

The World Is About to End

The Impact of Apocalyptic Beliefs on History

Class 1

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What We Will Cover in this Course - 1

- The Origins of Apocalyptic Beliefs
 - Judaism and the Covenant
 - The Impact of Antiochus IV Epiphanes
 - Jewish Apocalypticism and Messianism
 - Christian Apocalypticism
 - Some Key Traits

What We Will Cover in this Course - 2

- The Antichrist and his Impact
 - The Pope as Antichrist
 - Joachim of Fiore & Peter Olivi
 - Protestant Reformers
 - Church and State as Antichrist
 - Radical Implications
 - The Taborites
 - The Anabaptists
 - Separatists, Puritans & the Anglican Establishment
 - The Mark of the Beast

What We Cover in this Course - 3

- The Secularization of Apocalypticism
 - Apocalypticism without God
 - Private Property as Original Sin
 - The Revolution as the Tribulation and Last Judgment
 - Utopia replaces the Kingdom of God
 - We Destroy Ourselves without God being involved
- 19th & 20th Century Protestant Apocalypticism
 - William Miller and the Great Disappointment
 - John Nelson Darby and Premillennial Dispensationalism

What We Will Cover in this Course - 4

- Catholic Apocalypticism
 - Marian Apparitions
 - The Prophecies of St Malachy
- Jewish Apocalypticism
 - If You Build the Third Temple, the Messiah Will Come
 - The Bible Code
- Islamic Apocalypticism
 - Fighting the Dajjul
- Apocalyptic Cults

Why Are Apocalyptic Beliefs Important?

- They helped give rise to the Jewish belief that History was governed by God and had both a goal and a destiny
- They constituted a major portion of the message of Jesus, Paul, and early Christianity
- Throughout the history of the West, they have led to creative action, revolution, and sometimes genocidal violence

Why Are Apocalyptic Beliefs Important? - 2

- They created a fascination with the future – a what will happen next attitude and an interest in the signs, conditions, and people that will signify the end times are upon us
 - This will lead to a fascination with the predictions of prophets, seers, psychics, and futurists

Why Are Apocalyptic Beliefs Important - 3

- The notion of the “end times” carried with it concepts and themes that eventually led to the following:
 - The concept of progress,
 - Marxist Communism and Nazism,
 - Such Christian denominations as the Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses, and
 - Pre-millennial Dispensationalism
 - The development of apocalyptic themes and tendencies in Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, and Modern Secularism

Why Are Apocalyptic Beliefs Important? - 4

- Substantial numbers of Americans (and others) believe that the writings of the Hebrew prophets, Jesus, Paul, and John of Patmos contain divinely-revealed predictions about a soon-to-happen end of the world
- As Paul Boyer notes in “When American Foreign Policy Meets Biblical Prophecy,” many of these beliefs have definite policy implications

Origins

The Covenant

The Covenant

- Central to Judaism was the concept of a Covenant between God and Israel
 - If Israel obeyed God's laws (as contained in the Torah), God would bless and protect both individual Israelites and Israel as a nation
 - If, however, Israel or individual Israelites disobeyed God's laws, then God would punish those guilty

Emerging Problems - 1

- In the era of the Judges, Israel was largely an egalitarian society of landowning farmers
 - One problem with rule by Judges was that such decentralization made unified action difficult and left Israel vulnerable to attack. This led to a demand for a monarchy
 - One problem with a monarchy was it created a center of power whose consequence was to make Israel an increasingly unequal society

Emerging Problems - 2

- Thus as time went on, Israel developed a socio-economic structure increasingly similar to those of pre-industrial agrarian empires
 - Such societies consisted of two primary social classes:
 - A largely urban ruling elite (with their families constituting 1%-2% of the population)
 - Rural peasants – mostly sharecroppers, tenants, day laborers, and slaves – who made up 90% of the population
- In this context arose the Prophets who:
 - Condemned the arrogance of the elite, their exploitation of the poor, and the tendency to worship idols
 - Stated that God would punish those guilty of the above transgressions

Emerging Problems - 3

- After the death of Solomon, the northern tribes rebelled against Rehoboam, Solomon's son and successor
 - Result: the empire established by David and Solomon broke apart into two relatively weak kingdoms at odds and frequently at war with each other in an era where new and powerful empires were emerging
- Eventually, Israel was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC and Judah by the Babylonians in 586 BC

Exile

- With the fall of Jerusalem, the elite of Judah were deported to Babylon, a large city noted for commerce, religion, and vice
- What turned Judah exiles into Jews were:
 - The fact of exile from their native land while living in a large heterogeneous urban center
 - Babylon's policy of religious toleration
 - The writings and oral traditions of the prophets, especially Ezekiel, who had added credibility among the exiles

After the Exile

- A minority of exiles returned to Judea where they began rebuilding the Temple and the city of Jerusalem
- Judea, Samaria, and Galilee were loosely governed provinces within the Persian Empire
- In 332 BC came under Greek rule, with the conquest of the Persian Empire by Alexander the Great

Greek Rule - 1

- In 331 BC, the Persian Empire was conquered by Alexander the Great
 - After Alexander's death in 323 BC, his empire is partitioned among his four top generals
- Palestine comes under the rule of the Ptolemy dynasty of Egypt (323-198 BC)
 - Ptolemy II Philadelphus asks for a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures to add to his famous library
 - As a consequence, the Hebrew Scriptures are translated into Greek

Greek Rule - 2

- Greek culture was seductively alluring to many Jews
- Some hedonistic aspects of Greek culture, however, were deeply offensive to Jewish traditionalists
 - E.g. prominent displays of the naked human body, nude athletic competition, homosexuality, and temple priests neglecting their duties to go watch Greek athletic contests
- The result was a “culture war” between Assimilationists and Traditionalists

Antiochus Epiphanes

- In 198 BC, the Seleucids conquered Palestine after defeating Ptolemy V
- In 175 BC, Antiochus IV Epiphanes becomes ruler
- Troubled by the occasional public disorders resulting from the Jewish Culture Wars, Antiochus blamed the traditionalist Jews
- Consequently, In 164 BC, Antiochus criminalized the basic rites of Judaism, ordered the public burning of all Torah scrolls, and installed a statue of Zeus in the Holy of Holies of the Temple at Jerusalem

Maccabean Revolt

- Many Jews refused to violate the law and suffered martyrdom as a result
 - The Book of Daniel was written in this period to encourage Jews to remain loyal to their faith and the Law
- Faced with religious persecution and the abomination of having a statue of Zeus in the Holy of Holies,
 - Pious Jews, led by Judas Maccabeus rebelled and succeeded in defeating the Syrian occupying garrisons and liberating Jerusalem in 164 BC

Results of the Maccabean Revolt

- The creation of a politically independent Jewish state ruled by the Hasmoneans
- The calling into question the traditional idea that misfortune and suffering were the result of God's just punishment of personal and collective sin
 - Antiochus Epiphanes confronted Jews with the fact that people suffered and underwent martyrdom because they were faithful to Jewish law
 - This posed the problem of how could a good God let people suffer because they were faithful to his Law

Dealing with the Problem of Evil

- There were two resolutions to the problem of evil – how could a good God let bad things happen to good people
 - The first was the concept of an afterlife in which one's eternal status depended upon one's deeds in this life with the good rewarded and the wicked punished
 - This was distinct from the concepts of *sheol* and *hades*
 - The second was the idea that God would intervene in history in the near future to set things right

The Afterlife

- The idea of an afterlife in which the good were rewarded and the evil punished was first stated in the Book of Daniel (Daniel 12:2)
 - Until the Jews came into contact with Greek thought, they had no concept of an intelligent and immortal soul that would survive the death of the body
 - The Jews as reflected in Ezekiel 37:1-13 did have a concept of the resurrection of the body
- Christianity combined the Greek immortal soul with the Jewish resurrected body

Origins of Jewish Messianism

- The concept that at some point God would intervene in history to punish the wicked, overthrow Israel's oppressors, and establish a messianic kingdom had three intertwined roots
 - The tension between a faith that saw the Jews as Yahweh's chosen people and the reality of rule by foreign pagan powers
 - The experience of persecution and successful revolt under Antiochus Epiphanes
 - The predictions of the prophets that Israel's enemies would be punished and that God would restore Israel and usher in a new messianic era

Jewish Apocalypticism

- Basic concepts:
 - Cosmic reality was polarized between the forces of good and the forces of evil and these were in conflict
 - God, for mysterious reasons, had temporarily permitted the forces of Evil to dominate the world
 - Quite soon, however, God would intervene to destroy the forces of evil and a new kingdom in which good would triumph over evil

Jewish Apocalypticism - 2

- Apocalyptic dualism had major historical implications
 - All of history could be divided into three ages
 - The Garden of Eden before things went wrong
 - The present age where the powers of evil dominate
 - The Age to Come where good triumphs over evil and a messianic kingdom now rules
 - The transition from the present age to the age to come would be violent and traumatic since the forces of evil would resist
 - A key player in this transition and the era to come would be the Messiah

Jewish Concepts of the Messiah -1

- The Messiah, although sent by God, was human, not divine
- The Messiah would be a descendent of King David who would reestablish the kingdom of David and Solomon and make it a light unto the world
 - This is stated in Jeremiah 23:5-6, Isaiah 11:1-5, Isaiah 9:6-7, Micah 5:2-5 & Psalms 2:6-9; 72-1-17; 89:19-29

Jewish Concepts of the Messiah - 2

- Although the Messiah was merely a human king, his messianic reign had many utopian characteristics
 - The whole world would worship the One God of Israel and be at peace (Isaiah 2:1-5)
 - There will be no more hunger or death (Isaiah 25:6-8)
 - The wealth of the nations will be brought to a joyful Jerusalem (Isaiah 60:5-6)

Disappointment

- Despite the achievement of independence ,
Hasmonean rule proved disappointing
 - The Culture Wars continued
 - The legitimacy of the king and high priest were questioned
 - There were disputes over foreign policy
- All this gave rise to the four major Jewish sects
- A civil war between rival claimants to the throne led to Pompey incorporating Judea into the Roman Empire

Jewish Sects - 1

- Arose in response to the following:
 - The policies followed by the Hasmoneans
 - Entrusting the office of high priest to persons not descended from Zadok, the lineage from which high priests were traditionally selected
 - Entrusting the office of king to persons not descended from David
 - Differences over how Jews and Judaism should react to foreign rule and Greco-Roman culture
 - Disagreements over what constituted normative Judaism

Jewish Sects - 2

- **Sadducees** – Mostly aristocratic members of the priesthood concerned with Temple worship prescribed by the Torah
 - Were willing to collaborate with their foreign rulers so that Temple worship could continue.
 - Accepted only the Torah as normative
- **Pharisees** – Pious Jews who strictly followed the Law of Moses and the related oral traditions and interpretations that arose concerning the application of the Mosaic Law to specific situations.
 - They accepted concepts such as the existence of angels, the resurrection of the dead, and the concept of a soul that survives into an afterlife

Jewish Sects - 3

- **Essenes** – Rejected the Temple cult as corrupt and believed that Jews should separate themselves from such corruption by migrating into the wilderness.
 - Had a strong focus on ritual purity and very strong apocalyptic beliefs
- **Zealots** – Jews zealous for the Law who believed that Israel had a right to its own land, a right that had been granted by God himself.
 - Anyone who usurped that right, and anyone who backed the usurper, was to be opposed, by violent means if necessary. Hence, they supported armed resistance to foreign rule.

First Century Palestine - 1

- The Palestinian economy, like the Roman economy generally, was mostly agrarian
 - Agriculture was largely subsistence with some crops or handicrafts sold in order to gain the cash to pay taxes and buy needed goods
 - Taxes were high since they had to support the local Jewish administration, the Temple, and the Roman government
 - As a result, there was a lot of economic discontent on the part of a peasantry near the margins of existence

First Century Palestine - 2

- Given the economic discontent and the religious objections to rule by corrupt pagan foreigners, 1st Century Palestine experienced several revolts
- In such a period of discontent, Apocalyptic beliefs were fairly common

The “Kingdom of God” - 1

- Jesus preached a coming “Kingdom of God” which differed from the kingdoms and empires of the First Century CE
 - First, its coming would not be observable
 - Second, it did not accept the current status hierarchy of either Rome or Judea
 - The role of those in authority was to serve, not to be served
 - People with power would no longer oppress the weak
 - Third, it values non-violence, not violence

The “Kingdom of God”- 2

- Jesus made the following claims and predictions:
 - The new Kingdom of God is at hand
 - The Temple in Jerusalem will be destroyed
 - An “awful horror” will stand in a place where he should not be
 - In the days after that time of trouble, the sun will grow dark
 - The end will be preceded by wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, and the appearance of false messiahs and false prophets
 - The followers of Jesus will suffer persecution
 - The return of the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory
 - All these things will happen in the lifetime of people now living

A Few Things of Note

- In the mind of the gospel writers (and possibly Jesus himself), the destruction of the Temple and the End of this world are merged in time
- To both the Jews and Christians, the End of this world did not mean the physical destruction of planet Earth – it meant a new transformed Earth
- To the Jews, the destruction of the Temple meant the end of Judaism as they knew it
- Except for the cosmic signs mentioned in Mark 13:24-25, and those referring to the destruction of the Temple, all of the signs of the end have been fairly common throughout history

A Few Things of Note - 2

- Jesus does mention one caveat – “No one knows when that day or hour will come – neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son; only the Father knows.” (Mark 13:32)
- But his admonition to be on watch implies that Jesus (or at least the gospel writers) expected it to be soon
- As time passes, there is an increasing focus in the gospels (and in Paul) on prerequisites that have to be met before the parousia occurs

Paul on Christ's Return

- Paul, like the gospel writers, initially seem to believe that Christ's return was close at hand
 - He say “we who are now alive on the day the Lord comes”
 - 1 Thess 4:13-17 is the basis for the pre-millennial dispensationalists' concept of the Rapture
- Later, he says that the Wicked One has to appear beforehand

Peter on Christ's Return

- “The end of all things is near” (1 Peter 4:7)
- Another caveat re Christ's return
 - People will doubt that Christ will return (2 Peter 3:3-4)
- But God does not operate on the same time scale as we humans do
 - For God, one day is as a thousand years (2 Peter 3:8-9)
- The believers in Christ are now God's people (1 Peter 2:9-10)
 - This helped give rise to the concept of Christian supersessionism

John on Christ's Return

- John explicitly stated the end is near (1 John 2:18)
- John also stated that the Antichrist would come and this is another sign that the end is near
- John says that the world and everything in it that people desire is passing away (1 John 2:17)

Christian Apocalypticism - 1

- Christianity accepted several Jewish apocalyptic and messianic concepts
 - That humans had an idyllic life in the Garden of Eden
 - That things went off the track when Adam disobeyed God's command
 - That the powers of evil dominated the world, but that God would intervene to set things right

Christian Apocalypticism - 2

- That Christ was the Messiah who by his death and resurrection had reconciled God and Man and had overcome the power of sin and evil
- That Christ would soon return in glory to fully institute a new Kingdom of God
- That before his return, the Wicked One (i.e. the Antichrist) would appear and that he would usher in a period of persecution, war, and cataclysm

Christian Apocalypticism - 3

- That the forces of God and Jesus would triumph over the forces of Satan and evil
- Following this, there would be both a final judgment and a new Jerusalem that would descend from heaven to earth
- Implicit in the Christian view of history was a concept of historical eras, guided by God and moving toward the creation of the new Jerusalem described in the Book of Revelation

Christian Apocalypticism - 4

- Some of the aforementioned concepts were to have significant and unforeseen historical ramifications
 - The implicit concept of historical eras
 - The concept of the fall of Adam
 - The concept of the Antichrist
 - The concept of a final conflict between good and evil
 - The fact that the Second Coming was not as imminent as the early Christians believed and that the Church had to adjust to that fact

Three Impacts on the Antichrist Legend

- First, the Rise of Islam
 - Christians saw Islam not as a new religion but as a Christian heresy
 - Led many Christians to see Mohammed as the Antichrist
- Second, the Papal Reform Movement
 - In seeking to restore the Church to its original purity and purpose, reform gave rise to apocalyptic expectations
- Third, the Impact of Joachim of Fiore