What Does It Mean to Be a Missional Church in Crisis? Developing Responses to Portland’s Houseless Crisis Through Apocalypticism, Eschatology, and Prophetic Ministries in Jeremiah 16:14-15 and 29:1-14.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Ron Clark

Kairos Church Planting Support/George Fox University

[rclark@kairoschurchplanting.org](mailto:rclark@agapecoc.com)

Agape Church of Christ was planted as a missional congregation in 2007 in downtown Portland, OR. Our ministry has focused on reaching those in the sex industry, survivors of intimate partner violence and sexual assault, and houselessness. During partnership with local agencies to offer support to these vulnerable individuals the city has declared “homelessness a crisis.” Through this label we have found permission to develop diverse programs to help house individuals seeking safety, shelter, and acceptance. This label has also created an environment where members of the community feel a sense of despair, frustration, and hopelessness. End time language such as “Is this as good as it gets?” “Will this be the best we can be?” and “What is our future as a city?” are common questions we hear. These questions were also common expressions of the desire for eschatological hope of a “new heavens and a new earth” or “justice through divine judgment,” during the Babylonian exile.

David Hellholm suggested that an Apocalyptic Literature addressed a group in crisis, needing comfort, through divine authority.[[2]](#footnote-2) A community believing that they were near the eschatological end due to an impending crisis, sought comfort from a divine voice—usually a prophet or representative of God. While “the end” did not always mean “the end of the world” it offered the hope of an “end” to suffering, despair, hopelessness, and the faith of the community. In Jeremiah, the prophetic voice echoed hope through apocalyptic/eschatological language that manifested comfort during crisis and radiates with God’s authority. Agape has found similar opportunities to live during an eschatological time of crisis. In this paper I will discuss Hellholm’s definition of an apocalypse in light of an eschatological world view. I then will apply this view through the Jeremiah 16:14-15 and 29:1-14 texts and the hope offered the exilic community. Then I would like to discuss an eschatological application to our ministry in Portland developing houseless villages, ministries to those on the streets, safe and sacred worship spaces, and confronting the views of those who struggle to offer compassion to those in crisis. This eschatological/missional view of churches offers a unique opportunity to provide hope during the eschaton, facing so many cities today.

Portland, Oregon is a city in the Northwest United States which has become well known in our current news media. This peaceful, beautiful, and mildly climated urban center nestled at sea level between the Cascade and Pacific Coastal mountains, has become known for protests, violence, riots, and proudly proclaiming its blue state status, even though many of its citizens are unwilling to choose any political party. Portland also reflects the Pacific Northwest’s (as well as the West Coast’s) reputation for resistance to conservative, structured, and traditional Christianity. As Killen and Silk wrote, the same rugged, independent spirit that crossed the Rocky Mountains is the same spirit that feels no need for religion or church.[[3]](#footnote-3) Yet in the midst of this beauty, lies a highly racist city which struggles to embrace diversity while claiming to be open and accepting. This is clearly the example when discussing houselessness.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Rhetoric concerning houseless individuals, shelters (temporary residence during extreme weather or until individuals can move to transitional housing), gatherings (labeled camps), villages (communities with wooden structures designed and built by agencies, non-profits, or other volunteers), and houseless “task forces” suggests that Portland, as well as the rest of the country, is facing a crisis.[[5]](#footnote-5) Terms such as “crisis,” “emergency,” “taxed resources,” services that are “overwhelmed,” and “breaking point,” create a belief that Portland is worse than other urban centers concerning houselessness.[[6]](#footnote-6) This also encourages a belief that the presence of a vulnerable population presents a crisis, rather than illustrating the results of systemic oppression, a problematic America Dream, and poverty upon citizens in our community.[[7]](#footnote-7) These terms continue to inspire fear, concern, anxiety, and distress not only in our city, but those who find themselves houseless or on the brink of houselessness.[[8]](#footnote-8) Homeowners, business owners, and neighborhoods seek clear boundaries to separate the houseless from “the housed.” Many of the discussions we have, that are negative, resist a “welcoming” presence due to the fear of strangers and assumptions that the houseless live with addictions or choose to avoid employment and paying rent.

Anxiety, confusion, and avoidance is a response to self and society when we see beggars and not know whether to give or not…We fear to be family to the poor because we fear becoming poor. And yet, many of us also fear that refusing to be family to the poor is refusing membership in the body of Christ, which is the greatest danger of all.[[9]](#footnote-9)

While our work with local agencies and teams within the community offers opportunity to educate the public, there is a level of fear, anxiety, and distaste for those living on the streets. As Bouma-Prediger and Walsh stated, “homelessness strips homeless people of boundaries.”[[10]](#footnote-10) While those with homes have the privilege of setting boundaries, those without them do not. The lack of boundaries that houseless individuals face, as well as the perceived lack of boundaries housed neighbors have with the houseless, adds to this anxiety, fear, and feelings of “crisis.” In Portland the feeling that the houseless have “taken over our city,” creates a heightened sense of chaos.[[11]](#footnote-11) As Mitchell wrote, “Public space engenders fears, fears that derive from the sense of public space as uncontrolled space, as a space in which civilization is exceptionally fragile.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

Apocalyptic Literature, Chaos, Crisis, and the Eschaton

Apocalyptic Literature (hereafter referred to as AL) is an ancient style of writing that addresses crisis, persecution, fear, and/or a broad range of emotions experienced by a community. Apocalyptic writings, like Wisdom Literature, were penned by scribes who worked with both prophetic works and narratives designed to prepare or warn their communities in troubled times.[[13]](#footnote-13)

AL was driven by an apocalyptic world-view that blended diverse communities and schools to offer hope to those seeking divine guidance.[[14]](#footnote-14)

A genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an other-worldly 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 for a group in crisis with the purpose of exhortation and or consolation by means of divine authority.[[15]](#footnote-15)

While this is not characteristic of all AL this definition suggests that three themes seem common to apocalyptic: 1) there is divine authority (a god/God is in control), 2) there may be a crisis (real or imagined), and 3) there is comfort or consolation in the revelation.[[16]](#footnote-16)

The early scribes and prophets sought to communicate in an oral culture influenced by idols and fear or concern of the future. The use of ancient Near Eastern myths, symbols, and visions suggest an attempt by scribes to use common pictures to communicate theological concepts.[[17]](#footnote-17) In apocalyptic there is supernatural revelation and otherworldly journeys to indicate that the god is in control. Cosmic forces were organized into good and evil to draw clear lines between darkness and light. The end was coming soon creating a short time in which the evil would be active followed by a time when the wicked were judged or allowed to repent, and good rewarded or transformed.[[18]](#footnote-18) AL communicated the presence of divine authority during crisis, and that consolation was revealed to the community from above.

This also is true in the Hebrew scriptures. The end comes when the wicked are judged and the nation of Israel is restored (Dan. 7,8,9-12; Is. 66). This end or eschaton is described by three metaphors; the *Day of Yahweh*, *Coming on the Clouds*, and the restoration of the righteous/judgment of the wicked.[[19]](#footnote-19) Rather than referring to the end of the world, “the end” would apply to a period when God led the people into a time/age of peace, redemption, and safety.[[20]](#footnote-20)

According to these definitions AL suggests that a community experiences a crisis, seeks comfort, and needs to know that God is in control. Eschatology involves the prophecy or hope of the end of this crisis or suffering. The Biblical texts identify the hope that suffering will end followed by an age of peace, love, and healing. Whether the crisis is legitimate or constructed, the eschaton offers a time when the community finds peace and *shalom*.

Much of the current discussions or popular literature concering apocalyptic, in the bible, seem to center around an interpretation of Daniel, Revelation, or the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). I have found that the popular literature suggests that these apocalyptic texts are predictions of the end of the world or destruction of a world power. Since much of these materials are inexpensive and easy to read, I find that most of our college students have read or are acquainted with their theology. Because of these materials many have the belief that AL is both mysterious and futuristic. I believe that these conclusions are due to faulty interpretations of AL and an unawareness of the recent research into this form of literature.

First, *a misunderstanding of AL’s three themes* is a cause to modern interpretations of the goals of the worldview. In apocalyptic evil and sin are the sources of the crisis and God will deal with the enemy. Second, an *incomplete understanding of the post-exilic period of Judaism and the restoration from Babylonian captivity* is also a contributing factor to our current view of apocalyptic. In Jeremiah 16:14-16, God promised to restore Israel’s relationship to Himself.

However, the days are coming, declare *Yahweh*, when men will no longer say, “As surely as *Yahweh* lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,” but they will say, “As surely as *Yahweh* lives, who brought the Israelites up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.” For I will restore them to the land I gave their forefathers.

Finally, a *failure to see eschatology as an end to the crisis* is a cause of misinterpretation of apocalyptic. This end is not the final event in history, but the end of suffering or crisis and the return to Jerusalem. God will bring about deliverance to those who endure and suffer through the crisis. Apocalyptic texts and the eschaton were not interested in determining the end of the world, but the existence and end to evil, as well as the end of their suffering.[[21]](#footnote-21) The context for apocalyptic is "searching for God during crisis."[[22]](#footnote-22)

Missional Ecclesiology During an “Apocalyptic Eschaton”

What is the role of the church during such crisis? If the texts address a crisis, provide comfort, and indicate divine authority; what would a Missional church practice during these times? Whether the crisis is “perceived” through the efforts of the media, or a reality based on personal experience, the church’s missional, or missional-incarnational, role continues to be providing hope/comfort/encouragement during this crisis and witnessing that Jesus remains on the throne. As with Ezekiel and Revelation, the repeated visions of God on the throne reminded the writer/prophet and community that God was still in charge. While the prophets received messages of “doom,” they also couched these proclamations in language that provided hope for those waiting for the end of suffering. The prophets provided this hope throughout the vision and

One text that has been used by those of us in the Missional movement has been Jeremiah 29:1-14. In this narrative the nation of Judah had been carried to Babylon due to their sins (2 Chron. 36:15-20). Yahweh’s covenant had been continuously violated and as the Babylonians crushed the city of Jerusalem, the cries for deliverance from the Judeans went unacknowledged (Jer. 11:11, 14). As the Judean captives began to repent and turn their hearts to Yahweh, the prophet Jeremiah offered hope of return from captivity to future generations. However, while in Babylon the people were called to serve missionally in their community.

This is what Yahweh Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Seek the peace (*shelom*) of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to Yahweh for it, because if it prospers, (*bishelomah*) you too will prosper (*shalom*).” (Jer. 29:4-7)

The the text reminded the Judean’s, in exile, that Yahweh was still in control. Even though God had carried them or had them carried to Babylon by the foreign armies, Yahweh claimed to be responsible.[[23]](#footnote-23) Their God also reminded them that Babylon would be blessed through their actions, faithfulness, and obedience. The use of *shalem* three times reminded them that their peace would extend to their captors.[[24]](#footnote-24) Yahweh also encouraged them to bless their city and enjoy life, their families, and their occupations. As Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azeriah, Esther, Nehemiah, Ezra, and others found great respect and authority in their community service and leadership, so the people would bless their community through the *shalom* of Yahweh. During crisis, Jeremiah’s text reminded the missional community to find hope and comfort by blessing their city and acknowledging that Yahweh was king.

AL offers a similar calling to the missional church. *First, faith communities, while feeling that we live in a form of exile, bring tremendous value to our cities experiencing crisis*. Through the witness that Jesus reigns and hope/consolation we offer our communities a way to see through the crisis and look to the eschaton, or the end of crisis/suffering.[[25]](#footnote-25) The missional-incarnational church may not necessarily practice this through preaching alone but has a powerful witness by “bringing” or “practicing” *shalom*. As Ellison, a pastoral practitioner to young black men suggests, “Practical Theology is certainly a reflective discipline, but above all else, it is a theology of action.”[[26]](#footnote-26) This form of eschatology is practiced rather than limited to proclammation:[[27]](#footnote-27)

“Traditional Christian eschatology, or the doctrine of end things, posits that Christ will come from universal glory and judge the world. This traditional notion of the end-times casts human flourishing deep into the future and may lead some in the present to feel apathetic and hopeless. A realized eschatology, however, contends that the presence of God actively works in tandem with human action to transform present sociohistorical realities.”

Application to Portland—the City of Bridges

As a minister I not only work academically through the various issues we face in Portland, but personally as an advocate for those who are part of the church where I serve. Portland’s houseless crisis has not only drawn the attention of city leaders, businesses, and homeowners; it has drawn support from many advocates, houseless, and care providers who are determined to directly address this community issue. The Village Coalition, of which I am a part, has developed teams that are working together to solve the houseless crisis through the establishment of communities by designing tiny houses (PODS), wrapping services around these new communities, while both encouraging and supporting the efforts of the villagers to govern themselves. The Coalition includes architecture professors and students from Portland Statue University, housing advocates, those living in camps or on the streets, the formerly houseless, addiction recovery providers, and now faith-based leaders. Through these partnerships we have developed six houseless villages, educated community members to engage houseless individuals safely, managed over 1500 youth group and young adult teams to build new villages, and strengthened relationships with community members who have expressed a negative view of church and faith communities.

The bulk of this witness has come from “hands on” community work, partnering community and youth group members with houseless members to construct shelters, and actively engaging donors with this work. While the media has been a strong advocate for us, they do focus on the negative and often report the “problem of homelessness” rather than the many small acts of kindness and compassion. These “small” and “random” acts of compassion and kindness, that are done in Portland, are an attempt to bring *shalem* to our community and encourage others to have hope during the crisis. Even more, the respect given faith communities during this time has also been a success. Agencies which typically resisted the presence of faith groups, have offered support, donations, and supplies. During a time of crisis, or a perceived crisis, the missional church can bring *shalem* to a city while testifying that Jesus is the reason for our service and the author of compassion.

*First, the missional church can use Apocalyptic themes to provide comfort during times of crisis, exile, and fear*. By identifying and “owning” the crisis, congregations can offer hope through the witness of the Lordship of Jesus and the commitment to providing peace/*shalom* in their communities. Proclaiming that “the eschaton” offers time for repentance, evangelism, the temporary reign of evil, and the reality that God’s patience is a sign of authority while practicing ministry; teaches the community that hope inspires endurance.[[28]](#footnote-28) Our work in building villages, engaging community agencies, and setting the pace in outreach to the houseless requires relationships, connection, and offering a hopeful view to address the “crisis.”

*Second, the missional church can practice ministry, in crisis, by engaging the community and removing boundaries of fear, hatred, and marginalization*. The command to “build houses,” “intermarry,” and “pray for the *shalom* of the city” suggested that proclamation was not the focus of exilic mission. Practical ministry would be the preferred method. Including the houseless in our church communities, as advisors in our village construction, and partnering with local agencies not only provides an opportunity to listen to those in crisis, but a time to be encouraged by those living on the streets. Stivers indicates that this is building “just and compassionate societies in solidarity with the homeless and poor, not on behalf of the poor.”[[29]](#footnote-29) This process includes reaching out to bring both groups together, crossing boundaries, understanding, and welcoming each other. Crossing boundaries is not only important for the homeowner, it is important for the one dwelling on the streets [[30]](#footnote-30)

The Jeremiah text reminds us that those of us who build houses in exile are still homeless, longing for the end of crisis and waiting to return to God. Likewise, we must remember that the houseless and housed, during crisis, are seeking *shalom* in a world of fear, anxiety, and exile. The missional church embraces AL and language to provide hope and witness the power and authority of Jesus over our lives and the places where we live. This is truly n opportunity for “practical ministry.”

*The witness of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy…* (Rev. 19:10)

*Those who are wise will understand…* (Dan. 12:10)

1. This paper was developed and accepted for presentation Pre-Covid-19. Since then my discussion concerning homelessness and a “perceived crisis” in Portland has dramatically shifted due to the virus, Black Lives Matter, and continual protests and political unrest in our country, state, and cities. The discussion concerning houselessness has become less frequent based on media, however the large presence of houseless campers within our city adds to an impression of an “apocalypse” with conversations I experience within my community. Those living on the streets also feel a sense of “Mad Max” view of our city. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. David Hellholm, “The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John,” in *Early Christian Apocalypticism: Genre and Social Setting,* A. Yarbro Collins, ed., (Decatur, GA: Scholars, 1986), 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Northwest: The None Zone*, edited by Patricia O’Connell Killen and Mark Silk (Alta Mira Press: New York, 2004). This collection of essays examined notes from frontier clergy, current faith leaders, and church growth. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. I have chosen the term “houseless” because it is a common phrase used within our work with county, city, and community advocates in addressing the commonly used term “homeless.” While comedian George Carlin once stated that “home” is a concept, the homeless are houseless and our community advocates agree. The issue with which we struggle concerns finding a community or place for those on the streets to live (they already have found a community). The main issue that drives houselessness is a lack of affordable housing. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. On any given night in 2017 in Multnomah County:

   The total number of people experiencing homelessness was 4,177

   16% of individuals experiencing homelessness were part of households with children

   Of whom, 88% were living in a shelter, and 12% were not.

   37% of these individuals were female, 62% were male, and 1% identified as transgender.

   69% of individuals experiencing homelessness were white, 14% were African American, 5% were Native Indian or Alaskan, and 9% were of multiple races.

   Just 0.4% of these individuals were unaccompanied youth under 18 years old.  
   Of this population, 57% were unsheltered, and 43% were sheltered. 11% of these individuals experiencing homelessness were Veterans of whom, 86% were male, and 12% were female.

   In Multnomah County, homelessness has increased 10% since the last count, growing from 3,801 in 2015 to 4,177 in 2017. This report was released by JOIN, one of the most active groups addressing houselessness in Portland. Sofie Jaggi, “[Homelessness Statistics in the Portland Metro Area](https://joinpdx.org/homelessness-statistics-in-the-portland-metro-area/),” Feb 24, 2018: <https://joinpdx.org/homelessness-statistics-in-the-portland-metro-area/?gclid=CjwKCAjw4rf6BRAvEiwAn2Q76jf9xYmhgtKrLXkDDEqCt9DlkQO6KP-2OgJ4hcgU6Q8Fo-a3miD9KhoCNO0QAvD_BwE>. The research also indicated that in 2017, there was an increase in those using public shelters. However, with Covid-19 shelters have closed due to social distancing, leading to an increase in those living on the streets. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Maggie Vespa, “Study predicts national homelessness spike due to COVID-19. Here's what it means for Portland's housing crisis,” July 3, 2020:<https://www.kgw.com/article/news/local/homeless/portland-homeless-crisis-coronavirus-pandemic-impact/283-f311d4cb-578b-4d2c-9775-491e4f6a7c55>. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Tavis Smalley. Molly Harbarger, “Few homeless people have coronavirus. Portland still plans to resume clearing camps,” June 1, 2020: <https://www.oregonlive.com/news/2020/05/few-homeless-people-have-coronavirus-portland-still-plans-to-resume-clearing-camps.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://www.opb.org/news/article/portland-police-sweeps-homeless-cleanups/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Kelly Johnson, *Fear of Beggars: Stewardship and Poverty in Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007): 2, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Steven Bouma-Prediger and Brian J. Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in a Culture of Displacement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008): 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. “For some the right for people to move through town without seeing a homeless person sleeping or urinating outweighs the freedom of public space.” Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York: Guilford Press, 2003), 15. Conn and Ortiz suggest that in the ancient world the city walls prevented chaos/evil from entering the city. Modern culture has limited chaos and evil to the inner city. Harvie M. Conn and Manuel Ortiz, *Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City, and the People of God* (Downer’s Grove: IVP Academic, 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Mitchell, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. AL has developed from a broad class of people ranging from the poor to the wealthy (who could afford to read and write). This style of literature also grew within the prophetic communities as well as the wisdom school/community which wrote material addressing the economic suffering of their communities. John J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Routledge, 1997), 3; Collins, “Genre, Ideology and Social Movements in Jewish Apocalypticism,” In *Mysteries and Revelations: Apocalyptic Studies Since the Uppsala Colloquium*,” edited by John J. Collins and James H. Charlesworth, *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series*, 9 (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1991), 12; Greg Carey, “Introduction: Apocalyptic Discourse, Prophetic Rhetoric,” *Vision and Persuasion: Rhetorical Dimensions of Apocalyptic*, edited by Greg Carey and L. Gregory Bloomquist (St. Louis: Chalice, 1999): 4, 9-10; Anathea E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011): 11-15; Damian Thompson, *Waiting for Antichrist: Chrisma and Apocalypse in a Pentecostal Church* (New York: Oxford, 2005): 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. While this genre differs from prophetic literature, it has received much influence from the prophetic and wisdom schools. Charlesworth indicated that Apocalyptic Literature was a learned phenomenon which preserved the Jewish folk traditions and was motivated by the early theologians of Israel. While scholars of the past have suggested apocalyptic movements and the elements of Apocalyptic Literature as the driving force behind this literature, Charlesworth believes that the tone and scheme make the literature apocalyptic. He also indicates that the origin of Jewish apocalypses is found primarily in Prophecy and to a lesser extent in Wisdom. While ancient Near Eastern influences are seen in this literature Judea and Galilee play a major role in the apocalypses—suggesting that scribes borrowed Eastern symbols to create a literary style for the Jewish audience. James H. Charlesworth, “Folk Traditions in Jewish AL,” Mysteries, 92-94; George W. E. Nickelsburg, “Wisdom and Apocalypticism in Early Judaism: Some Points for Discussion,” *Conflicted Boundaries In Wisdom and Apocalypticism* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005): 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2d. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 5. Hellholm has suggested that the end “intended…” be emended to the definition by Collins in “The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John,” *in Early Christian Apocalypticism: Genre and Social Setting*, Semeia 36, ed. A. Yarbro Collins (Decatur, GA: Scholars, 1986), 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. David E. Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006): 10; Carey, 4-5; Portier, 11-15; Thompson, 36.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Aune, 4; Charlesworth, 93; Collins, “The Expectation of the End in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, edited by Craig A. Evans and Peter W. Flint (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997): 79; Frederick J. Murphy, *Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World: A Comprehensive Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012): 6; Kenton L. Sparks, *Ancient Texts fir the Study of the Hebrew Bible: A Guide to the Background Literature* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2005): 240; Carey also indicated that 10 characteristics of Apocalyptic Literature were: 1) Narration of visions or auditions sent by God, 2) Heavenly Intervention, 3) Intense Symbolism, 4) Pseudonymous, 5) Imminent end of world age and inauguration of new aeon, 6) Cosmic catastrophes, 7) Dualism, 8) Determination, 9) Repentance short and prophecy after the fact, and 10) Cosmic or astronomical speculation. Cary, *Ultimate Things: An Introduction to Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic Literature* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2005): 4-5. I would like to categorize five characteristics of apocalyptic, which apply to both the Greek and Hebrew scriptures. First, *AL was a revelation from a higher being to a community*. Second, *AL did not have a consistent matrix*. The influence from ancient cultures, scribes, and prophetic literature indicate that metaphors and symbols were being borrowed and used to communicate a theological message about God and His people. These symbols were borrowed from Persian, Babylonian, Akkadian, Egyptian, and other surrounding cultures. Third, *this literature was usually pseudonymous*. Fourth, *AL seems to have three basic themes*. There was a crisis in the lives of the author or community. There was unjust suffering, invasion by an army, or a punishment from God. The vision or visit brought a message of hope and comfort during this crisis. The comfort involved vindication or an end to the suffering. The message to the community was that there was divine authority. During crisis and hope there was a divine plan to all the ambiguity. Perseverance and hope were necessary for God to fulfill the plans of battle. Finally, *apocalyptic had an end or judgment in mind*. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Aune, 4; Collins, “The Expectation of the End,” 79. Hemerton-Kelly indicated that the Apocalyptic authors were motivated by a paranoid grandiosity and self-righteous perspective of themselves living in a community experiencing conflict between good and evil. Due to this they suggested that the only solution to this conflict was an ultimate divine war and extermination of evil. Robert Hemerton-Kelly, “An Introductory Essay,” *Politics and Apocalypse*, edited by Hemerton-Kelly (Lansing: Michigan State University, 2007); 3-5.

    While popular apocalyptic authors seem to indicate that the end is something no one knows, except them, the ancient apocalyptic writers suggest that the end was imminent. Collins writes that the Qumran community did not have a consistent eschatological doctrine. The Dead Sea Scrolls community indicated that the end was yet to come (1 Qsa), was very near (CD 20:14; 1 QS 4:18-19; 9:11) or was already present 4QpNah 3-4 ii 2; 4QMMT). Collins believes that the end was only a time of testing and a time of incipient salvation. Collins indicates that the Qumran community further defined the Jewish thoughts and theology that was later used by early Christians. The Qumran community also used apocalyptic texts and hope of restoration as a part of their theology. Collins suggests that there was no consistent eschatology at Qumran since the "end" was a present reality or a day in the immediate future. The "end" was to be a time when the people of Israel would once again be restored by the Messianic priest or Messianic Son of God. There were at least two Messiah's at Qumran but both were necessary to restore the people of God. In the Pseudepigrapha texts such as the Apocalypse of Abraham and Enoch suggest restoration and victory for the faithful believer and the hope of a new kingdom. The restoration is close and something the reader is expecting to see soon. For a further discussion of modern apocalyptic writings in the Left Behind Series see: Clark, “Sent Ahead or Left Behind? War and Peace in the Apocalypse, Eschatology, and the Left Behind Series,” *A Cry Instead of Justice: The Bible and Cultures of Violence in Psychological Perspective*. Edited by Dereck Daschke and Andrew Kille (T and T Clark: New York, 2010): 182-94; and Amy Johnson Frykholm, *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America* (Oxford: New York, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The first metaphor used is *Yom Yahweh*. The day of the Lord was a metaphor that indicates a day of destruction, despair, pain, suffering, and always judgment. The day came upon Israel or her enemies. The enemy of God was punished by God, who was angry at their behavior and resistance to serve Him. Sometimes this enemy was Israel (Is. 13:9-11; Amos 5:19-20; Zeph. 1:14-17)

    The next metaphor is “coming on the clouds.” This is another ancient Near Eastern metaphor for divine judgment. The earliest and most common use seems to be at Ugarit. Baal was the “rider of the clouds” (IIIABA 4,29; IIAB iii 10,12; v 121; VAB B 38; D 47,49,50; IAB ii 8). Coming on the clouds was used for God’s divine judgment on Egypt, Edom, Assyria, and Judah (Is. 19:1-3; 34:1-8; Nah. 1:3; Mal. 3:1-5; Mark 13:26).

    Finally, the restoration of the righteous and judgment of the wicked is another metaphor common in apocalyptic texts. Passages such as Isaiah 55-66, Ezekiel 40-48, and Jeremiah 31, promise that Israel will once again be restored to their relationship with God. These metaphors are similar in the prophetic literature and indicate that much of apocalyptic has its origins in the prophets. As Charlesworth mentions this provides a good foundation for Jewish apocalyptic. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The end (eschaton) can refer to the end of conflict, the world, testing, incipient salvation, the operation of evil in the world. See Carey, 4; Collins 79; Murphy, 9-10; and Thompson, 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Thompson, 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Dan. 12:12, Mark 13:13, 2 Peter 3:8-10, and Rev. 6:9-11, 13:9 all calls the reader to suffering and patience. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ron Clark, *The God of Second Chances: Finding Hope through the Prophets of Exile* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012): 18-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid., 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. The Daniel and Revelation passages call the community to endurance during persecution and faithfulness to God/Jesus. Dan. 9:22; 12:4, 10; Rev. 1:2, 9; 6:9; 12:11; 19:10. For more concerning using victims’ testimonies with university students to motivate them to compassion, hope, and working with prophetic and apocalyptic texts see: Clark, “Using Victim’s Testimonies with the Prophets,” and “Victim’s Testimonies in the Apocalypse.” In *Teaching the Bible: Practical Strategies for Classroom Instruction*. Edited by Mark Roncace and Patrick Gray. Atlanta: Scholar’s Press, 2005; “Associating with the Humiliated: Using Victim’s Testimonies in the College Classroom.” *Journal of Religion and Abuse* 7:1 (2005): 61-79. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Gregory C. Ellison II. *Cut Dead But Still Alive: Caring for African American Young Men* (Abingdon: Nashville, 2013); 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid., 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid., 39. See also Clark, “Associating with the Humiliated,” *The God of Second Chances*, “Using Victims’ Testimonies,”. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Laure A. Stivers, *Disrupting Homelessness* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2011): 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. A social movement against poverty and in support of redistribution of wealth and power is necessary if we are going to be successful at preventing homelessness and ensuring decent affordable housing for all. This happens through, 1) Listening to the homeless in our community, 2) educating congregations, 3) volunteering in homeless communities, 4) joining local coalitions, 5) advocating for state and national policies, and 6) standing in solidarity with workers. Ibid., 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)