This is an introduction to apocalyptic literature and apocalypticism. It is an interesting topic, a fascinating topic, one that has captured the imagination of a lot of literature and a lot of folks from the Judao-Christian tradition. It shows up in our fiction, it shows up in our culture today and it’s an interesting topic. But it is not one, quite frankly, that’s well understood. And so hopefully today we can introduce you to the concept and the idea and the area of apocalypticism, and walk away with a little bit better picture, a little bit more of a holistic picture of apocalypticism. Because apocalypticism is so cheerful and a happy subject, I wore appropriate clothing for the day.

So let’s review just a little bit. We talked about prophecy. Prophecy we have talked about as being advice, commentary, perspectives, consultations that all take place and focus on what’s going on within history in this realm. Apocalypticism is different and it is a significant change. One of the things that this society or modern culture doesn’t necessarily — popular culture doesn’t necessarily distinguish is the difference between prophecy and apocalypticism. There is a difference and it’s important for you to understand it. For this class at the very lease.

Apocalypticism deals with predictions and consultations, perspectives, about what will happen or is soon to happen outside of history, outside of this realm. The key difference, the key distinction between prophecy and apocalypticism, prophecy focuses on this realm, what’s happening in history. Apocalypticism, on the other hand, focuses on what’s happening outside of history, outside of this realm. And that is the key distinction between these two concepts and why biblical scholars separate them, and why in this class we have separated them out.

Let’s talk a little bit about the development of apocalypticism because apocalypticism has not always — was not always a part of the Hebrew Bible and the thought and thinking in the Hebrew Bible. If you think about this class, we have taken a
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chronological approach to the contents and the topics and the subjects and the issues and the ideas in the Hebrew Bible. We have spoken about them as they sort of cropped up and bubbled up in ancient Israel’s history. Here we are at the end of the class and now we’re talking apocalypticism.

The only apocalyptic book in the Hebrew Bible, Daniel, is a very late work, the latest of all the works in the Hebrew Bible, dating in its final form to about the second century. We can date it pretty precisely, pretty exactly to about 164 B.C.E. And so that literature is late. And apocalypticism developed late. It developed out of post-exilic times. It developed out of the disappointment, you might say, in ancient Israelites — Hebrew or early Jewish society there in Palestine.

Some of the factors during the post-exilic period that led to apocalypticism are as follows. First of all, there became internal conflicts within the community about who had authority, who was in power, and who was out of power. Think about it. The state itself, ancient Judah, the province under Persia, and then later after the time of Alexander, after 330 B.C.E., Judah was a province under the Tolamese or the Selucids or other folks. And so you have a state itself that is marginal and, to a certain extent, out of power. And then within that state you have other groups that are in conflict with one another socially, and so there’s internal conflict.

We’ve seen, for example, in the priestly literature that part of the thesis for the priestly literature was that it was the priests who were the ones who could properly develop Israel as a testimony of Yahweh’s power, that they were the ones who had been elected and selected to do that. Well, that indicates right there that there is another group who’s making sort of claims and they’re having to defend themselves against those claims. There’s internal conflict and the priests themselves are saying, “We are the ones who should have authority. You should be out of power, out of authority.” There’s an internal conflict there.
We looked at Ezra. In Ezra 4 it talks about conflict. Who is it that generates the kind of energy needed to build the temple? Well, it is the priests' group: Zerubbabel, Joshua, Haggai, Zachariah. And who is it that stalled out the work and gummed up everything? It was those folks who were left in the land and who were impure, and they intermarried, and things like that. It was the others. So there was internal conflict. The people in the land versus the priests: Ezra, Nehemiah, Zerubbabel, Joshua, etc.

You also have then the — there were conflicting prophetic claims. In the post-exilic period, there were conflicting prophets -- one person saying this, another person saying this, something else — and the nation as a whole, the society as a whole, was saying, you know, how do we discern guidance here? How do we discern what is true and not true? And so there was that going on.

There grew, then, to be a dependence on and authority given over to written prophecy. There was a sense along with this that really the time for prophetic utterance was over, and we see references to that in the New Testament and other literature that the time of prophecy has passed by. And again, there's internal conflict, there's competing prophetic voices during that day. On the other hand, the people by that time — they had works like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the book of the 12 minor prophets, and you have those kinds of works, written prophecy of prophets who predicted something. It came true, at least for the most part or at least to some extent or by and large. We've seen some exceptions in Ezekiel and Haggai. But nevertheless, there was a certain authority given over to those and so it was a time of written prophecy.

Therefore, confidence in prophets talking about and giving advice was waning. There was an emphasis upon the law. Again, you have the Deuteronomistic works. You have the Pentateuch having been written, the Deuteronomistic history, Chronicles.
These kinds of texts were being used to talk about Israel’s history and how that history adhered to the law or didn’t adhere to the law, and how that made a difference in the outcome. Therefore, there’s a new emphasis on obedience to the law and it becomes static. The law becomes something fixed and static. It is not tied to a king or a royal authority or that sort of thing. It’s a book. And then it becomes open to interpretation and our interpretation, our path, is the path or righteousness. Yours is wrong. And again, it actually lends itself to more conflict within the society.

If you look in the New Testament times — in the Gospels, for example — you see that there’s conflict between Jewish sects. There’s the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and there are the Essenes and the Zealots, and etc., etc., etc. There are different interpretive schools of thought about that law. What we see in the New Testament is emerging here in the post-exilic time.

In all of this, then, as groups got pushed further and further out from the center of power, center of authority, as they lost power, they started to look for power outside of their realm. They started to look for answers and salvation outside of their realm. They started to expect and hope for rewards and salvation outside of their realm and in the future. Maybe some day this will turn in our favor. We feel that we are righteous. We’re not being rewarded for it. How do we reconcile that? Our reward is in heaven. Our reward is in the future. And there you have the fundamentals and the basic context in which — for Apocalypticism to grow up and to flourish.

Now let’s look at some definitions. These are definitions we’ll be using when we talk about — and highlighted when we talk about Daniel in the Book of Daniel. Apocalypticism. It’s a worldview. It is a worldview. It is a particular view of how reality is constructed. What characterizes this particular worldview. I have a worldview, you have a worldview, the communists years ago or those who are still there today in Russia had a worldview. Pat Robinson has a worldview and, you know, Ralph
Nader has a worldview. What characterizes apocalypticism’s worldview.

Number one, it is a dualistic worldview. It says there is heaven and earth, the spirit and the flesh. There is the physical reality and there is metaphysical reality. This is the time when Hellenistic thought and particularly neo-platonic thought came into vogue and captured the imagination of the people and culture, and this dualistic worldview. We don’t have time to go into it, but there is the famous allegory that is Plato’s writings about the cave and the people are in a cave and they’re looking at shadows being cast upon the cave wall by fire, and thinking that that’s reality. And that represents for Plato and Socrates — it represents reality. But if those people would turn around, walk out of the cave and see a real horse, a real tree, a real dog, then they would see reality. And that represented the metaphysical realm. That duality ruled the day and ruled apocalypticism.

But apocalypticism goes beyond just dualism and it holds to an apocalyptic eschatology. And we’re gonna have to define that. That’s our next term to define, is apocalyptic eschatology. Because that is as confusing and sheds no light on what apocalypticism really is. Apocalyptic eschatology. First of all, let’s take the word eschatology. Eschatology is the understanding of how things are going to come to an end. It’s the study of end times. And the eschaton in Greek vocabulary is the end, the end time, that sort of thing. So apocalyptic eschatology is a particular perspective on how the world is going to come to an end.

Before I started — when I was working on my master’s and then graduate school and things like, it was in the ‘80s. It was at the height of the Cold War. If you talked to a lot of people then, how’s the world going to come to an end? “Oh, we’re gonna blow ourselves up with a nuclear war. Russia and the United States are going to go to war with a nuclear battle and it’ll wipe human life off the face of this earth. The only things that’ll be left are cockroaches and crocodiles.” That’s one perspective on how the
world is gonna end. Another perspective might be, “Well, we’re gonna be hit by a massive meteor, just like perhaps a massive meteor struck the earth millions of years ago and wiped out the dinosaurs. In a few short years it’s gonna happen to us.” A particular perspective on the end. “Well, we are going through pollution, warm up the climate to such a state that all the icecaps will melt and human life won’t be able to be sustained any long. We’re all gonna die that way.” A particular perspective on how the world is gonna end.

Apocalypticism has another view of how the world is gonna end. First of all, it’s going to be an other-worldly battle between God — i.e., the forces of good — versus Satan, the Devil or the forces of evil. But it’s an other-worldly battle. The real battle is going on out there in a metaphysical realm. It’s taking place in heaven. The conflicts that are happening here on earth are just shadows of that as the people here on earth align themselves with either the forces of evil or the forces of good. And so the battles that are going on here are shadows of or representations or imitations of really the ultimate battle between good and evil that’s taking place in the heavenly realm.

Again, think about how this warrior imagery and images of God fighting the powers of chaos, Baal fighting Yam and Mote, Marduk fighting Tiamat, all of these images of order versus chaos and the warrior imagery that goes on with that. That was in ancient Israel’s time in the Hebrews’ day all contained within this realm. There was not a dualistic worldview at that time. Everything was part and parcel of the whole. Chaos had the potential of being right here. The realm was just a little bubble -- the realm of order and life was just a little bubble surrounded by chaos. It was all one. With dualism, though, this battle becomes transported into the other metaphysical heavenly realm. It becomes a spiritual battle ultimately and above all else.

Number two, salvation. Salvation in an apocalyptic worldview is something that’s going to the righteous will ultimately prevail and win. In the future, at the end of
time, when righteousness and when the forces of good defeat the forces of evil in that other realm. That may happen. Apocalyptic communities and movements thought that was happening in their day. They thought it was gonna be pretty soon. They thought about it coming around here pretty fast. They did not think about it in terms of millennia into the future. But nevertheless, it was in the future — near future, but in the future in a different realm. Salvation is going to come with that ultimate victory in that battle. So a brief review is apocalypticism has a dualistic worldview, not a monistic. That apocalyptic eschatology focuses on an otherworldly battle that’s going to result in salvation for the righteous when that victory is won.

An apocalyptic movement is a community that adheres strongly to an apocalyptic worldview or to apocalypticism, and holds out hope for salvation through apocalyptic eschatology and has that worldview. An apocalypse is a particular kind of literature. Apocalypse — an apocalyptic community, an apocalyptic movement wrote all sorts of different types of literature. They wrote letters, they wrote speeches, they wrote narratives, they wrote history, they wrote all sorts of different types of literature. But one of the types of literature that they wrote was an apocalypse. It is a particular kind of literature, a particular genre of literature, and it has certain characteristics. We're gonna highlight those here in a minute.

But I want you to understand that a member of an apocalyptic community could write all sorts of things. And in the New Testament, for example, Paul wrote letters but he also had in mind that there was going to be an end and that it was coming soon. He was largely apocalyptic in his worldview. Nevertheless, he wrote letters about church governance and how people should get along, and how they needed strategies for what's going on in this world and things like that. And Paul actually was pretty well integrated into his society and had not really withdrawn or removed himself. At any rate, that's another testament beyond the scope of this course.
Let’s look, then, at apocalypses because Daniel has apocalyptic literature or has apocalypse within it. It is not totally an apocalypse but that’s part of what it is. If we were to go on to a New Testament course, the Book of Revelation is apocalypse. And so there is apocalyptic literature in the Judao-Christian canon and it has certainly played and been influential in Judao-Christian thought, and today in many circles continues to hold a very strong sway.

Apocalypses. There are — we’re gonna highlight five characteristics. When people have started to try to define what an apocalypse is, what makes up an apocalypse, they have found it challenging. Because not every piece of literature that a person would call apocalypse contains every characteristic. I have seen all sorts of lists, varying lengths, some with 10 or 12 characteristics, and then it would identify various pieces of literature that people agreed these are apocalypses, and then it would start to identify. Well, what kind of characteristics show up in which of these and it charts it all out. The bottom line is that an apocalypse — it’s a creative piece of literature. It has certain — it has within it sort of a critical mass of certain characteristics. One apocalypse may have this collection of characteristics, another one may have a slightly different collection, and a third one might have still yet another collection of characteristics. But there’s certain commonalities between them, certain characteristics that they all might share. I want to make sure and communicate to you that apocalyptic literature, apocalypses, they are a type of literature but they are creative pieces of literature that are fluid in exactly what characteristics might show up, to what extent they’re being emphasized, and things like that.

First of all, apocalyptic literature oftentimes features an ancient authority. In the Book of Daniel it is the figure of Daniel. Daniel is a character that shows up in Ugaritic literature. If you go back and you look in your notes, you’ll see that you’re -- in the last quarter of the second millennium B.C.E. there was a — that’s when the Ugaritic
literature — that's the date that we've traced the Ugaritic literature, the Baal cycle and things like that. Having said that, the figure Daniel shows up as an ancient authority even back then.

Now, in that literature, in the Ugaritic literature, Daniel is not an apocalyptic figure. The Ugaritic literature is not apocalyptic at all. But he was a judge, an authority figure, and he remains so. We see the figure of Daniel showing up in Ezekiel. Ezekiel is not an apocalypse. It is a prophecy. Nevertheless, Daniel is referred to a couple of times, chapters 14 and 28 in Ezekiel, and Daniel is referred to as an ancient authority. In other words, Daniel had a certain stature in popular and academic and scholarly Israelite circles. He was an authority that someone knew and was not always associated with apocalyptic literature until we do see in the Book of Daniel Daniel being used in apocalyptic literature in an apocalypse, and Daniel becomes an ancient authority and brings with Daniel all the authority. We could look at other apocalypses and they would also have some sort of an ancient authority oftentimes — maybe not always, but oftentimes an ancient authority there — that would be conveying the message. They would bring with them that stature of sort of someone who has seen it all, been through it all, done it all, knows it all. That's what they bring to the literature.

There are — number two, there are very — as a part of apocalypses, there are familiar, symbolic representations. Symbols that to us seem strange but to the audiences they would — these symbols are languages, horns, dragons, horses, warriors. These are symbols that people understand. They make sense to the people and they know how to read the language of those symbols. So they understood what the story and what these symbols were trying to — what the apocalypse was trying to communicate through the use of these symbols.

To us today, to modern readers, they oftentimes look strange. What is 6-6-6? What is that symbol? What does it mean? We don't really have a handle on it
nowadays. In New Testament times — and again, I jump forward to the New Testament in Revelation — in New Testament times they probably understood what 6-6-6 was. It was probably a symbol that they all had a handle on and it was a symbol that they would’ve known how to understand. It would’ve been something that that community — when they saw that, they said “Oh, I know what he’s talking about.” The ancient of days. Three times and a half or three weeks or three periods and a half. And then in Daniel, that’s something that the community probably would’ve understood. I understand what that’s gonna mean.

Three. The apocalypses are — deal with and reflect a known history. In Daniel 11 — and we’ll look at this next session if I’m remembering my chapters right — there is a series of events. This event is gonna happen and then this event, and it’s all talked about as this is gonna happen in the future. It’s gonna happen one day. But it is a known history that the people know. It’s history that’s already happened. This is referred to as ex eventu prophecy. Ex eventu prophecy is important to get down in your notes. What it means is — ex eventu prophecy is literature or a piece of writing or a passage that’s written as a prophecy about something that’s going to happen. But the author is writing about something that chronologically has already happened, and so that the writer knows what’s going to happen and that makes this prophecy — the literature that the writer is writing — very accurate. It is — and you want to make sure you understand it in this context — it’s a literary technique. It is not the writer being evil or wicked. It is the writer using a literary technique to try and communicate that God is in control.

Chapter — again, Chapter 11 of Daniel repeats a long history of events and it talks about them in great detail. All those events happened. They happened just — but then when it comes to the very end -- and scholars can mark it when it comes to the very end of that chapter -- it launches into — and therefore this is gonna happen in the
future and it truly does make a prediction, and then it gets broad. It gets a little bit fuzzy and it loses its accuracy. And that’s how scholars can identify this literature using ex eventu prophecy and start to understand this literary technique and why it was used. It was used to say God is in control of history, that what’s going on in this realm is really just a reflection of what’s going on in the metaphysical realm.

Apocalyptic literature, apocalypses, always have apocalyptic eschatology, a particular view of the end. That this is a heavenly battle that’s going on, a battle not part of this realm, and it’s a battle that the forces that are good are gonna win, and it’s a battle therefore that means that those who are righteous — that is to say our side, the good guys — are going to receive salvation. And that’s the fourth characteristic of apocalypses.

Number five. Oftentimes, not always, you will see intermediaries and you will see the hero of the story saying, “What does this mean?” And a heavenly intermediary, an angel, says, “Well, let me tell you.” Or it will be a heavenly intermediary that is showing the hero of the apocalypse. “Let me show you this and let me show you what’s going to happen next. Let me show you this.” So a heavenly intermediary is a part of this. Again, this relates to the issue of authority and infusing the apocalypse with heavenly authority. The apocalyptic community that treasures this literature, that’s using this literature, that is deriving strength from this literature, is a community that’s out of power, that does not have confidence in powers in this world. And so who are their authorities? Well, they are ancient wise ones who have proven themselves throughout history. Who’s giving them meaning and explaining this to them? It is someone from the heavenly realm who can say, “Here’s what’s going on in the heavenly realms. Here’s the bigger picture. This conflict you’re involved in is just a small part. It’s just the earthly manifestation of the bigger battle going on in heaven. God is in control. You are righteous. Salvation will come to you.” And so those are the five
characteristics that we’ll kind of highlight as they pop up when we look at the Book of Daniel.

Now, let me just conclude today’s lesson by talking a little bit about the value of apocalypses. Apocalypses — when I oftentimes talk about apocalypses, many times students will say, “Oh, that just means that they’re meaningless or that they’re a piece of fiction or” — you know, it just takes all the meaning out of it. And, no, that’s not accurate. These apocalypses made many theological affirmations. They affirmed their belief that God was ultimately in control of their lives and their fate in this world. That God was ultimately in command of it. Is this really any different from the priests setting up Israel as a testimony of Yahweh’s power over chaos? It’s really a new manifestation in a new era, in a new time, with new situations. It is a — when the Hebrews and the Israelites, the Jews, lost power and lost authority, this is a technique that they developed to — and a worldview that they developed, they were a part of, to affirm that God’s in control, God is in power. The priests did it differently. The priestly literature did it differently. Deuteronomy 20 did it differently. Deuteronomy 20 had within its perspective David’s dynasty, though. It’s a different context.

The apocalyptic literature provided these communities hope an it gave them direction, and it was their way of discussing and explaining how they should remain faithful to the law and how they should remain faithful to the principles that had given the community life for many, many centuries. And so it’s valuable literature and it’s valuable perspectives, and it was valuable to the people of that day. It does mean, however, that here in the modern world we need to understand how that literature was used, what it was used for, how it worked within that historical context, and therefore be careful with what sorts of lessons we learn and apply in our own world.

Well, that summarizes our introduction, provides an introduction to apocalypticism. In our next lesson we’re going to look at the Book of Daniel. Half —
not all — but half of the Book of Daniel is apocalypse and we'll take a look at how that shows up in the Book of Daniel. I look forward to seeing you then. Thank you.