

Exegetical Eschatology, the Peasant Present and the Final Discourse Genre: the Case of Mark 13.

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Abstract

The ancient literary form best fitting the Synoptic "Eschatological Discourse" is the final discourse, the final words of a person about to die, describing what was forthcoming for those near and dear to him/her. The nineteenth-century German theological terms "apocalyptic" and "eschatology" are misplaced and misleading when applied to New Testament documents in general and to the Synoptic final discourse in particular. Ancient self-evident presuppositions about the devolution of life might have naturally (i.e. culturally) served as latent assumptions in the Synoptic story line but do not receive explicit attention.

I dedicate this essay to my colleague, the Reverend Leland J. White, Ph.D., J.D., scholar and friend, whose untimely demise has caused sorrow and a sense of loss to all who knew him, all whom he befriended and all who worked closely with him. Leland supported the general contention of anthropologists that peasant societies are oriented to the present and that this feature was significant for understanding Jesus and the Jesus movement groups described in the New Testament documents.

I begin this study with a story: Once there was a young man, beloved of his people, who, everyone said, bore the spirit of God. He lived in a kingdom ruled by a ruler acclaimed by all in his kingdom as the greatest of kings. While the land was at peace, many of the king's subjects struggled for a living as their lands were increasingly taken by elites. As the young man with the spirit of God grew in wisdom and age, he taught the people and they, in turn, began to consider him a sign of God's presence among them. The prophet Isaiah once proclaimed one of his ancestry to be Israel's Messiah. He felt called by God to proclaim a theocracy; the inauguration of God's rule in the land would take place soon. To this end he urged his followers to spread his message among the people, to assist those who needed help, to have all with open hearts be ready for the forthcoming theocracy. People knew that both he and his inner circle had God's ready assistance thanks to the presence of a personage (some said several personages) who was sent down from God for the purpose of aiding and abetting those who proclaimed and looked forward to God's rule in the land. The great king was angered when he heard this message of a forthcoming theocracy. From among those who proclaimed this forthcoming kingdom, he exiled some, tortured others and killed still others. To deal with the growing opposition to his rule, the king called upon the international imperial power of the day to assist him with his secret service surveillance and to help in consolidating his power in the region. All those who spread the message of the man of God were persecuted. Those who believed were tempted by Satan to disavow their loyalty to God and God's will. And the foreign imperial power itself was seen as Satan, intent on tempting the people to depart from their loyalty to God by allurements of all sorts. Yet in face of persecution the followers of the man of God endured; they persevered in their witness to the coming theocracy. Eventually the great king was stricken with illness. His imperialist ally helped to transport him from his capital city. Meanwhile, the people of the capital took to the streets as they awaited the king's departure. Not long after, the man of God emerged in the capital and proclaimed that the rule of God, theocracy, would be the political form of the nation henceforth, in place of the hateful monarchy.

As everyone knows, the man of God in question was that sign of God's presence, the Ayatullah (meaning: sign of God) Khomeini (PBUH). His given name was Ruhollah (meaning: having the spirit of God). And the theocracy established by God during his career is the present Islamic nation of Iran. The heavenly being (or beings) that assisted in this task was the Mahdi, the "hidden Imam" who disappeared in 873, but who is

said to still be alive with God, providentially emerging at the right moment to return to assist in realizing God's will in society and in restoring divine justice among humankind.

Curiously, no Euro-American theologians have described Ayatullah Khomeini's successful project as eschatological, or apocalyptic or an instance of apocalyptic eschatology. Given Khomeini's proclamation, why do not U.S. scholars consider the kingdom of God established by God in Iran eschatological? Since the Iranian theocracy was established for God's elect with the assistance of a celestial Mahdi, a "supernatural," "Son of man" type personage, why is Iranian society not considered apocalyptic? Why were the Ayatullah's proclamations of the forthcoming rule of God in Iran not judged to be apocalyptic eschatological proclamations? Is not the contemporary Islamic state of Iran the outcome of apocalyptic eschatology? If not, why not?

In sum, when biblical scholars speak of apocalyptic, eschatology, or apocalyptic eschatology, why does the case of modern Iran elude their field of vision? I would suggest that the emergence, in the lifetime of many of us, of the divine government in Iran has more in common with what Jesus envisioned with his proclamation of the kingdom of heaven, both in process and outcome, than any other scenario contrived by scholars, past or present.

And yet contemporary biblical scholars may be quite correct in their unaware assessment of the Khomeini event. I would concur that the Islamic state of Iran has nothing to do with apocalyptic or eschatology, or an ideology of apocalyptic eschatology. Furthermore, I would likewise insist that neither did Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God in general, nor his foretelling of the destruction of the Temple (and Jerusalem) in Mark 13 (for outline, see Duling). The continued use of categories such as eschatology or apocalyptic to describe New Testament data simply indicates that too many scholars are stuck in nineteenth-century tautologies that no longer produce the scientific self-evidence they did in the past.

Definitions: Origins

Modern scholars who deal with Israel's ancient political religion and the prophets who proclaimed its transformation are burdened with a scholarly spurious familiarity. This spurious familiarity derives from 18th and nineteenth-century Northern European ideology and categorization which support the attempts of late twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholars to maintain continuity with their past Northern European theological ideology. A good interpretation is believed to be one that fits in terms of that ideology. People who are ideologically indisposed to a different perspective invariably adhere to this "Received View" (see Malina 1986). "Apocalyptic" and "eschatology" are two anglicized German theological words used to label temporal dimensions of New Testament "theology." Like those other Germanism, "salvation history," and "delay of the parousia," the labels are inaccurate and misleading when applied to biblical documents or any other documents of the first century Mediterranean world. The most we can say is that if New Testament documents were nineteenth-century German compositions, then what they say would be understood as German theologians explained it in terms of German conceptions of eschatology and apocalyptic.

In point of chronological fact, eighteenth century Europe gave us the categories of salvation history, of fact and fiction, and of the Bible as a narrative or story, a body of literature with character, plot and setting-- much like any other novel of the time (see Prickett). The nineteenth century gave us eschatology and apocalyptic, eschatological delay, delay of the parousia: all categories deriving from and relevant to European salvation history formulas. "Eschatology" was coined in 1804 by the German, K.G. Bretschneider to refer to what previously was designated as "the last things" that were to befall humans individually, studied in treatises aptly titled *De Novissimis* (Concerning the Latest). Through a rather interesting pathway, the term was attached to the presumably last things of humanity in general (Carmignac). These last things were allegedly derived from the Bible whether they were there or not, as is usual with creative hermeneutics, known in the nineteenth-century as appropriations (aneignen, see Prickett 1996: 28). As for "apocalyptic," it was the German scholar F. Lucke (in 1852) who decided to use the word "apocalypse" as a label for the genre or category of the book of Revelation and documents presumably similar to it, such as the book of Daniel and those Israelite writings called Enoch, 4 Ezra and Baruch (Kvanvig: 40, 56).

This usage continues (see Bailey & Vander Broek). In his recent "historical" introduction to the New Testament, for example, Bart Ehrman defines apocalypse as follows: "A literary genre in which an author, usually pseudonymous, reports symbolic dreams or visions, given or interpreted through an angelic mediator, which reveal the heavenly mysteries that can make sense of earthly realities" (2000: 451). Given such a definition of apocalyptic as a genre, it is rather obvious that the book of Revelation (Apocalypse) has very little apocalyptic about it. And, of course, there is nothing apocalyptic about any of the discourses found in the Synoptics. After perusing apocalyptic writings, one wonders whether a first century apocalypticist would know he was apocalyptic. Would a first century eschatologist know he was eschatological? While such questions are immaterial to theological doctrine where they are firmly esconced, they are important to history. The task of the historical method is to develop an understanding of people in other historical periods on their own (approximate emic) terms.

Views of the Synoptic Discourses: Definitions and Their Implied Models

The dimensions of human experience categorized with the terms apocalyptic and eschatology are temporal dimensions. Since meanings in language invariably derive from the social system of those using the language, the presumed ancient meanings ascribed to apocalyptic and eschatology derive from and depend on the speaker's or author's social system value of time. In other words, the significance ascribed to time determines what native speakers might mean by eschatology and apocalyptic.

A number of years ago, I published an article in the CATHOLIC BIBLICAL QUARTERLY dealing with the perception and conception of time in peasant societies and the New Testament (Malina 1989: 1-31; reprinted 1996: 179-214). That article was published because, to the chagrin of some of the organization's gatekeepers, I was elected president of the Catholic Biblical Association of America, and the essay was my presidential address. It thus bypassed the editorial gatekeepers of the journal, still largely allergic to social scientific methods. Since its publication, the article has been largely ignored. It is difficult to say why. Perhaps the people whom it was meant to inform are incapable of understanding what it means to do cross cultural studies, a task basic to biblical interpretation of a historical kind. The problem for the historically oriented interpreter of first-century documents is to find out what an author said and meant to say to an original audience in the first century. As I have explained at length in the work just cited, the attitude of first century people towards time was markedly present-oriented. An event that was about to happen was forthcoming, a sort of expanded present rooted in a process launched in the present. If some "end" were coming soon, that is only because of what was under way in the present. As William Herzog has noted, prophets in Israel "were not so much driven by a vision of the future as by confidence in the past, the past that had antecedently shaped their present and could continue to influence its forthcoming course. All that was needed was a leader like Moses or Joshua and a people oppressed by their rulers" (Herzog: 58).

The exegetical eschatology of the nineteenth-century imported German concern about the future into biblical discussions making "apocalyptic" and "eschatology" German theological terms that still live on.

Apocalyptic

In a recent book, entitled: *Jesus: APOCALYPTIC PROPHET OF THE NEW MILLENIUM*, Ehrman writes:

According to this way of thinking, God was still in control of this world in some ultimate sense. But for unknown and mysterious reasons he had temporarily relinquished his control to the forces of evil that opposed him. This state of affairs, however, was not to last forever. Quite soon, God would reassert himself and bring this world back to himself, destroying the forces of evil and establishing his people as rulers over the earth. When this new Kingdom came, God would fulfill his promises to his people. This point of view, as I have said, is commonly called apocalypticism. It was an ideology that tried to make sense of the oppression of the people of

God. As you have probably inferred, and as I will lay out more fully in chapter 8, I think it was a view embraced by Jesus [Ehrman: 120-21].

For Ehrman, Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet because Jesus espoused the idea of theocracy, God's rule, and proclaimed it with certainty as to occur soon. This, in effect, is Ehrman's appropriation of the nineteenth-century category. In his introduction to the New Testament, Ehrman defines apocalypticism as: "a worldview held by many ancient Jews and Christians that maintained that the present age is controlled by forces of evil, but that these will be destroyed at the end of time when God intervenes in history to bring in his kingdom, an event thought to be imminent" (2000: 451).

Balabanski, in her excellent overview of Synoptic "eschatological" discourses, notes the following:

If an apocalypse is characterized by the following features, Mark 13 fits the description only partially: against a background of persecution and spiritual turmoil, a series of visions is granted to a seer; these visions are generally mediated by an angelic being, and call those who are still faithful among the people of God to endurance, because the present age of darkness will soon be at an end; there is an urgent expectation of the impending overthrow of all earthly conditions in a vast cosmic catastrophe; the language is veiled in secrecy and is rich in symbolism and mythical imagery. In Mark 13 there is no vision, no angelic mediator or interpreter. So instead, it seems better to make use of J. J. Collins' distinction between 'apocalypse' and 'apocalyptic eschatology': 'apocalypse' refers to the literary genre, whereas 'apocalyptic eschatology' refers to a religious perspective and looks for the cataclysmic End of the age. According to this distinction, though Mark 13 is not strictly an apocalypse, it certainly demonstrates apocalyptic eschatology [Balabanski: 70].

For Balabanski, then, what distinguishes Mark 13 from other apocalypses is that: "In Mark 13 there is no vision, no angelic mediator or interpreter." But, I would add, much more is lacking. First of all, the presumed background of persecution and spiritual (sic) turmoil presumed to lie at the root of apocalypse is not present yet in the story. Neither is there concern with the present age. Rather the focus of Mark 13 is with the present Temple. Further, there is no urgent expectation of the impending overthrow of all earthly conditions. What is expected is a war that will destroy the Temple, and the city of Jerusalem which is a Temple city. And there is no vast cosmic catastrophe involved, just the usual concern with celestial territoriality to account for the usual effects produced by the sky during a period of war. Moreover, there is no language veiled in secrecy, just plain ordinary language known to persons enculturated in Israel of the first century. Finally there is little if any symbolism and mythical imagery, just the usual symbols and imagery of the everyday world. As a matter of fact none of the features of apocalypse are found in Mark 13.

Consider John J. Collins' well known definition of apocalypse as genre as further expanded by Yarbro Collins:

Apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world intended to interpret the present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behavior of the audience by means of divine authority [Yarbro Collins 1986: 7].

As I shall point out below, the definition is obviously too ethnocentric to be of use to historians of the first century. And the new features in the expanded definition ("intended to interpret the present, earthly

circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behavior of the audience by means of divine authority") are still insufficient to characterize Mark 13 as apocalyptic.

Eschatology

Balabanski tells us that eschatology is "the expectation of an imminent End." In this she is quite in step with what one might usually find in modern scholarship (for example Langkammer; Witherington; Taylor 1996a, 1996b; Keener). Of course as a description the statement is woefully high-context for a guild that prides itself on its low-context methods. For the question is, an imminent End to what? an imminent End of what? Would the imminent End of the Temple and the political religion made concrete in the Temple organization, ritual and behavior qualify as eschatology? Or must the End in question be some sort of final and definitive End of the world, the world order or what? The way many scholars use the term eschatology in biblical interpretation, the term often means little more than "future orientation" (see Dyer). That description or translation is still not problem-free since the question remains: "future" in whose cognitive scheme of time?

Something Else Plus Apocalyptic or Eschatological

To Balabanski's credit, however, she departs from the usual categorizations of Mark 13 as eschatological or apocalyptic eschatology, and introduces the category of "farewell discourse." In seeing another category for Mark 13, she is much like Yarbro Collins, who calls the passage a "scholastic dialogue," in agreement with Brandenburger (Yarbro Collins 1992:1129). Hence Balabanski concludes relative to the genre of Mark 13:

Nevertheless, given that this material is presented not as a vision but as a discourse delivered before Jesus' death, Mark 13 is closer to the genre of the farewell discourse than to an apocalypse. Of course, many farewell discourses from the intertestamental period have apocalyptic features, so the farewell discourse model is by no means at odds with the apocalyptic eschatology of Mark 13. Therefore, Mark 13 is a type of farewell discourse, much of which is expressed in the language and imagery of apocalyptic eschatology [Balabanski: 71]

With her insight into farewell discourses, Balabanski almost broke free of the nineteenth century fetters of apocalyptic and eschatology. Yet once more, she succumbs. She cannot shake the overpowering mental presence of 'apocalyptic eschatology,' which she defines as that which "refers to a religious perspective and looks for the cataclysmic End of the age" (Balabanski:70). Does Mark 13 in any way reveal a religious perspective? Does Mark 13 look for the cataclysmic end of the age?

Problems with the Received View: the Models Implied in the Definitions

To understand this discourse, I would begin by eliminating the categories apocalypse and eschatology. I do so for these simple reasons, which should prove adequate. First of all the definitions of these terms are anachronistic; they entail the retrojecting of many post-Enlightenment concerns into antiquity. Second these definitions conceptualize what can only be called faulty history. And third, the genre of Mark 13 is that of a final (not farewell) discourse of a person near death, concerning the fate of Jerusalem.

Definitions Are Anachronistic

The definitions of eschatology and apocalyptic are etic (modern scholarly) definitions. They look at the world from the perspective of contemporary (i.e. eighteenth- and nineteenth-century) scholars and their practices and concerns. To begin with, eschatology presumably stands in contrast to protology: dissolution versus creation. In Mark 13 there is no dissolution of creation--just a destruction of Jerusalem. While there is evidence that the some ancient elites believed in cosmic disintegration (the Stoic and Epicurean

viewpoint, e.g., Lucretius, Dio Chrysostom, Seneca, Lucan, etc.), such was not the case in Israel at all. The reasons for this are: First, it is inconceivable. Second, God created the cosmos. Third, Israel's biblical tradition says so: "A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains for ever" (Eccles 1:4). "Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away" (Matt 5:18; see Mark 13:31; Matt 24:35; Luke 16:17; 21:33; Acts 4:24) is a standard oath that also serves as a word of honor. The high context presupposition is that heaven and earth are enduring and will never pass away, a point which gives even greater permanence to "my words." For most Hellenized people in the first century, the universe is geocentric, all creation centered about the earth. "Ge," the geo part of geocentric, cannot change. The sky might change and impact on the land, but neither can be destroyed.

The standard definition of apocalyptic as a genre is equally etc. To serve for a historic understanding of documents of the past, the definition must be stripped of its etc features. For example, the following categories were nonexistent in antiquity: "otherworldly," "transcendent reality," "eschatological salvation," "another, supernatural world," "the future." If such terms are used, they must be defined in some comparative perspective. If they are left to stand, they imply an ethnocentric as well as an anachronistic perspective.

History Is Faulty

Given their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century perspectives, it seems that in the minds of many biblicists, the ancient apocalypticists with their eschatological hopes were essentially authors of fiction who proceeded in a manner quite similar to modern, literate science-fiction authors. When such authors claim that they had visions, these are denied as fictional ruses. When celestial entities are described, these too are not taken as seriously as the ancients took them when they wrote about them. Since most historians concerned with apocalyptic or apocalyptic eschatology are focused on the history of ideas in general, and on the history of religious ideas in particular, they are usually unconcerned with the social system from which the documents emerged and in which it had sense. Genetic mislabeling only compounds the problem.

As a rule, modern interpreters omit a large part of the historical setting. I refer to the sky, the actual sky that is observable to us today. This sky is referred to as "another, supernatural world." I do not believe there is any proof that any ancient considered this sky and its denizens as a supernatural world (see Saler). As a matter of fact, the inhabitants of the sky formed an integral part of the social environment of the period. The huge amount of astral documents from the Greco-Roman period makes it quite obvious that for the contemporaries of Jesus, sky and land constituted a single environmental unit, a single social arena. Hence any study of people of the pre-industrial period without consideration of the sky that impacted on their behavior is to give but half the picture. Pre-industrial peoples generally considered their habitation as part of a total system that was essentially closed, much like images of the earth in an armillary sphere. The sky enveloped the earth, caged it in, if you will. Just as people were organically linked to their land, its features and the events that took place there, they were equally affected by celestial phenomena that were rooted in the vault of the sky. Everyone knew that if the God of Israel had any direct influence on people in the land of Israel, this God did so through an opening in the sky (see Malina 1995: 80-84). This was such common knowledge that even those Jesus group members expecting the "royal arrival" (parousia) of the Lord knew that "the signs of truth will appear: first the sign of an opening in the sky, then the sign of the sound of the trumpet, and thirdly the resurrection of the dead ..." (DIDACHE 16:6).

By the way, the perception of a "delay" of the Parousia is also a nineteenth-century German theological category. There was no "eschatological delay" even if early Jesus group members spoke of the possible imminence of an intervention of God or his agent in Israelite society. People in peasant society would not have to cope with a problem of eschatological delay. As Robert P. Carroll has so aptly put it: "In order to have a delay there must be a specific time or schedule whereby an event, arrival or expectation can be known to be late. Without such information it is not possible to use the term 'delay.' ... This factor suggests that 'delay of the parousia' treatments of the New Testament may not be built on firm foundations" (Carroll 1982:55 n. 24). Carroll could find no such eschatological delay motif in the late prophetic material either.

The Last Discourse Before Jesus' Death: Final Discourse Genre

In the Synoptic tradition, Jesus tells of the destruction of the Temple in his last discourse before Jesus' arrest. In the story-line, Jesus knows he will be arrested and be put to death in Jerusalem. These events are not mere possibilities, but probable, morally certain, forthcoming, bound up with the present. Hence this passage serves as his final discourse before death, an ultimate farewell speech.

In the U.S. persons about to die are said to see their whole life flash before their eyes. Not so in the Mediterranean world. What is distinctive of final words before death in the Mediterranean (and elsewhere) is that the person about to die is believed capable of knowing what is going to happen to persons near and dear to him or her. Dying persons are prescient because they are closer to the realm of God (or gods) who knows all things than to the realm of humans whose knowledge is limited to human experience. The dying process puts a person into specific type of Altered State of Consciousness, a special way of knowing from the viewpoint of God (or gods), as it were. There is ample evidence of this type of Altered State of Consciousness in antiquity (see Pilch 1993; 1995; 1998; Malina 1999). Consider these instances, collected by Gaster (1974 vol. 1: 214; 378). Xenophon tells us: "At the advent of death, men become more divine, and hence can foresee the forthcoming" (CYROP. 7.7.21). In the ILLIAD (16.849-50) the dying Patroclus tells of the coming death of Hector at the hands of Achilles, and the dying Hector predicts the death of Achilles himself (22.325). Similarly, in Sophocles' play, "The Women of Trachis," the dying Heracles summons Alcmena so that she may learn from his last words "the things I now know by divine inspiration" (TRACHINIAE 1148 ff.). Vergil finds it normal to have the dying Orestes predict that his slayer will soon meet retribution (AENEID 10.729-41). Plato too reports that Socrates made predictions during his last moments, realizing that "on the point of death, I am now in that condition in which men are most wont to prophesy" (APOL 39c; cf. Xenophon, ANAB. APOL. 30). Cicero reports concerning Callanus of India: "As he was about to die and was ascending his funeral pyre, he said: 'What a glorious death! The fate of Hercules is mine. For when this mortal frame is burned the soul will find the light.' When Alexander directed him to speak if he wished to say anything to him, he answered: 'Thank you, nothing, except that I shall see you very soon.' So it turned out, for Alexander died in Babylon a few days later" (DE DIVINATIONE 1.47).

The Israelite tradition equally shared this belief, as is clear from the final words of Jacob (Gen. 49) and Moses (Deut 31-34); see also 1 Sam 12; 1 Kgs 2:1-17; Josh 23-24. The well-known documents called "Testaments," written around the time of Jesus, offer further witness to this belief (e.g. Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, Testament of Moses; see also Jubilees 22:10-30, 1 Macc. 2:47-70; Josephus, ANTIQUITIES 12.279-84).

In the U.S., with economics as the focal social institution, last words and testaments will deal with the disposition of goods. However in Mediterranean antiquity, with the kinship institution being focal, final words will deal with concern for the tear in the social fabric resulting from the dying person's departure. Hence the dying person will be deeply concerned about what will happen to his/her kin group. As the examples just cited indicate, toward the close of the dying process, the person soon to expire will impart significant information about what is soon to befall the group in general and individuals in the group. This includes who will hold it together (successor), and advice to kin group members on how to keep the group together. Of course, before passing on the dying person tries to assure the kin group of its well-being, offering abiding good wishes and expressing concern for the well-being of the group. It is within this cultural framework that Jesus' final words and actions need to be understood.

A comparison of the prevailing view of Mark 13 as apocalyptic eschatological discourse with the final discourse form yields the features shown in Figure 1.

Because of Israel's territorial conceptions and the organic relationship of people to their land, the story is solely and only about Israel. Gentiles and Gentile territories do not enter at all.

As a matter of fact, one can flee to Gentile territories to be saved!

Sky Dimensions of Jesus' Final Discourse

What is distinctive of Jesus' final discourse in Mark 13 and parallels is that it concerns the destruction of Jerusalem, a set of persons resident in a spatial configuration, overlaid with many layers of meaning and feeling. I shall not go into this dimension of the city (see Malina 2000: 26-45). My only concern here is to note that if one is to forecast the destruction of a city in the ancient Mediterranean world, a number of stereotypical themes inevitably come to the fore. And if one make this forecast in Israel, the phraseology will be "Bible-speak." Israel's sacred books provide the prevailing cultural intertext for Israelites in the period. When God speaks in the Synoptics, God too uses "Bible-speak." And so would persons close to the realm of God.

Scholarly commentaries have ample information about biblical allusions in Mark 13. But most scholars make little if any mention of the fact that this final discourse shares much of its terminology with astrological/astronomical documents of the period (see Malina 1997, following Boll 1914). Furthermore, along with such astral terminology, the unfolding sequence of: 1) wars; 2) international strife; 3) famines; 4) earthquakes; 5) persecutions; 6) eclipses are common to all the Synoptics and the book of Revelation (noted by Ford 1975:104). What is common to these events is that the ancients saw them all as triggered by celestial entities and celestial events. (Prof. Ray Hobbs, in a personal communication, observes that this viewpoint is traditional in ancient Canaan, Mesopotamia and Israel. For YHWH Sabaoth, note the astral and meteorological phenomena associated with his military interventions: lightnings, mists, thunder, clouds, especially in the poetic presentations [Jud 5, Exod. 15], He often "roars from the skies" [esp. Isa 42.13]. "Fire chariots" [2 Kings 2, and 2 Kings 6] which descend from the sky are features of celestial military events as well).

Unsurprisingly, Josephus' description of the destruction of Jerusalem presents two simultaneous conflicts: one in the sky and one on the land below--as we might expect in any first century scenario of the destruction of a city. Thus Jesus' mention of the coming of that celestial figure known as one like a Son of man is no surprise. As we know from Rev 14:6-20, the coming of this sky being does not necessarily signal the end of any cosmic time period, just destruction of a city as commanded by God. After the destruction wrought by one like a Son of man and accompanying angels in Rev 14:6-20, no new heaven and new earth follow. All that is involved is a judgment on the inhabitants of the City. This is exactly what happens in the scenario described by Mark 13. And to repeat, this scenario too is part of astral prophecy.

Of course the problem with history is that history essentially consists of scenarios in the mind of the historian. How can such scenarios be tested? In social-science method, the simple test is to find comparable behavior on the planet in the contemporary world. Behind this test is the medieval logical principle: if something exists, it could have existed, but if something could exist, (if we can conceive of it), it did/does not necessarily exist. (*Ab esse ad posse valet illatio, a posse ad esse non valet illatio*). I found the parallel case of the holy man, Ayatullah Khomeini (PBUH) to be instructive in this regard, especially in face of the flamboyant claims of Ehrman and the confused conclusions of persons finding apocalyptic eschatology of any stripe in Mark 13.

In sum, compare, relative to Mark 13, the Received View with the Social Science View (Figure 2).

Ancient Devolution and Modern Evolution

Furthermore, in Mark 13 there seems to be little, if any, foregrounding of the belief shared by all ancient Mediterranean peoples that the world was running down. (Downing 1995a; 1995b; Ax; Malina 1997). The implicit worldview at the time was one of devolution and gradual breakdown of the cosmos in general and of society in particular. Whether this involved an ultimate cosmic dissolution or cosmic renewal was a point of contention. Apocalyptic was the term applied by nineteenth-century German biblical scholars to writings that describe what in their estimation was a quick, accelerating, devolutionary demise of a certain segment of society. Emphasis was usually on Israel and Israelite society, although later generations would apply it to the known human world. What is distinctive in this apocalyptic is the acceleration of the

devolutionary process. Cosmic descriptions of this devolutionary demise are to be expected since the human environment included the sky and the land and things below and the seas. And so the whole human environment: water, lands, space, all witness to this devolutionary acceleration. But since causality was essentially personal, the leading persons involved in the story, characters who played a lead role and were affected by these events, are featured prominently. In modern stories, fictional and non-fictional, describing cosmic calamities of cosmic proportions, humans are depicted as up to the task of fending off and at times controlling celestial events and terrestrial developments. But in antiquity human beings were simply not the center of any scenario; they did not act so much as they were acted upon. It was the sky, the land and the seas and their denizens that acted upon them. The only possible salutary reaction to devolutionary situations was allegiance to the God who ultimately controlled all.

In sum, first century people believed in devolution, just as nineteenth-century Germans, and modern Euro-Americans after them, believed in evolution. First century persons believed in regress just as nineteenth-century German elites, and contemporary Euro-Americans after them, believed in progress. An ancient Greek might call the common devolutionary perspective "kakoterology" (= worse-ology). To call the ancient symbols of this common belief "apocalyptic," and systems of explicating the symbol "eschatology" is simply not useful. We live in a society that has a parallel and equally strong belief in evolution (social and organismic in face of physical entropy) and progress. If we call our cultural outlook "scientific," should we not develop a theological perspective that is "kreittology" (or kreissology or belterology = betterology)? Compare the present evolutionary view with the ancient devolutionary view (Figure 3).

I think it is important to underscore the fact that the devolutionary cultural perception of antiquity is simply not noted, much less highlighted, in the New Testament. Rather, New Testament story-lines focus on what was to happen "soon," "next." This emphasis should generate a first-century theory and a set of terms called proximatology or nextology. Proximatology or nextology better fits the broader assumed devolutionary perspective of antiquity than eschatology or apocalyptic.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Jesus' forecast of the destruction of Jerusalem in Mark 13 belongs to the category of final words rooted in that type of Altered State of Consciousness that befalls a person aware of impending death.

Second the forecast consists of social and celestial events in tandem. Why this collocation? I believe that anyone acquainted with first century astrology/astronomy will find it obvious. Since cataclysms on land inevitably correlate with celestial phenomena overhead. Significantly in this regard, in antiquity there are no celestial events that impact on the whole round earth. Celestial events impact on the land over which these celestial events take place.

Third, the nineteenth-century categories labeled "Apocalyptic" and "Eschatology" are not useful for a historical description of first-century concerns and experiences. Something like Worseology and Nextology better mirror first-century perceptions.

Fourth once again, the Received View has to be abandoned in favor of something more suited to a historically oriented, culturally sensitive interpretation of ancient documents.

Figure 1

Literary Genre	Literary Genre
Apocalyptic Eschatology	Final Words before Death
Time Model	Time Model
Past-Present-Future	(as Experienced Time (past-

in contemporary perception)	present-forthcoming of living persons) and Imaginary Time (possible past-possible future) = Peasant Perception
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Explanatory Concerns	Explanatory Concerns
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Largely of 19th century vintage.	Largely of 1st century vintage
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Totally lacking States of Consciousness	Altered States of Consciousness
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Apocalyptic	Astral prophecy
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Eschatology	The Forthcoming
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End of the World	Destruction of Jerusalem
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Son of man and end of the World	Son of Man and end of Jerusalem
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Midrash	Bible-speak
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Delay of the End of World	Population in Abeyance
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Problem of Unfulfilled Prophecy	Solution: Never Mind, no problem
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Figure 2

Received View	Social Science View
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Genre: Apocalyptic	Genre: Final Words in Altered State of Consciousness
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Scope: all Humankind	Scope: Israel
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Context: Final State of Humankind	Context: Advent of Theocracy in Israel
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Content: Eschatology	Content: Forecast of destruction of Temple and surrounding Temple city--Jerusalem
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Source of Information: Rational Research and Pseudonymous Compositional Technique	Source of Information: Alternate State of Consciousness Experience of those aware of death
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Basis: O.T. symbols, Midrashic Methods	Basis: Astral Prophecy in Biblespeak
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Message: End of the World (This Age) soon	Message: End of the Temple and Jerusalem soon
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End of the Age has World Impact	End of Society as hitherto known has Local Impact only (Celestial Territoriality)
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Event of Universal Concern to Humankind	Event of Particularistic Concern to all Israelites
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Trigger Situation: Delay of Parousia	Trigger Situation: Population in Abeyance, Israel awaiting theocracy
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Medium: Apocalyptic Discourse or Apocalyptic Eschatological Discourse	Medium: Final Words of One Soon to Die
---	--

Son of Man is a Cosmic Entity marking the End	Son of Man is a Middle Eastern celestial entity at
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of the Age	work in specific cataclysms
People are in control of their Lives, the gospel message is liberating	People are totally controlled, not in control of their lives

Figure 3

Evolutionary View	Devolutionary View
Education and behavior entail catching up with where the community is now and then contributing to it.	Study and Behavior are concerned with matching the past, living up to the past as normative.
Evolution has no closure; it is open-ended.,	Devolution has closure, with reopenings looking for new closure.
Change is positive	Change is negative
In evolution, potentiality requires an unfolding within an environment that can go beyond what is.	In devolution everything is given at birth; life is one long present tense, with the forthcoming emerging from what is present.
In evolution, one is to surpass one's ancestors in a context of increasing supply of potentialities.	In devolution one is to live up to one's ancestors in a context of ever dwindling supplies of ability.
Evolution replicates the perception of limitless good; all goods in life are in plentiful and increasing supply.	Devolution replicates the perception of limited goods; all goods in life are limited (like land never enough to go around).
The earth has renewable resources.	The earth's resources are running down.
Technological progress is expected to increase exponentially and is good.	Technology is a low status concern, of general disinterest and held in low regard.
Perfection is to be creatively achieved as something new and previously non-existent, to be increasingly surpassed by subsequent generations.	Perfection is to be restored as restoration of what once was and must be reacquired in its pristine form.
Wisdom is a plan for success based on self reliance.	Wisdom is a plan for success based on group integrity.
Desire for profit (the profit motive) is something positive, to be cultivated.	Desire for profit (the profit motive) is totally negative; it is greed to be avoided.
Concupiscence (desire, covetousness, lust) is positive, to be encouraged,	Concupiscence (desire, covetousness, lust) is totally negative, and summarizes or synthesizes all possible violations of the Ten Commandments.
Increasing physical develop-	Decreasing physical development

ment (larger crops, larger and healthier children, animals, etc.) are expected, Agricultural superproduction in evidence, evidence.	(smaller crops, smaller and sicklier children, animals, etc.) are evident. Agricultural deterioration in
The goal in one's life is not perfection (completion), but first catching up with where the developmental process is, and surpassing the present status.	The goal in one's life (and in society) is perfection (completion), finding ever more creative ways to live up to traditions.
Perfectibility, open-endedness, expansion is a value of Weak Group society, replicating normative individual self-reliance, progress, sense of history,	Perfection, completion, totality is a value of Strong Group society, replicating group integrity, group wholeness, lack of a sense of history, and belief in unchangeability of social nature and human nature.

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