 Enoch 85–90, often called the Animal Apocalypse, presents an allegorical vision that depicts the history of the world until the coming kingdom. This section of 1 Enoch was composed sometime in the second century BC during the Maccabean period.<sup>3</sup> Olson summarizes the eschatological outlook of the Animal Apocalypse (1 En. 85–90) in this way: “God steps onto the scene, presiding over a final judgment of angels and humans. Afterwards, a New Jerusalem is constructed, and all the wild beasts and birds (the Gentiles) submit to the flock of sheep (Israel).”<sup>4</sup> He later makes the following comments on 1 Enoch 90.33–34, “The resurrection of the just, the gathering of the dispersion, the conversion of the Gentiles, the end of war, and the joyful congregation in the New Jerusalem are related in brisk fashion,” and notes that “none of these is unique” to the Animal Apocalypse,<sup>5</sup> as they reflect common themes throughout the Old Testament prophets as well as other intertestamental literature.

In his commentary on 1 Enoch, Nickelsburg summarizes the eschatological outlook of the Animal Apocalypse this way: “With the great judgment indicating a conclusion to the second era, the remainder of the Vision’s narrative depicts the beginning of a third era. There are continuities with the second era, specifically the resolution of unresolved problems: the renewal of Jerusalem, the return of the dispersion, and the submission of the Gentiles. Nonetheless, vv 37–38 indicate a return to the first beginnings and hence a new creation and an entirely new era.”<sup>6</sup> In sum, once the reader cuts through the confusing allegory, the general picture of the coming kingdom in 1 Enoch is consistent with the collage of images left to us in the Old Testament prophets.

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel Olson, *A New Reading of the Animal Apocalypse of 1 Enoch: All Nations Shall Be Blessed*, *Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 24 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 1. Translation used in this section is from Olson.

<sup>4</sup> Olson, *New Reading of the Animal Apocalypse*, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Olson, *New Reading of the Animal Apocalypse*, 227.

<sup>6</sup> George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch: The Hermeneia Translation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2012), 404.

## Psalms of Solomon (c. First Century BC)

Among the Psalms of Solomon, safely dated in the century prior to Christ, we see a picture of the coming kingdom consistent with the collage of images from the Old Testament prophets in all its major points. God will not reject his people Israel, but will show pity on the people, just as he promised (Ps. Sol. 7:6–10; 8:27; 11:1).<sup>7</sup> The “dispersed of Israel” will be gathered together from every place where they had been driven (Ps. Sol. 8:28; 11:3)—summoned back to Zion with the sounding of a trumpet (Ps. Sol. 11:1), and they will never be removed again (Ps. Sol. 8:33; 14:4).

Of particular brilliance is the vision of the coming kingdom set forth in Psalms of Solomon 17, which includes not only the language and imagery of restoration of Israel but also the central role of the Davidic king: “Behold, O Lord, and raise up unto them their king, the son of David, at the time in the which Thou seest, O God, that he may reign over Israel Thy servant” (17:21). He will be “pure from sin, so that he may rule a great people” (17:36). Further, “Throughout his days he will not stumble; for God will make him mighty by means of (His) holy spirit, and wise by means of the spirit of understanding, with strength and righteousness. And the blessing of the Lord (will be) with him: he will be strong and stumble not” (Ps. Sol. 17:37–38).

That son of David will liberate Jerusalem from its oppressors and wicked rulers (Ps. Sol. 17:22), and all wickedness will be banished from their midst (17:27, 30, 32, 36). That king will gather together his holy people and “judge the tribes of the people that has been sanctified by the Lord” (17:26) and “divide them according to their tribes upon the land” (17:28). The psalmist sings, “Blessed be they that shall be in those days, in that they shall see the good fortune of Israel which God shall bring to pass in the gathering together of the tribes” (17:44). The king’s reign will extend far beyond the borders of Israel, though: “He shall judge peoples and nations in the wisdom of his righteousness” (17:29) and “nations shall come from the ends of the earth to see his glory” (17:31).<sup>8</sup>

De Jonge sums up the picture from Psalm of Solomon 17:

The rule of the expected Son of David will be realised in Jerusalem and in Palestine, the promised land. He will cleanse Jerusalem of heathen and sinners and will drive them out and destroy them (22–25, 30, 36). A sanctified people will live in Palestine. Evildoers will no longer be found there and strangers will not live there (26–29). The rule of the King will be extended further over the whole earth and all peoples. They will serve under his yoke

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<sup>7</sup> References to the Psalms of Solomon (Ps. Sol) are from the versification of the Greek text; translations are from volume 2 of Charles, ed., *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Howes summarizes the picture of the coming kingdom in Ps. Sol. 17 this way: “After dispensing judgement, gathering in the Diaspora and restoring the throne of David, God will reinstate the (twelve) tribes of Israel and distribute them evenly across the Promised Land (17:26, 28, 43–44). Not only the tribes of old but also the nations throughout the world will serve the new Davidic king and come under his rule forever (17:30). Nations will visit the king from all over the world just to witness his majesty and experience the glory of God (17:31). The messianic king and all his subjects will be completely holy and righteous (17:32– 34, 36).” (Llewellyn Howes, “Judging the Twelve Tribes of Israel: Q 22:28, 30 in Light of the Psalms of Solomon and the Community Rule,” *VE* 35.1 [2014]: 4).

(30) and will come to Jerusalem to see the glory which God will give to the King and to Jerusalem. The exhausted children of Israel will be gathered from the dispersion and brought home.... Salvation would be realised here on earth, and therefore at the human level. But the King and his subjects possess superhuman attributes. There is no mention of the death and succession of the Son of David.<sup>9</sup>

### **Book of Jubilees (c. First Century BC)**

The Jewish pseudepigraphic writing, Book of Jubilees, also contains language and imagery that appears to draw on the Old Testament picture of the coming kingdom. One excerpt will illustrate the general similarity not only between the Old Testament Jubilees, but also between Jubilees and other intertestamental literature:

And in those days the children shall begin to study the laws, and to seek the commandments, and to return to the path of righteousness. And the days shall begin to grow many and increase amongst those children of men till their days draw nigh to one thousand years, and to a greater number of years than (before) was the number of the days. And there shall be no old man nor one who is not satisfied with his days, for all shall be (as) children and youths. And all their days they shall complete and live in peace and in joy, and there shall be no Satan nor any evil destroyer; for all their days shall be days of blessing and healing. And at that time the Lord will heal His servants, and they shall rise up and see great peace, and drive out their adversaries. And the righteous shall see and be thankful, and rejoice with joy for ever and ever, and shall see all their judgments and all their curses on their enemies. And their bones shall rest in the earth, and their spirits shall have much joy, and they shall know that it is the Lord who executes judgment, and shows mercy to hundreds and thousands and to all that love Him (Jub. 23.26–28).<sup>10</sup>

Especially notable is what appears to be an early interpretation of Isaiah 65:20: “No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days or an old person who does not live out a lifetime, for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.” Jubilees 23.28 mirrors this language: “And there shall be no old man nor one who is not satisfied with his days, for all shall be (as) children and youths.” During this time, Satan himself will be banished along with all evil; moreover, the world will be filled with blessing, healing, peace, righteousness, joy, and prosperity.

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<sup>9</sup> Marinus de Jonge, “The Expectation of the Future in the Psalms of Solomon,” *Neot* 23.1 (1989): 101–102, 103.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Henry Charles, ed., *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 49.

### Dead Sea Scrolls (c. Second Century BC–First Century AD)

Besides preserving the eschatological traditions from Old Testament prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel as well as non-canonical texts like 1 Enoch and Jubilees,<sup>11</sup> the Qumran community exhibits teachings concerning the coming kingdom consistent with themes in biblical and extra-biblical texts. For example, the 4Q475 (*4QRenewed Earth*) fragment (likely second century BC) reads, “there will be no more guilty deeds on the earth” (4Q475, 4), “all the world will be like Eden” (4Q475, 5), and “the earth will be at peace for ever.”<sup>12</sup>

The second-century BC fragments known as 4QTime of Righteousness (4Q215a) describe a time in the future when all iniquity and injustice will be wiped away (4Q215a 1 II, 3–4), and “the earth is filled with knowledge and the praise of God” (4Q215a 1 II, 5).<sup>13</sup> It will be a time of justice, and age of peace, (4Q215a 1 II, 5, 6), in which all people will honor and worship God (4Q215a 1 II, 8). This age will come after the earth has been destroyed in God’s anger and renewed (שׁוֹדָד) (4Q215a 3, 1).

Hogeterp notes, “The non-sectarian Qumran texts and traditions concerning eschatology are concerned with the ultimate destiny of Israel and the world at large (cf. *4QRenewed Earth*). This destiny is determined by the eventual victory of justice over evil.”<sup>14</sup> He concludes, “The apocalyptic notion that heaven and earth will be renewed in the final age is common to Hellenistic Diaspora Judaism and Palestinian Judaism alike.”<sup>15</sup>

### Assumption of Moses (Testament of Moses) (First Century AD)

After prophesying the events from the time of Moses to the religious and political conditions of the first century (As. Mos. 1–6), the first-century author of the apocryphal Assumption of Moses describes “a second visitation and wrath, such as has not befallen them from the beginning until that time” (As. Mos. 8.1). This language is reminiscent of Daniel 12:1: “there shall be a time of anguish such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence.”<sup>16</sup> The author of Assumption of Moses seems to be forecasting the ultimate Day of the Lord on earth—likely the imminent fulfillment of Daniel 12. During this coming time of “visitation and wrath,” God “will

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<sup>11</sup> Albert L. A. Hogeterp, *Expectations of the End: A Comparative Traditio-Historical Study of Eschatological, Apocalyptic and Messianic Ideas in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament*, Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah, vol. 83 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 19–35.

<sup>12</sup> Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Study Edition (Translations)* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 957.

<sup>13</sup> Martínez and Tigchelaar, *Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, 457.

<sup>14</sup> Hogeterp, *Expectations of the End*, 42.

<sup>15</sup> Hogeterp, *Expectations of the End*, 109.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew mirrors this language in his report of the Olivet Discourse but adds language of ultimacy: “For at that time there will be great suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be” (Matt 24:21).

stir up against them the king of the kings of the earth and one that ruleth with great power, who shall crucify those who confess to their circumcision” (As. Mos. 8.1). This enemy of Israel, “king of the kings of the earth,” may be the author’s reference to the so-called “willful king” of Daniel 11:36–45. At the time of the persecutions under this wicked king, a Levite named Taxo, with seven sons, will arise and exhort his sons to faithfulness to the law even in the midst of this time of great trial and tribulation. He promises that even if they die for the sake of faithfulness to the commands of the Lord of lords, their blood will be avenged before God (As. Mos. 9).

Following this time of persecution, God’s kingdom “shall appear throughout all His creation” (As. Mos. 10.1). As in the general Old Testament picture, “his kingdom” or the “kingdom [of God]” is not a heavenly, but an earthly, kingdom (As. Mos. 10.1). During that kingdom, “Satan shall be no more” and with his defeat “sorrow shall depart” (10.1). Also, the mysterious “angel” or *nuntius*—who has been appointed chief—appears to avenge God’s people against their enemies (10.2).<sup>17</sup> It seems to me that this figure is not, in fact, an *angelic* being strictly speaking, but rather this *nuntius* represents one of many messianic expectations of first-century Judaism. In any case, at the time of the kingdom, “the Heavenly One will arise from His royal throne, and He will go forth from His holy habitation with indignation and wrath on account of His sons” (As. Mos. 10.3). This heavenly figure is a theophany as God himself descends from heaven to deliver his people (10.7).

The author then utilizes common Old Testament images for the Day of the Lord (As. Mos. 10.4–7). After the coming of God as judge, Israel will finally be delivered (10.8). Though the language is corrupted in this passage, it seems to reflect the imagery of Daniel 7:13–14, 18, 27 (As. Mos. 10.9). As Israel is exalted to a high position over all the earth, they will look down upon their enemies “in Gehenna” and rejoice with thanksgiving for their victory (10.10).

### Summary of the Intertestamental Picture of the Coming Kingdom

Numerous examples could be added to illustrate the perpetuation of the grand collage of images of the coming kingdom from the Old Testament prophets, but they would present the same general picture. Michael Knibb notes that the belief “common to both Jews and Christians” was that, “the prophecies [or Isaiah] remained unfulfilled or were otherwise of continuing relevance...To take one well-known example, Isa 11:1–9 was of direct importance in the formation of messianic beliefs, and the influence of this passage can be traced in a number of apocryphal and pseudepigraphic texts that are concerned with the messiah and the son of man: see *Pss. Sol.* 17:23–24, 29, 35–37;

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<sup>17</sup> Many identifications have been made of the *nuntius* figure of Test. Mos. 10.2, including the proposal that he is the glorified, vindicated Taxo who suffered death in chapter 9. See Johannes Tromp, “Taxo, the Messenger of the Lord,” *JSJ* 21.2 (1990): 200–209.

18:7–8; *1 Enoch* 46:3; 49:1–4; 62:2–3; 2 Esdras 13:10; *T. Levi* 18:7; *T. Judah* 24:5b–6a.”<sup>18</sup> Comparing the picture of the son of David and the messianic age of Psalms of Solomon 17 and the Qumran (Dead Sea) literature, Knibb notes, “*Psalms of Solomon* 17 depicts the son of David as a military leader, whose task is to drive the enemy from Jerusalem, and as the righteous ruler of the newly purified city. What is said of the Davidic messiah in the Qumran texts is entirely consonant with this picture.”<sup>19</sup> He summarizes the “broad lines of the interpretation” of the Qumran material this way:

Within these writings the eschatological topics familiar from other literature of the Second Temple period are all reflected: the idea of a final judgment in which the righteous will be rewarded and the wicked punished (e.g. 1QS III, 13–IV 26; 4QSapiential Work A); the idea of a last great battle with the forces of evil (e.g. the *War Rule*; 1QH XI [= III], 19–36); descriptions—in the form of benedictions—of the blessings of the new age (4Q285; 11Q14); the expectation of a new Jerusalem (the New Jerusalem text); rules for the ordering of life in the new age (the Rule of the Congregation); an explanation for the delay in the expected time of the end (1QpHab VII, 1–14); belief in resurrection (e.g. 4Q521 2 ii + 4 12); and messianic beliefs (e.g. the *Rule of the Community*, the *Damascus Document*).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Michael Knibb, *Essays on the Book of Enoch and Other Early Jewish Texts and Traditions*, SVTP, vol. 22 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 289.

<sup>19</sup> Knibb, *Essays on the Book of Enoch*, 311.

<sup>20</sup> Knibb, *Essays on the Book of Enoch*, 329.