

Department of  
**New Testament Greek and Literature**

## **THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE JEWISH APOCRYPHAL LITERATURE**

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### INTRODUCTION

It is important for the thoughtful student of New Testament eschatology to possess an accurate understanding of Jewish eschatological expectations in New Testament times. There are several reasons for this. Scholars have often maintained that Jesus was influenced by and shared the views of His contemporaries. Epoch-making in modern Biblical criticism has been the work of Albert Schweitzer, the famous missionary-theologian, who elaborated the view already espoused by Johannes Weiss,<sup>1</sup> that Jesus expected the world immediately to come to an end by apocalyptic intrusion of God for the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth.<sup>2</sup> This conclusion was achieved by "the thoroughgoing application of Jewish eschatology to the interpretation of the teaching and work of Jesus."<sup>3</sup> Schweitzer inaugurated a new epoch in the study of Gospel eschatology, as a survey of criticism since his day clearly shows.<sup>4</sup> Conservative Bible students in America have paid little attention to this movement in liberal criticism; but it is part of the theological life of the world in which we live and has made a strong impact upon modern theological thought. It cannot be ignored.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Johannes Weiss, *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes* (Göttingen, 1892, 2 Aufl. 1900). This work has not been translated into English.

<sup>2</sup>See Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London, 1910), pp. 249-395.

<sup>3</sup>Albert Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters* (London, 1912), p. ix.

<sup>4</sup>See Amos N. Wilder, *Eschatology and Ethics in the Teaching of Jesus* (Revised edition; New York, 1950), chapter II.

It is obvious that no student can criticize Schweitzer's position without a good grasp of Jewish eschatology.

Schweitzer's viewpoint postulates a human Jesus, a man of His times, who was utterly deluded by vain apocalyptic expectations. This is why many conservative students who accept the New Testament teaching that Jesus was God incarnate have largely ignored his position. However, the fact remains that Jesus came to Jews of the first century and of necessity had to relate His teaching to their thinking. Sound pedagogy must begin with the thinking of those who are taught, and Jesus was the Master Teacher. What did the "kingdom of God" mean in the ears of a first century Jew? What thoughts were aroused in his mind by the phrase "Son of Man"? Why did the Jews reject the Messiah? How did Christ's kingdom differ from the one they expected? From our vantage point, we interpret these phases in the light of the full New Testament revelation; it is obvious that a Jew of 30 A.D. could not do so. The appreciation of our Lord's self-revelation and of the response of the Jews to Him is greatly enhanced by an understanding of the mind of first century Judaism, especially with reference to eschatological and Messianic expectations.

Furthermore, it must be recognized that there is a certain relationship between New Testament eschatology and Jewish eschatology. The Protestant Christian believes that the Old and the New Testaments were inspired by the Spirit of God and therefore represent the mind of God, while the Jewish writings produced between the two Testaments are not inspired but represent only human thinking. While we share this view, we cannot deny that there are areas in which New Testament theology is very close to, if not identical with, contemporary Jewish eschatology where there is no antecedent Old Testament teaching. So striking is this phenomenon, that one staunch contender for the Biblical faith, Geerhardus Vos, was led to say, "There is no escape from the conclusion that a piece of Jewish theology has been here by Revelation incorporated into the Apostle's teaching. . .

The main structure of the Jewish Apocalyptic is embodied in our Lord's teaching as well as in Paul's."<sup>5</sup> This raises questions for the serious student of the Bible which necessarily involve an understanding of Jewish teaching. There is need for much scholarly study on the relationship between New Testament and Jewish eschatology. Conservatives have for the most part left this area of investigation to liberal scholars.

There is one point where this Jewish eschatology bears directly upon the views of conservative students, viz., the future aspect of the kingdom of God. In both the Gospels and the Epistles there is a uniform emphasis upon the future eschatological aspect of the kingdom; and Revelation 20 affirms that resurrected saints are to live and reign with Christ for a thousand years. The natural interpretation of these words is that after the Second Advent of Christ there will be a period of a thousand years' duration during which Christ and the resurrected saints will reign over this earth. This is, of course, the position of *Bibliotheca Sacra*, and it is the position of the writer and of the seminary faculty of which he is a member. It was the position of the early Christian church. Some premillennialists, as we are called, have gone so far as to claim practically every one of the early fathers of the church for this position. This affirms more than the evidence allows, for many of the fathers have nothing to say about a millennial kingdom—either to affirm or deny it. They are silent on the subject, and the argument from silence is precarious. In former days it was enough to argue, as did D. T. Taylor,<sup>6</sup> that if any author entertained a vivid expectation of the second coming of Christ he must have been *ipso facto* a premillenarian, for he could not have been a postmillenarian. This line of reasoning assumes that the choice is limited to the premillennial and postmillennial

<sup>5</sup>Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (published by the author, 1930) p. 28.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. D. T. Taylor, *The Voice of the Church* (Philadelphia, 1856). Later editions of this book were published under the title, *The Reign of Christ on Earth*.

positions; but today the view known as amillennialism<sup>7</sup> is a very live option and is popular in some thoroughly conservative circles. Thus it has been maintained<sup>8</sup> that only a very few of the early fathers were millennialists. This claim is based on the argument from silence, assuming that any author who does not mention the millennium did not believe in it. It is true that only a few writers clearly mention the millennium; but the facts are set in a clearer light when it is recognized that every church father of the first two centuries who touches at all upon the subject does so to affirm belief in a literal millennium. There is not a single amillennialist or postmillennialist in the early history of the church,<sup>9</sup> judging from the extant records with the exception of Caius of Rome (cir. 200; cf. Eusebius, *H. E.* III.xxviii.2)—who rejected the Montanists who taught it—until the times of Origen (185-254 A.D.) in Alexandria and Augustine (354-430 A.D.) in North Africa; and each of them espoused an anti-millenarian position because of exegetical or theological presuppositions which led them to depart from the natural interpretation of Revelation 20.

How is this, rather uniform presence of millenarian views in the early church to be accounted for? It is either the natural and true interpretation of Revelation 20 and therefore the heritage of the early church from the Apostles; or it must be due to an erroneous interpretation which crept into the thinking of Christians immediately after apostolic times. This is what the modern exponents of the anti-mil-

<sup>7</sup>This view, as the name indicates, maintains that there is *no millennium* at all.

<sup>8</sup>L. Berkhof, *The Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, 1951), pp. 21;133. Berkhof includes as a chiliast Hermas, who makes no clear reference to a millennium; but he does not mention Justin Martyr, whose clear support of the doctrine is one of the strongest evidences of its wide prevalence. Cf. A. Harnack, "Millennium," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Ninth edition), XVI, 328.

<sup>9</sup>D. H. Kromminga in *The Millennium in the Church* (Grand Rapids, 1945, pp. 29-40) claims Barnabas (cir. 96-131 A.D.) for the amillennial position; but to the present writer, Barnabas is one of the most explicit of the early millenarians, and Berkhof (*op. cit.*, p. 21) attributes the millennial belief to him.

lenarian interpretation affirm. ". . . Chiliastic<sup>10</sup> views were extensively circulated in the early church through such Jewish or Jewish-Christian writings as *Enoch*, *4 Esdras*, *Assumption of Moses*, *Ascension of Isaiah*, *Psalms of Solomon*, *Baruch*, writings which neither Jews nor Christians regarded as canonical."<sup>11</sup>

There is no question but that some of the Jewish writings mentioned above reflect "chiliastic" views. *But that is not to admit that chiliasm is an unbiblical doctrine, because it is Jewish.* To solve such a problem one must familiarize himself thoroughly with the Jewish views to discover what precisely the Jews did believe about the kingdom of God, and how their belief compares or contrasts with the Biblical teaching. It has been the privilege of the present writer to have devoted considerable attention to this particular area of the history of doctrine, and it is the purpose of this series of articles to discuss those portions of the Jewish writings which reflect opinions about the kingdom of God.

There are four main sources for our knowledge of Jewish thought in New Testament times: the New Testament, Josephus, the talmudic literature, and the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. Josephus has nothing to say about the kingdom or Messianic expectations of the Jews, and so need not enter into our study. The talmudic literature presents a vast field and very specialized problems. This literature is essentially the written deposit of the stream of oral tradition frequently referred to in the Gospel as the "tradition of the fathers" (cf. Mark 7:3, 5, 9 etc.). These traditions were first codified and fixed in written form in the second century in

<sup>10</sup>Properly, the terms "millennial" (or "millenarian") and "chiliastic" are strictly synonymous, the former coming from Latin and the latter from Greek, referring to the earthly reign which is to be of a *thousand years'* duration. The two terms are often so used. However, the word "chiliastic" has come to be used of any view which anticipates an earthly kingdom, however long its duration may be. None of the books to which Professor Allis refers speaks of a *thousand year* kingdom, as we shall see in later articles in this new series.

<sup>11</sup>O. T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Philadelphia, 1945), p. 287. Cf. also L. Berkhof, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

the Mishnah,<sup>12</sup> but the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds which incorporate the continuation of this stream of tradition were not written until the fourth and sixth centuries respectively.<sup>13</sup>

There were, however, many writings which were produced during the first two centuries before Christ and the first century A.D. expressing views which were held by Jesus' contemporaries. These have been collected and rendered into an English translation in the collections usually called the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.<sup>14</sup> This is not the place to outline the history of these collections, but a few words are necessary. These two terms do not designate collections of writings made by the Jews. To them, all religious literature was either canonical or noncanonical; and it would therefore be more accurate to speak of this entire group of writings as the Jewish apocryphal literature.<sup>15</sup> Some of these books were included in the Greek translation of the Old Testament used by Greek-speaking Jews in Alexandria in the first two centuries before Christ. Through this channel, some of them came to be cherished by the early Christian Church and found their way into some editions of the Greek Bible very early in the Christian era. Thence they passed into the oldest Latin translations. It is quite clear that there was no distinctly delineated collection at this time, for the lists of apocryphal books found in the three oldest extant manuscripts of the Greek Bible vary considerably from each other.<sup>16</sup> From the Old Latin version they passed into

<sup>12</sup>English translation by H. Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford, 1933).

<sup>13</sup>This mass of talmudic literature has been made available for New Testament students in the monumental work of Herman L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (München, 1922), 4 vols.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. R. H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1913), 2 vols. The reader is referred to this work for all of the quotations from these writings which follow.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. C. C. Torrey, *The Apocryphal Literature* (New Haven, 1945), p. 11.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. H. B. Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* (Cambridge, 1902), pp. 201-2.

the later editions of the Vulgate,<sup>17</sup> and thence into some English editions of the Bible. It is from this background that the term "Apocrypha" has come to designate the distinct collection of books which is found, for instance, in the English version of the Catholic Bible. The collection, however, has no intrinsic literary, historical or religious reason for existing as such, apart from the history of the Bible in the Roman church.

The books of this type which were not included in the Apocrypha came to be known as the Pseudepigrapha. This again is an inaccurate term. Properly, a pseudepigraph is a writing which claims an author who did not produce it. Enoch, the Apocalypse of Baruch, and IV Ezra are genuine pseudepigrapha, for it is certain that Enoch, Baruch, and Ezra were not the authors of our extant books. Not all of the so-called Pseudepigrapha are pseudepigraphs: such books as Jubilees, the Sibylline Oracles, Third and Fourth Maccabees and Pirke Aboth make no claim to pseudepigraphic authorship. On the other hand, one book customarily included in the Apocrypha is a genuine pseudepigraph, viz., IV Ezra.

All of the books included in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha were probably produced between the years 200 B.C. and 100 A.D. and provide us with one of the finest sources for the study of Jewish thought in New Testament times. A very difficult question is the extent to which the views reflected in these writings were current among the Jewish people. This is particularly difficult with reference to eschatological expectations, for the ideas in this area found in the talmudic literature are somewhat different. It has been held, therefore, that these apocalyptic books represent individual speculations, or at the most the esoteric views of small, closely knit groups of people. However, it is quite customary for scholars to take the expectations of this literature as rather widely known among the Jewish people,

<sup>17</sup>Jerome, recognizing that they were apocryphal, desired to exclude them from his translation of the Old Testament. He finally admitted only two under pressure of friends. Cf. B. F. Westcott, *The Bible in the Church* (London, 1885), p. 183.

and it is the writer's judgment that this is a sound procedure.<sup>18</sup>

The procedure in the studies which follow will be to take up each of the books which contain expectations about the kingdom of God, to say a few words of an introductory nature concerning the character, date, and content of each book, to quote as completely as possible those portions which reflect kingdom expectations, to indicate in footnotes the most important critical literature that the advanced student may pursue the matter further, and to conclude with a brief evaluation. The reader will then have before him the primary sources for the Jewish views on the kingdom of God so far as we possess them.. Too often students have been content with second-hand opinions on such matters. There is nothing which can take the place of a personal acquaintance with the primary sources, and it is the main purpose of the following series to make this acquaintance possible in a very limited area for students who have not had the privilege of thorough, study of a very difficult body of literature. The books to be considered are as follows: Jubilees, Enoch, the Psalms of Solomon, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Assumption of Moses, IV Ezra, the Apocalypse of Baruch, the Secrets of Enoch, and the Sibylline Oracles. These books are arranged above roughly in chronological order.  
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<sup>18</sup>Cf. the brief but excellent remarks of Charles in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, Vol., II, p. vii.

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