

Biblical and Para-Biblical Origins of Millennialism

*Håkan Ulfgard**

From a biblical point of view, there is no significance whatsoever connected with the millennial change just ahead. Since Jesus, according to common scholarly opinion, was born during the last years of King Herod the Great, who died in 4 BCE, this means that we have in reality already passed the magic date, the year 2000 of the Common Era. However, focalization on the millennium has meant an actualization of the biblical predictions about the future and of the various chronological data contained in them. This has especially brought to attention the famous passage in the Book of Revelation about the 1000-year rule of the faithful with Christ (20 : 4-6). But Revelation is not alone among biblical and early Jewish and Christian writings to express the idea of a period of particular salvific existence and blessing for God's chosen people (not necessarily exactly limited to 1000 years, though this round figure has given rise to the common appellation « millennialism », or « millennialism »).¹ The aim of this contribution to *Religiologiques* is to present an attempt at clarifying and tracing the biblical and early post-biblical roots of

* Håkan Ulfgard is a Professor in the Faculty of Theology, University of Lund (Sweden).

¹ General surveys of ancient millennial passages, mainly in Christian literature, may be found in e. g. A. Wikenhauser, « Die Herkunft der Idee des tausendjährigen Reiches in der Johannes-Apokalypse », *RQ* 45, 1937, p. 1-24 and *idem*, « Weltwoche und tausendjähriges Reich », *TQ* 127, 1947, p. 399-417; see also J. Daniélou, « La typologie millénariste de la semaine dans le christianisme primitif », *VC* 2, 1948, p. 1-16, as well as *idem*, *Théologie du judéo-christianisme (Histoire des doctrines chrétiennes avant Nicée, 1)*, Paris, Desclée & Cie, p. 341-366. Focusing on Jewish texts, see, above all, P. Volz, *Die Eschatologie der jüdischen Gemeinde im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter*, Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1934, but also e. g. J. W. Bailey, « The Temporary Messianic Reign in the Literature of Early Judaism », *JBL* 53, 1934, p. 170-187. For shorter surveys of the topic, see, among others, O. Böcher, « Chiliasmus. I. Judentum und Neues Testament », *TRE* 7, 1981, p. 723-729, A. Gelin, « Millénarisme », *DBSup* 5, 1957, p. 1289-1294, and J. Massyngberde Ford, « Millennium », *ABD* 4, 1992, p. 832-834.

millennarianism as it appears in Jewish and Christian documents up until c. 100 CE.²

A word about definitions may be needed at the outset: In her article «Millennialism With and Without the Mayhem», in T. Roberts and S. J. Palmer (eds.), *Millennium, Messiahs, and the Mayhem. Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements*, Catherine Wessinger notes that «(m)illennialism in its most general definition refers to the expectation of an imminent and collective earthly salvation accomplished according to a divine or superhuman plan.»³ This broad formulation allows for the inclusion not only of biblical and biblically related phenomena, but also of concepts

² I am very conscious of having omitted to take into account parallel phenomena in the extra-biblical world, which would have enriched — but prolonged beyond all bounds — this presentation. For comparison, the interested reader may find references to ancient Persian concepts found in Zoroastrian and (later) Zurvanite schematization of world history into thousand-year periods, cf. D. Winston, «The Iranian Component in the Bible, Apocrypha, and Qumran: A Review of the Evidence», *History of Religions* 5, 2, 1966, p. 197, 204; G. Widengren, «Leitende Ideen und Quellen der iranischen Apokalyptik», *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East. Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism* Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979; D. Hellholm (ed.), Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1983, p. 77-162; S. Hartman, «Datierung der jungavestischen Apokalyptik», *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, p. 61-75; A. Hultgård, «Bahman Yasht: A Persian Apocalypse», in J. J. Collins & J. H. Charlesworth (eds.), *Mysteries and Revelations. Apocalyptic Studies since the Uppsala Colloquium*, *JSPSSup* 9, Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1991, p. 131-132; and, among earlier contributions, F. Cumont, «La fin du monde selon les mages occidentaux», *RHR* 103, 1931, p. 29-96. Other extra-biblical material concerning a millennial period of special blessing, such as the fragmentary Oracles of Hystaspes, and the mention of a 1000-year period for the cleansing of the souls after death in Plato and Vergil, is briefly discussed by Gelin, «Millénarisme», p. 1290. See also, commenting on the eschatology of the Qumranite «War Scroll» (1QM), J. J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, London and New York, Routledge, 1997, p. 101-103, who draws attention to Plutarch's reference (*Isis and Osiris* 47, quoting Theopompus [c. 300 BCE] as his source) to Persian periodization of history into alternating good and evil periods.

³ New York and London, Routledge, 1997, p. 47-59, quotation p. 48. Concerning frequently used terminology such as «premillennialism» and «postmillennialism» (whether Christ will come first and inaugurate the millennial era, or this will take place afterwards), Wessinger also gives some clarifying and critical remarks, suggesting that these words be exchanged for, respectively, «catastrophic millennialism» and «progressive millennialism» (p. 49-52). A useful survey of scholarly opinion on the concept of the millennium in general, and in the Book of Revelation in particular, is found in J. W. Mealy, *After the Thousand Years. Resurrection and Judgment in Revelation 20*, *JSNTSup* 70, Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1992, p. 15-58.

and movements in many other cultures and religious traditions as well. Already in the biblical world of thought, however, and still more in subsequent Christian exegetical tradition, it is important to note that the distinction between heavenly and earthly scenery may sometimes be transcended and blurred. Thus, the earthly quality of the millennium is not always prominent or self-evident in early Jewish and Christian texts.

By working backwards, starting with some roughly contemporary texts from late New Testament times that may serve to exemplify millenarian ideas current at the parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity, I will try to trace the development of these ideas from their biblical and early post-biblical origin. In so doing, it will be possible to focus on some central concepts that seem to have been of special importance for the growth of this theological tradition. One such concept will be found in the notion of a periodization in world history, which is a typical feature of Jewish apocalyptic. When fused with heightened eschatological expectation resulting from an experience of political turmoil and deteriorating conditions for Jewish life, if not outright suffering, this creates an awareness of living close to the End Time. Other concepts, more or less connected with millenarianism, include messianism as well as the idea of a return to paradisiac conditions. Millenarian expectation of restoration of nature and of national sovereignty are signs of an earthly orientation, which represents an important phase in the history of biblical and post-biblical doctrines of salvation. Of particular significance is the observation that messianism, whether individual or collective (i. e. involving the whole of the chosen people, or the faithful remnant within it), does not always constitute a part of the millenarian scenario, just as there can be messianism without any millenarian framework.⁴

Millenarianism in the New Testament and contemporary Jewish literature

⁴ See also the valuable considerations on the issue of biblical and post-biblical millenarianism from a sociological point of view in S. R. Isenberg, « Millenarianism in Greco-Roman Palestine », *Religion* 4, 1974, p. 26-46, and G. W. E. Nickelsburg, « Social Aspects of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypticism », *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, p. 641-654.

For the study of early Jewish and Christian millennial beliefs, it is appropriate to begin with the evidence from the Book of Revelation, 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch, all of which were composed shortly before or around 100 CE. All three use apocalyptic language in response to crises experienced by the communities in which they came to existence. In the Book of Revelation the Christian confessors are exhorted to faithful endurance in the face of increasingly hostile Roman state authorities; in 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch it is the survival of Judaism after the destruction of the temple in 70 CE which is the main concern. The differences in style and narrative content must not be overlooked, though: while the two «purely» Jewish texts contain much theological and philosophical reflection and discussion, both on a personal and a collective level, in which apocalyptic imagery clearly plays a secondary role, and where the visionary message is constantly given a rationalistic explanation, the Jewish-Christian Book of Revelation, with its combined epistolary and dramatic character, is much more «impressionistic», leaving to its readers the tantalizing task of finding the (or a) meaning of its allusive and elusive imagery.

To begin with the brief text on the millennium in Rev 20 : 4-6 (NRSV) :

Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years.

These verses belong to a context beginning with the appearance of the divine warrior together with the heavenly hosts in order to defeat all earthly enemies of God's chosen people (19 : 11-21). Parallel to this imagery, but on a «celestial level», the binding and imprisonment of Satan is depicted in 20 : 1-3, the duration of his imprisonment for 1000 years coinciding with the period of the rule of the faithful in vv. 4-6. After the 1000 years, Satan will be set free for a last futile battle with God, which will lead to his utter destruction (vv. 7-10), after which the great

judgment scene is depicted (vv. 11-15). All this marks the end of the present era, with the ensuing visions of the heavenly Jerusalem descending to earth and of Paradise regained in 21 : 1–22 : 5 providing glimpses of the blessings expected for the age of salvation. Despite the mention of a « new heaven and earth » (21 : 1), however, the contrast between this section and the previous chs. 19-20 should not be overemphasized. There is more of a thematic progression in 21 : 1–22 : 5, as compared to the foregoing chapters, than there is a radical chronological separation between these sections of Rev.⁵ The author of Rev does not separate his view on the World to Come too strictly from what he has been saying about the period of messianic rule.

In 4 Ezra, a comparable text and context is provided by 7 : 26-31 (all following quotations from pseudepigraphical texts are from *OTP* 1-2) :

For behold, the time will come, when the signs which I have foretold to you will come to pass ; the city which now is not seen shall appear, and the land which now is hidden shall be disclosed. And everyone who has been delivered from the evils that I have foretold shall see my wonders. For my son the Messiah shall be revealed with those who are with him, and those who remain shall rejoice four hundred years. And after these years my son the Messiah shall die, and all who draw human breath. And the world shall be turned back to primeval silence for seven days, as it was at the first beginnings ; so that no one shall be left. And after seven days the world, which is not yet awake, shall be roused, and that which is corruptible shall perish.

In the preceding passages it has been stressed that salvation is not an automatical gift to the whole of God's chosen people Israel, but only to the just, whereas the following text gives a detailed description of the coming final judgment which will last for « a week of years » (7 : 43 ; a unique chronological reference within 4 Ezra, reminiscent of Dan 9 : 24-27). Later in 4 Ezra, this brief messianic passage is complemented in the interpretations of the « Eagle Vision » and the vision of « the Man from the Sea »

⁵ Cf. Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, p. 59-65, especially referring to C. H. Giblin, « Structural and Thematic Correlations in the Theology of Revelation 16–22 », *Bib* 55, 1974, p. 487-504.

(chs. 11-13). The concrete messianic teaching is rather meagre, however;⁶ cf. what is stated about the Messiah in 12 : 32-34 :

[...] this is the Messiah whom the Most High has kept until the end of days, who will arise from the posterity of David, and will come and speak to them ; he will denounce them for their ungodliness and for their wickedness, and will cast up before them their contemptuous dealings. For first he will set them living before his judgment seat, and when he has reproved them, then he will destroy them. But he will deliver in mercy the remnant of my people, those who have been saved throughout my borders, and he will make them joyful until the end comes, the day of judgment, of which I spoke to you at the beginning.

The notion about a coming messianic period, but now combined in greater detail with ideas about a return to paradisiac conditions, is also found in 2 Bar 26-30 and 35-40. Having been informed about the division of the coming period of suffering into 12 periods, Baruch's anxious question as to whether the whole world or only a part of it will be affected is answered in chs. 29-30 :

That which will happen at that time bears upon the whole earth. Therefore, all who live will notice it. For at that time I shall only protect those found in this land at that time. And it will happen that when all that which should come to pass in these parts has been accomplished, the Anointed One will begin to be revealed. And Behemot will reveal itself from its place, and Leviathan will come from the sea, the two great monsters which I created on the fifth day of creation and which I shall have kept until that time. And they will be nourishment for all who are left. The earth will also yield fruits ten thousandfold. And on one vine will be a thousand branches, and one branch will produce a thousand clusters, and one cluster will produce a thousand grapes, and one grape will produce a cor of wine. And those who are hungry will enjoy themselves and they will, moreover, see marvels every day. For winds will go out in front of me every morning to bring the fragrance of aromatic fruits and clouds at the end of the day to distill the dew of health. And it will happen

⁶ Cf. B. M. Metzger in his introduction to 4 Ezra in *OTP* 1, p. 521 (referring to M. E. Stone, « The Concept of the Messiah in IV Ezra », in J. Neusner [ed.], *Religions in Antiquity. Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough, Studies in the History of Religions, NumenSup.* 14, Leiden, Brill, 1968, p. 295-312). Though the figure of the Messiah holds an important role within the eschatology of 4 Ezra, maybe « he was not the answer to the questions that Ezra was asking ».

at that time that the treasury of manna will come down again from on high, and they will eat of it in those years because these are they who will have arrived at the consummation of time.

And it will happen after these things when the time of the appearance of the Anointed One has been fulfilled and he returns with glory, that then all who sleep in hope of him will rise. And it will happen at that time that those treasuries will be opened in which the number of the souls of the righteous were kept, and they will go out and the multitudes of the souls will appear together, in one assemblage, of one mind. And the first ones will enjoy themselves and the last ones will not be sad. For they know that the time has come of which it is said that it is the end of times. But the souls of the wicked will the more waste away when they shall see all these things. For they know that their torment has come and that their perditions have arrived.

Shortly afterwards, Baruch relates his vision of a forest, a vine, a fountain and a cedar, the interpretation of which concludes with the following statement on the coming messianic rule (39 : 7—40 : 4) :

And it will happen when the time of its fulfillment is approaching in which it will fall, that at that time the dominion of my Anointed One which is like the fountain and the vine, will be revealed. And when it has revealed itself, it will uproot the multitude of its host. And that which you have seen, namely the tall cedar, which remained of that forest, and with regard to the words which the vine said to it which you heard, this is its meaning.

The last ruler who is left alive at that time will be bound, whereas the entire host will be destroyed. And they will carry him on Mount Zion, and my Anointed One will convict him of all his wicked deeds and will assemble and set before him all the works of his hosts. And after these things he will kill him and protect the rest of my people who will be found in the place that I have chosen. And his dominion will last forever until the world of corruption has ended and until the times which have been mentioned before have been fulfilled. This is your vision, and this is its explanation.

Towards the end of the book, yet a third text contains the idea of a coming messianic period of earthly blessing, as Baruch's vision of a cloud pouring out a succession of alternatively bright and dark waters over the earth is interpreted for him. After 12 such waters, explained as referring to various phases of biblical history (the eleventh leading up to the calamity with the destruction of the temple in 586 BCE, i. e. the fictive situation to which 2 Bar is

Håkan Ulfgard

addressed ; the twelfth representing post-exilic restoration), there are two final waters, blacker and brighter than all the previous ones, signifying the tribulation of the End Time, after which the militant Messiah ushers in an era of earthly blessings (72 : 1—74 : 1) :

Now, hear also about the bright waters which come at the end after these black ones. This is the word. After the signs have come of which I have spoken to you before, when the nations are moved and the time of my Anointed One comes, he will call all nations, and some of them he will spare, and others he will kill. These things will befall the nations which will be spared by him. Every nation which has not known Israel and which has not trodden down the seed of Jacob will live. And this is because some from all the nations have been subjected to your people. All those, now, who have ruled over you or have known you, will be delivered up to the sword.

And it will happen that after he has brought down everything which is in the world, and has sat down in eternal peace on the throne of the kingdom, the joy will be revealed and rest will appear. And then health will descend in dew, and illness will vanish, and fear and tribulation and lamentation will pass away from among men, and joy will encompass the earth. And nobody will again die untimely, nor will adversity take place suddenly. Judgment, condemnations, contentions, revenges, blood, passions, zeal, hate, and all such things will go into condemnation since they will be uprooted. For these are the things that have filled this earth with evils, and because of them life of men came in yet greater confusion. And the wild beasts will come from the wood and serve men, and the asps and dragons will come out of their holes to subject themselves to a child. And women will no longer have pain when they bear, nor will they be tormented when they yield the fruits of their womb.

And it will happen in those days that the reapers will not become tired, and the farmers will not wear themselves out, because the products of themselves will shoot out speedily, during the time that they work on them in full tranquillity. For that time is the end of that which is corruptible and the beginning of that which is incorruptible. Therefore, the things which were said before will happen in it. Therefore, it is far away from the evil things and near to those which do not die. Those are the last bright waters which have come after the last dark waters.

While there are some differences in emphasis concerning various aspects of the expected judgment and salvation between these texts from Rev, 4 Ezra and 2 Bar (and, especially in 2 Bar, within the book itself), they share the notion of a messianic figure appearing at the end of time to inaugurate a period of special blessing for the chosen faithful. The role of the Messiah varies between the texts, however. According to 4 Ezra 7 he will bring joy to the chosen, after which — rather extraordinarily — he (and all

those with him) will die and primeval silence will ensue for seven days, before the beginning of the new creation, whereas in 2 Bar 40 he is portrayed as militant and vengeful, with his rule — apparently limited in time, though not specified — described in greater detail than in the other two apocalypses. In comparison with the other two, what is said about the Messiah in Rev 20 : 4-6 apparently only amounts to very little, namely that the faithful confessors will rule with him. As was remarked above, this is a short-sighted conclusion, though, since this passage is part of a larger context which begins already in 19 : 11ff with the messianic character and activity of the horseman.

But what is especially important to note — and I will return to this below — is that the millennial teaching of Rev is set within a context which reflects Ezekiel's prophecies about the future restoration of Israel, and which is not found at all in 4 Ezra / 2 Bar.⁷ The revival of the dry bones in Ezek 37 is matched by the (first) resurrection in Rev 20 : 4-6, after which comes the final attack from Gog and Magog (cf. Ezek 38 / Rev 20 : 7-9) and the vision of the new temple/temple city where God himself will dwell among his sanctified people (Ezek 40-48 / Rev 21 : 1—22 : 5). Building on this basic structure,⁸ the author of Rev has further emphasized the cultic context in his final chapters by stressing the priestly and royal dignity of the revived and redeemed, who may from now on serve God, share Christ's rule, and partake of the paradisiac blessings of the New Jerusalem descending from heaven. In 20 : 7-15 he has also enlarged on the subjects of resurrection and judgment, expanding from the resurrection only of the just to a vision of general resurrection, and from the judgment on Gog and Magog to final universal judgment, which enables him to let his visions end with the perfect and eternal communion between God and his elect in chs. 21-22.

Common to Rev, 4 Ezra, and 2 Bar is that the millennial era also involves a messianic figure, whose rule is of a limited, temporary character. Especially in 2 Baruch, the vindication of the chosen faithful and their perfect and blissful communion with God in the World to Come are anticipated within an earthly, millennial context. Later Jewish and Christian (and Jewish-

⁷ Cf. Böcher, « Chiliasmus », p. 723-729.

⁸ Cf. also the correspondence between the birds feeding on God's slain enemies in Rev 19 : 21 and the proclamation in Ezek 39 : 4 and 17.

Christian) traditions show how these millenarian ideas were developed further (see the following contributions to this issue). In order to put these early Christian and Jewish millenaristic beliefs into their proper perspective, it is essential to go back to the biblical and post-biblical roots of these ideas. In passing, however, it is worth remembering that what the four gospels say about the Jesus figure actually bears the millenarian quality of the messianic era. The appearance of Jesus at the beginning of the gospel stories informs the readers in an unambiguous fashion that the preordained times have been fulfilled. What the apocalypses disclose about the messianic period in God's secret plans for the world is thus revealed in a narrative way in the gospel stories. The Messiah has come, as shown by glimpses of millenarian ideas (which should not, as is often the case, merely be understood as signs of the perfect conditions in the World to Come) : the healings, the feeding(s) of the multitude(s), the gathering of the followers of the Messiah and the special calling of the Twelve, the successive revelation of Jesus' messianic identity culminating with his entry into Jerusalem, etc. Theologically speaking, the New Testament testifies to the beginning of the millennial era through Jesus Christ, the restoration of the ideal relationship between God and mankind.

**Looking for the essence
of early Jewish millenarianism (I).
Messianic restoration without millenarianism**

The above examples from New Testament times show millenarian ideas that are connected with messianism. In order to clarify the biblical and para-biblical roots of millenarianism, it is necessary to look further into pre-Christian evidence for the belief in a messianic period of restoration for God's chosen people. As we shall see, millenarian ideas are not an essential corollary to the expectance of a messianic figure, who will restore Israel's national glory, but rather a further development and systematization of prophecies of salvation, for which the apocalyptic world-view was a necessary prerequisite.

Finding support in prophecies like 2 Sam 7 : 4-16, Jer 23 : 5 ; 33 : 15 ; Is 11 : 1ff ; Zech 3 : 8 ; 6 : 12, Jewish aspiration to national restoration during the tumultuous last centuries BCE could be formulated as an expectation of a « David redivivus ». One of the most well-known examples comes from *Ps. Sol.* 17 : 21-46, which was probably composed in reaction to the events in

63 BCE, when the whole of Palestine was conquered by the Roman general Pompey. After having complained about all the evils that have befallen the kingdom and descendants of David ever since the time of the Maccabees (vv. 4-18), the psalmist asks for God's intervention. God is implored to raise up the king of Israel, the son of David, who will destroy all his enemies and gather the holy people. Then Jerusalem will become a central place of pilgrimage for all nations, a place where the glory of the Lord shall be seen, and where the Lord Messiah (Greek : *christos kyrios*) will be king. Several passages from Scripture, notably the Davidic prophecy in Is 11, are combined to produce the picture of a future earthly messianic kingdom. There are no indications, however, that this will also be a time of increased earthly fertility ; nor are there any hints of what will come after this period. The emphasis rests solely on earthly restoration of Israel, as witnessed also by the following psalm, cf. 18 : 5-9 :

May God cleanse Israel for the day of mercy in blessing, for the appointed day when his Messiah will reign. Blessed are those born in those days, to see the good things of the Lord which he will do for the coming generation ; (which will be) under the rod of discipline of the Lord Messiah, in the fear of his God, in wisdom of spirit, and of righteousness and of strength, to direct people in righteous acts, in the fear of God, to set them all in the fear of the Lord. A good generation (living) in the fear of God, in the days of mercy.

The impression that early Jewish expectance of messianic restoration must not intrinsically be connected with millenarianism is confirmed by the evidence from Qumran.⁹ Messianic texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls (e. g. 1QS 9 : 11 ; CD 12 : 23 ; 14 : 19 ; 19 : 10 ; 20 : 1 ; 1QSa 2 : 12, 14, 20 ; 4Q252 5 : 3)¹⁰ do not envisage that this will introduce a future period of various kinds of earthly blessings, such as expressed e. g. in 2 Baruch. In fact, no particular scenario, apart from judgment and vengeance upon God's enemies, emerges as characteristic for this kind of messianic expectation (with some

⁹ Apart from the Qumran material, cf. the messianic passages in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, e. g. *Test. Levi* 8 and 18.

¹⁰ Cf. also 4Q246 [4QArabic Apocalypse], though a clear reference to the Messiah is lacking here. A good survey of messianic belief in the Qumran texts is provided by Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ch. 5 : « Messianic expectation » (p. 71-90).

exceptions, e. g. 1QSa, focusing on the « messianic meal », and the peaceful and restorative messianic prophecy in 4Q521 [4QMessianic Apocalypse], recalling Is 61 : 1ff). Generally speaking, the Qumran texts are much more preoccupied with calculating and identifying « the Time of the End » than with messianic and millenarian speculation.¹¹ We shall see below, however, how the tendency to a periodization of history may be regarded as an important element in the process of emerging millenarianism. In our search for the essence of early Jewish millenarianism, we should therefore instead direct our attention to another phenomenon within early Judaism, namely the interest in a theological understanding of history. Or, rather : history viewed from the perspective of divine (fore-)knowledge and often presented by means of apocalyptic style and imagery.

**Looking for the essence
of early Jewish millenarianism (II).
The periodization of history in apocalyptic literature**

In order to comprehend the nature and development of early Jewish millenarianism, it is necessary to give particular attention to the interest in a periodization of world history witnessed especially in apocalyptic literature from pre-Christian times.¹² For this, the Enochic and Danielic traditions are of primary importance.¹³

The most precise millenarian indications are found in 2 Enoch, which, however, is notoriously difficult to date. All MSS are from medieval times, there are two recensions of the text of quite different length, and it is much debated whether there might be

¹¹ But cf. the expectation of earthly blessings in 11Q14 (11QBer), a text related to the « War Scroll » (1QM).

¹² A vast material pertaining to this topic is collected in H. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 4 : 2. Exkurse zu einzelnen Stellen des Neuen Testaments, München, Beck, 1928, p. 986-996.

¹³ For later traditions, cf. e. g. the 12 + 2 black and bright waters of 2 Baruch 55-74 referred to above. See also 4 Ezra 14 : 11 : « For the age is divided into twelve parts, and nine of its parts have already passed, as well as half of the tenth part, so two of its parts remain, besides half of the tenth part » — thus according to the Latin text ; the Ethiopic version gives the total as ten parts, out of which half of the tenth has passed. The resemblance of the Ethiopic version with the traditions of 1 Enoch and 11QMelchizedek (to be discussed below) is obvious.

a pre-Christian Jewish substratum behind the present Christian recension.¹⁴ After the secrets of the creation week have been revealed (chs. 24-32), Enoch is informed about the duration of the world (ch. 33 : 1-2) :

On the 8th day I likewise appointed, so that the 8th day might be the 1st, the first-created of my week, and that it should revolve in the revolution of 7000 ; [so that the 8000] might be in the beginning of a time not reckoned and unending, neither years, nor months, nor weeks, nor days, nor hours (like the first day of the week, so also that the eighth day of the week might return continually).

Despite the implication that the present era will exist for 7000 years, corresponding to the seven days of creation, there are no signs of the idea that the seventh, sabbatical day might be related to a special period in God's foreordained secrets for the world. Millenarian expectation seems to be totally absent from 2 Enoch, nor are there any traces of an expected messianic rule in this writing.¹⁵

Much more chronologically relevant, and of much greater significance, are the opinions contained in the composite 1 Enoch. In its so-called « Apocalypse of Weeks » (93 : 1-10 ; 91 : 12-17), which is commonly considered as a pre-Maccabean document,¹⁶ past and future world history is divided into ten « weeks ».¹⁷ Within the scheme of this periodization, it is evident that the true perspective of the author is in the seventh « week », and that he is expecting the restoration of God's oppressed people in the coming, eighth « week », after which the last two weeks are

¹⁴ Cf. F. I. Andersen in his introduction to 2 Enoch in *OTP* 1, p. 94-97.

¹⁵ Cf. D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1964, p. 293, whose interpretation and conclusions concerning the precise millenarian implications of 2 Enoch 33 cannot be sustained, though. Similar overstatements concerning the millenarian ideas in 2 Enoch are held also by Volz, *Die Eschatologie der jüdischen Gemeinde im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter*, p. 34f.

¹⁶ Cf. O. S. Wintermute in his introduction to 1 Enoch in *OTP* 1, p. 7.

¹⁷ After the finding of the Aramaic fragments of 1 Enoch in Qumran, it is no longer relevant to take the confused order of the preserved Ethiopian text as an indication that there may only have been seven « weeks » from the beginning ; for this assumption, cf. Volz, *Die Eschatologie der jüdischen Gemeinde im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter*, p. 18. The ten-part division of world history is found also in *Sib. Or.*, books 1, 2, and 4.

characterized by the destruction of God's enemies and universal judgment (93 : 9-10 ; 91 : 12-13, 14-15) :

After that in the seventh week an apostate generation shall arise ; its deeds shall be many, and all of them criminal. At its completion, there shall be elected the elect ones of righteousness from the eternal plant of righteousness, to whom shall be given sevenfold instruction concerning all his flock.

Then after that there shall occur the second eighth week — the week of righteousness. A sword shall be given to it in order that judgment shall be executed in righteousness on the oppressors, and sinners shall be delivered into the hands of the righteous. At its completion, they shall acquire great things through their righteousness. A house shall be built for the Great King in glory for evermore.

Then after that in the ninth week the righteous judgment shall be revealed to the whole world. All the deeds of the sinners shall depart from upon the whole earth, and be written off for eternal destruction¹⁸ [...] Then, after this matter, on the tenth week in the seventh part, there shall be the eternal judgment [...]

It is important to note that the allusion in 91 : 10, referring to the chosen and righteous who are living just before the final judgment as « the eternal plant of righteousness », a phrase which echoes the Isaianic prophecy in 60 : 21, is paralleled in the Qumran texts. E. g. in CD 1 : 7 it occurs as a designation of the early stage of the community of the « New Covenant », before the appearance of the « Teacher of Righteousness » (I will return to this passage below). Furthermore, concerning the eighth « week », it is also significant that the formulation about « a sword » being « given to it » in 91 : 12, which could also refer to another masculine object, has a plural reference in the Aramaic fragment from Qumran (4Q212 [4QEn^sar] col. 4 l. 15) ; i. e., the sword (of judgment) shall be given to the collective of the righteous.¹⁹ Also, the expectation of an eschatological « house » (temple) that will be built for God towards the end of the eighth « week » may be connected with similar ideas in the Qumranite Temple Scroll

¹⁸ Cf. 4Q212 [4QEn^sar] col. 4 l. 21 : « [...] and they shall be hurled into the [eternal] well. » (All quotations from the Dead Scrolls are according to F. García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated. The Qumran Texts in English*, Leiden, New York and Cologne, Brill, 1996 [1994].)

¹⁹ Cf. J. T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch. Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân Cave 4*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1976, p. 266.

(cf. 11QT col. 29, ll. 7-9) and in the Book of Jubilees (cf. 1 : 26-29 ; Hebrew fragment in 4Q216 fragm. 1 col. 4).

Before going further into other examples of periodization of world history in pre-Christian Jewish apocalypses, it should be pointed out that some significant details from the pattern in 1 Enoch's « Apocalypse of Weeks » recur in the composition of Rev 20-21, helping to illuminate the passage about the millennium within its contextual setting. The ideal community in the vision of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21 : 22-27) is described in a way that alludes to the Isaianic prophecies about the chosen and redeemed people of God (cf. e. g. Is 60 : 21 and 61 : 3) ; i. e. it may be identified as that « plant of righteousness », of which it is also spoken in 1 Enoch towards the end of the seventh « week ». In both texts, the Isaianic prophecies about the chosen and redeemed people of God in the age of salvation obviously have served as a common point of departure.²⁰

The formulation in Rev 20 : 4 « Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge » may be illuminated by the active role of the just in bringing about God's judgment, according to the Enochic tradition (in the Qumranite Aramaic version ; cf. above). In my opinion, there can be no doubt that this transfer of divine authority parallels the millennial reign with Christ (20 : 4-6). As I have argued elsewhere, participation in the millennial reign cannot be limited to a small number among the faithful, i. e., the martyrs.²¹ The same authority to sit as judge, which has been accorded Jesus Christ / the slaughtered Lamb, is extended to all the faithful (cf. Rev 2 : 26-28 ; 3 : 21). To this must also be added that the various elements in the judgment process in 1 Enoch 91 : 14-15, including the crushing of all God's enemies, are also present in Rev 20 : 10-15. Even more, the reference in Rev 21 : 1 to the passing away of the « first » heaven and earth, replaced by a new heaven and earth, echoes 1 Enoch 91 : 16 : « The first heaven shall depart and pass away ; a new heaven shall appear ; and all the powers of heaven shall shine forever

²⁰ On the collective messianism implied by this phrase, see my article « The Branch in the Last Days : Observations on the New Covenant before and after the Messiah » forthcoming in the volume from the conference « The Dead Sea Scrolls in their Historical Context », 5-6 May 1998, Edinburgh, to be published in 1999 by T&T Clark.

²¹ Cf. my dissertation *Feast and Future. Revelation 7 : 9-17 and the Feast of Tabernacles* (ConB NT 22), Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell, 1989, p. 58-65.

sevenfold. »²² It should also be noted that the absence of a temple in the New Jerusalem, according to Rev 21 (explicitly, cf. v. 22), may be explained by the holiness of the whole city, coming down from heaven as the dwelling-place of God and the Lamb. With the names of the 12 tribes of Israel written on its portals (v. 12), and of the 12 apostles of the Lamb written on the foundation stones of the city wall (v. 14), the city itself actually forms one whole temple, representing the true people of God both before and after Jesus the Messiah.²³ (Space does not, unfortunately, allow for any further discussion about to which extent the Qumranite notion of the community of God's chosen and righteous as a « temple of man » — cf. e. g. 4Q174 [4QFlor], l. 6 — may be relevant for illuminating the cultic theology and temple vocabulary of Rev, as well as its temporal perspective.²⁴)

The tendency in early Jewish apocalyptic literature towards periodization of world history, combined with the conviction of the imminent end of the present world order, is confirmed by the concluding chapters of the Book of Daniel (chs. 7-12). Daniel's dream vision of the four beasts in ch. 7 is interpreted as the succession of four world empires, with the « little horn » (v. 8) evidently intended to refer to Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who for « a time, two times, and a half time » will oppress « the holy ones of the Most High » by disrupting the calendar and changing the law (v. 25).²⁵ In the following ch. 8, the explanation offered about the vision of the ram and the goat also points at Antiochus and his anti-Jewish policy, culminating in the cessation of temple worship in Jerusalem. This is « the period of wrath », which is also « the appointed time of the end » (cf. v. 19).

²² Text according to 4Q212 [4QEn^gar] col. 4 ll. 24-25 : « In it, the first heaven will pass away [and there will appear a new heaven and all the forces] of heaven will rise throughout all eternity, shining [seven times more] [...] » Cf. also the particular brightness of the New Jerusalem, Rev 21 : 23f.

²³ Cf. apart from Ezekiel's vision of the new temple (chs. 40-48) also 11QT cols. 38-39. Cf. R. H. Gundry, « The New Jerusalem : People as Place, not Place for People », *NovT* 29, 1987, p. 254-264.

²⁴ And, furthermore, what connection is there between, on the one hand, the cultic self-understanding revealed both in some of the Qumran writings and in the Book of Revelation, and, on the other hand, the expectation of a new temple for the eschatological era such as witnessed e. g. in 1 Enoch 91 : 13 ; 11QT 29, and *Jub.* 1 : 17, 27-29 ?

²⁵ Cf. 1 Macc 1 : 41-61 ; 2 Macc 6 : 1-11.

One of the most clear-cut and well-known examples of apocalyptic periodization, also pointing to the late period of Seleucid rule in Palestine, is the reinterpretation in Dan 9 of Jeremiah's prophecy about the desolation of Jerusalem and its temple for 70 years, following the Babylonian triumph in 586 BCE (Jer 25 : 11 ; 29 : 10). In 9 : 24-27, the 70 years are taken as referring to « weeks of years », i. e. $70 \times 7 = 490$ years, in which — according to the fictive past perspective of the author — the first seven « weeks » will end with the Persian king, Cyrus (« an anointed prince »). There will then come 62 « weeks » of rebuilding, until « an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing » — probably referring to the deposition of the High Priest Onias III in 174 BCE, which will inaugurate the final woes of the End Time (vv. 26-27) :

[...] and the troops of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. He shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall make sacrifice and offering cease ; and in their place shall be an abomination that desolates, until the decreed end is poured out upon the desolator.

The historical overview is continued in chs. 10-11, which contain a more specified presentation of events during the periods of Ptolemaic and Seleucid rule during the third century BCE, up until Antiochus IV Epiphanes and his profanation of the temple (11 : 31 : « the abomination that makes desolate »). It is this particularly difficult time for the Jews in Palestine during the last years of Antiochus that seems to be the actual date of composition of the resulting book ; cf. 12 : 6-12, from which it emerges that the abomination is still there, but also that the calculation of the end of the troubled time is open for reconsideration (the three and a half « times » also appear as 1290 days, which may even extend to 1335 days).²⁶

It is important to pay attention to the fact that while there is an interest in periodization of history in the Book of Daniel, its apocalyptic imagery contains no sign of any Messiah as a divinely

²⁶ According to Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* 4 : 2, p. 999-1000, these figures may be harmonized to denote the period between 15 Chisle 168 BCE — 10 Ab 164 BCE, depending on whether the lunar or solar calendar is used. Cf. also the shorter time span in Dan 8 : 14 : 2300 evenings and mornings = 1150 days.

sent saving figure for the End Time (except for the anointed figures of 9 : 25-26), no mention of a restored Davidic kingdom, nor of any messianic era characterized by special earthly blessings. In fact, very little is said about what will come after the present final woes of the foreordained time. What is expected is the coming of « one like a human being » in order to rule in an eternal kingdom (7 : 13-14), the collective identity of which as « the holy ones of the Most High » is explained in vv. 22 and 27. In another passage, the hope for individual resurrection also comes to expression (12 : 2-3, 13).

The apocalyptic interest in periodization of history is reflected also in the Qumran texts. 4Q180-181 (4QAges of Creation) are the fragmentary remnants of a synthetic overview of biblical history ; cf. the first four lines of 4Q180 :²⁷

Interpretation concerning the ages which God has made : An age to achieve [all that there is] and all that will be. Before creating them he determined their operations [according to the precise sequence of the ages,] one age after another age. And this is engraved on the [heavenly] tablets [for the sons of men.] for / all / the ages of their dominion.²⁸

An even more illuminating example is found in 11Q13 (11QMelchizedek). In a combined exegesis of Lev 25 : 13, Deut 15 : 2 and Is 61 : 1, the author has a message for « the last days » (col. 2 ll. 4-8) :

[Its inter]pretation for the last days refers to the captives, about whom he said : « To proclaim liberty to the captives. » And he will make their rebels prisoners [...] and of the inheritance of Melchizedek, for [...] and they are the inheri[tance of Melchi]zedek, who will make them return. He will proclaim liberty for them, to free them from [the debt] of all their iniquities. And this will [happen] in the first week of the jubilee which follows the ni[ne] jubilees. And the day [of atonem]ent is the end of the tenth jubilee in which atonement will be made for all the sons of [God] and for the men of the lot of Melchizedek.

²⁷ See further Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, p. 54-55.

²⁸ The concept of the « heavenly tablets », containing the ultimate divine commandments and the divinely foreordained order of events, is prominent in *Jub.* ; cf. e. g. 5 : 13 ; 6 : 17 *et passim*.

With one jubilee = $7 \times 7 = 49$ years, the time span for « the last days » comprises 490 years,²⁹ which means that the ten jubilees of years may be compared with the 70 « weeks » of years (= 490 years) of Dan 9,³⁰ after which ultimate deliverance will take place through Melchizedek.³¹ It is noteworthy that the same periodization involving the number 490 also seems to lie at the foundation for the chronology of the « Damascus Document » : the figures that denote the time span before and after the Teacher of Righteousness add up to 450 years (CD 1 : 5-6, 10, and 20 : 13-15), which leaves 40 years for the Teacher's activity.³²

To conclude : early Jewish apocalyptic traditions represented by 1 Enoch, Daniel and Qumran texts are important as examples of the tendency to periodization of world history, which is an essential component of millenarianism. However, this periodization does not everywhere include millenarian content as a characteristic feature of the era of salvation, nor is there always a messianic expectation involved in these schemes. But common to all these writings is the conviction of living during the crucial last period before God's great intervention to bring about salvation and judgment. Particularly in the Qumran literature, the Scriptural phrase « the end of days » functions as a key formula.³³ To trace the background of millenarianism in the biblical and early post-biblical periods we must therefore now go on to look for another of its essential components, namely the idea of a return to the paradisiac conditions of the primeval era.

²⁹ In the chronological system of *Jub.*, 4900 years may have been the total calculated duration of the world : according to 50 : 4, the date for the Sinai covenant is 2410, after which there will be another 40 years before the entry into Canaan. The resulting 2450 years is exactly half of 4900. See further Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 4 : 2, p. 994-995.

³⁰ Cf. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, p. 55. They must not, however, be identified with the ten « weeks » in 1 Enoch 93 and 91.

³¹ Of special significance for the author is evidently the first week of the tenth jubilee (i. e. years 442-448, a little more than 40 years before the End), when the proclamation of liberty to « the captives » will take place.

³² The 40-year period between the death of the Teacher and the final consummation in CD 20 : 13-15 may be hinted at in 4Q171 [4QpPs^a] 2 : 7 ; it should also be compared with the duration of the eschatological war for 40 years in 1QM.

³³ Cf. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, p. 56-58.

**Looking for the essence
of early Jewish millenarianism (III).
The restoration of paradisiac conditions**

According to 2 Baruch 29-30 (cf. the quotation at the beginning of this article), the messianic era is also a return to the paradisiac conditions of the primeval times.³⁴ The future earthly prosperity envisaged here is a precursor of later millenarian ideas in Jewish and Christian tradition (a subject to be discussed in other contributions to this issue). In typological and theological terms, there will be a correspondence between the Beginning and the End. This idea, inherited from the biblical prophets, was further developed in apocalyptic texts.³⁵ Thus, e. g., the coming era of salvation is described in the Sibylline Oracles, 3 : 652-808 (commonly dated to the mid-second century BCE),³⁶ as characterized by earthly blessings. It is not directly the idea of a New Paradise, however, but an amalgamation of various Scriptural prophecies about the restoration of creation to prosperity, fertility and peacefulness. More direct references to the restoration of paradisiac life in the messianic era are found in *Test. Levi* 18 : 10-11 and *Test. Dan* 5 : 12.³⁷ The « gates of paradise » will be opened and it will be granted to « the saints to eat of the tree of life » ; « the saints shall refresh themselves in Eden » and « the righteous shall rejoice in the New Jerusalem ».

In a significant passage from 1 Enoch 10-11, speaking about the fate of the fallen angels who have fornicated with women, periodization of world history is combined with the expectance of a

³⁴ In 4 Ezra 7, which was also quoted at the outset of this article, the appearance of the Messiah is not accompanied by a return of Paradise. « Paradise regained » is hence not an indispensable part of messianism. But we have also seen, however, that one can hardly speak about millenarianism in 4 Ezra. The absence of paradisiac expectation in 4 Ezra does not, therefore, contradict that there is a connection between millenarianism and the idea of a return to paradisiac conditions.

³⁵ Cf. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*, p. 280-284, 365-366.

³⁶ Cf. J. J. Collins in his introduction to *The Sibylline Oracles* in *OTP* 1, p. 355-356.

³⁷ The approximate dating of *T. 12 Patr.* is very uncertain, owing to Christian interpolation, but a date during the Maccabean period is often suggested ; cf. H. C. Kee, *OTP* 1, p. 777-778.

return to paradisiac conditions in the age of salvation (10 : 12—11 : 2) :

And when they [i. e. the fallen angels led by Semyaza] and all their children have battled with each other [...] bind them for seventy generations underneath the rocks of the ground until the day of their judgment and of their consummation, until the eternal judgement is concluded. In those days they will lead them into the bottom of the fire — and in torment — in the prison (where) they will be locked up forever. And at the time when they will burn and die, those who collaborated with them will be bound together with them from henceforth unto the end of (all) generations. [...] Destroy injustice from the face of the earth. And every iniquitous deed will end, and the plant of righteousness and truth will appear forever and he will plant joy. And then all the righteous ones will escape ; and become the living ones until they multiply and become tens of hundreds ; and all the days of their youth and the years of their retirement they will complete in peace. And in those days the whole earth will be worked in righteousness, all of her planted with trees, and will find blessing. And they shall plant pleasant trees upon her vines. And he who plants a vine upon her will produce wine for plenitude. And every seed that is sown on her, one measure will yield a thousand (measures) and one measure of olives will yield ten measures of presses of oil. And you cleanse the earth from all injustice, and from all defilement, and from all oppression, and from all sin, and from all iniquity which is being done on earth ; remove them from the earth. And all the children of the people will become righteous, and all the nations shall worship and bless me ; and they will all prostrate themselves to me. And the earth shall be cleansed from all pollution, and from all sin, and from all plague, and from all suffering ; and it shall not happen again that I shall send (these) upon the earth from generation to generation and forever.

And in those days I shall open the storerooms of blessing which are in the heavens, so that I shall send them down upon the earth, over the work and the toil of the children of man. And peace and truth shall become partners together in all the days of the world, and in all the generations of the world.

In this text, the appearance of « the plant of righteousness and truth » as the reverse side of divine judgment is a detail of particular significance. As we have seen above, the same phrase is

used in the « Apocalypse of Weeks » (1 Enoch 93 : 10),³⁸ referring to the community of the elect towards the end of the seventh « week », to whom special, « sevenfold » knowledge will be given.³⁹ It is also used frequently in the Qumran texts (a « shoot of the planting », an « eternal/everlasting plantation ») as a reference to the movement behind the Qumran texts (cf. CD 1 : 7, 1QS 8 : 5 ; 11 : 8 ; 1QH 14(6) : 15 ; 16(8) : 6 ; 4Q418 fr. 81 l. 13). Thus, it carries a sense of collective messianism, denoting the elect ones among God's people in the age of salvation. Furthermore, the reader cannot but notice the many similarities between this text and later millenarian apocalypticism, such as e. g. the texts quoted above from Rev and 2 Baruch, in which we also find the ideas of a fantastic increase in earthly fertility and fecundity (2 Baruch 29 : 5), a binding (or destruction by fire) of all satanic forces (Rev 20 : 2-3), and righteous ones who will become living ones (Rev 20 : 4-6).

But in order to come even closer to the biblical and para- (or post-) biblical background of millenarian belief involving a restoration of creation according to its paradisiac origins, it is also necessary to comment on the precise period of 1000 years. Why 1000 ? And why 400, as in 4 Ezra ? It is common knowledge that chronological data play a central role for shaping the symbolic universe of biblical, para- and post-biblical Jewish and Christian literature. Frequently using intratextual references and allusions, these writings can produce typological combinations between persons, events and conditions that « make sense » in a theological way, so that questions concerning temporal issues may be answered (when will salvation / judgment come ? What will happen to the sinners / to the righteous ?) Thus, e. g., the precise calculations of the duration of the « Days of the Messiah », such as found in 4 Ezra and in Rev may be explained as expressions of the idea of recompensation for previous periods of suffering for God's people. According to this reckoning, the 400 years of Ezra's Messiah (4 Ezra 7 : 28) may refer to the period of Egyptian slavery : Israel's past misery will be turned into an equivalent period of joy.

The key to the hermeneutical principle underlying this typological exegesis is found in the Book of Psalms, 90 : 15, in

³⁸ In 93 : 5, it probably refers to Abraham and Isaac ; cf. also 84 : 6. *Jub.* 1 : 16 ; 16 : 26 ; 21 : 24 ; 36 : 6.

³⁹ Cf. 4Q212 4 : 12f : « wisdom and knowledge ».

which we read : « Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us, and as many years as we have seen evil. » Abundant examples from rabbinic texts show that this way of thinking was frequently used in ancient Judaism for calculating the duration of « the Days of the Messiah ». Just to mention some figures, R. ‘Aqiba (d. 135) is cited as proposing 40 years, which would be equivalent to the desert period, whereas R. Yehudah ha-Nasi (d. 217) speaks about 400 years, corresponding to Israel’s stay in Egypt. According to the first rabbinic authority, however — R. Eli‘ezer b. Hyrcanos (c. 90), the days of the Messiah will amount to 1000 years, with Scriptural support from Ps 90 : 15 (cf. above) and 90 : 4 : « For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night. »⁴⁰ The 1000 years may also be obtained by adding Israel’s 400 years in Egypt (cf. Gen 15 : 13 — not the 430 years of Ex 12 : 40-41, corresponding to the 390 + 40 years of Ezek 4 : 4-8), 111 years under foreign rule during the period of the judges (cf. Judg 3 : 8, 14 ; 4 : 3 ; 6 : 1 ; 10 : 6-8 ; 13 : 1), and 490 years between the Babylonian exile and the fall of the Second Temple in 70 CE (according to « official » rabbinic chronology). This gives 1001 years, i. e. roughly 1000 years.

Though it is possible that the author of Rev may have intended the 1000 years of 20 : 4-6 as a reference to Ps 90, this is hardly a satisfactory explanation, considering the larger setting of this passage. Even less probable is the mathematical construct of the cumulated years of Israel’s distress. Instead, a more satisfactory explanation of the 1000 years, which also takes into account the wider context of restoration in chs. 19 : 11-22 : 5 may be found in *Jub.* 4 : 30. Here, the premature death of Adam at the age of 930 is understood as meaning that he did not attain to the « perfect » 1000 years. As a result of his sin, he died on the very same day (cf. Gen 2 : 17 : « In the day you will eat from you will die »). Failing to reach the 1000 years thus indicates the damage to the ideal quality of human life according to the paradisiac origins of creation.⁴¹ What Rev 20 : 4-6 symbolizes is therefore the

⁴⁰ Attribution of the various opinions varies among the rabbinic material. For a comprehensive survey of the often somewhat confused rabbinic material, cf. Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 3. Die Briefe des Neuen Testaments und die Offenbarung Johannis, München, Beck, 1926, p. 824-827.

⁴¹ Cf. *Jub.* 23 : 26-27 on the restoration and blessing that will come after the passing away of the present evil generation : « And in those days, children will

restoration of ideal human life in the messianic age. The consequences of Adam's sin are cancelled.⁴²

Within the context of the concluding visions of judgment and salvation in Rev 19 : 11-22 : 5, both millenarian and messianic ideas are present. But — as was remarked above — it also emerges clearly that it is the prophecies from Ezekiel that have contributed to shaping the particular apocalyptic visionary discourse of Rev. Not only is the end of ch. 19 strongly reminiscent of Ezek 39 : 17-20 (birds feeding on the flesh of God's enemies), just as the passage on Gog and Magog in Rev 20 : 8 recalls Ezek 38-39. Ezekiel's prophecies about future blessing, focusing on the restoration of creation and of ideal communion with God in the New Temple (e. g. 34 : 25-30 ; 36 : 29-30, 35 ; 47 : 12 ; several instances in the description of the New Temple, chs. 40-48) also reappear in John's ultimate symbolic conceptualization of the messianic triumph and restoration.

begin to search the law, and to search the commandments and to return to the way of righteousness. And the days will begin to increase and grow longer among those sons of men, generation by generation, and year by year, until their days approach a thousand years, and to a greater number of years than days. » (On the present consequences of evil, cf. 23 : 8-15.)

⁴² Cf. also the careful analysis of the passage with reflections over its various hermeneutical dimensions, though within a more martyrological horizon, G. Rochais, « Le règne des mille ans et la seconde mort : origines et sens (*Ap 19,11-20,6*) », *NRT* 103, 1981, p. 831-856.

*

Early Jewish millennial belief emerges as an integral part of the apocalyptic current within biblical and post-biblical Judaism. But it would be a mistake to think that all apocalyptic texts are of the same kind, always stressing the same theological answers and « solutions » in response to the questions formulated in the various groups from which they emerged. Changing historical, cultural and religious circumstances lead to new issues that need to be dealt with. As older traditions are brought along into these new situations, it is evident that they are not simply reused, but adapted and reinterpreted in order to provide adequate guidance. Apocalyptic then becomes one out of many vehicles for presenting an actualized message, a stylistic feature used to fit the strategies of the authors. Concepts like the Messiah and the millennium may then be brought into the apocalyptic discourse according to specific circumstances, needs and beliefs of the respective authors.

As I have tried to show above, millennial calculation and speculation concerning « the Days of the Messiah » should be regarded as hermeneutical responses to Scriptural traditions. Periodization of world history, combined with messianic hope for the restoration of Israel, means that a third epoch is sandwiched into the succession of this world and the World to Come. As the concept of « Paradise Regained » is merged into this complex of thought, there may be a natural fusion of messianic and paradisiac ideas within a millennial framework.

As for the Book of Revelation, being part of the ideological and theological process sketched out above, an important key for unlocking the secrets of its millennial teaching may be found in its combined reapplication of Scriptural prophecies — mainly from Ezekiel, but also from Isaiah (chs. 24-27 and 60-61) — together with its deep indebtedness to contemporary apocalyptic eschatology. One fundamental aspect concerns the idea of human communion with angels, which explains the special demands for sanctity and purity in Qumran and in Rev, and which also contributes to illuminating the notion of a « realized eschatology » within a liturgical framework, which is a major element both in Qumranite theology and in Rev.⁴³ Partaking of the millennium is meant for those who are witnesses of Jesus (not for those witnesses in a wider

⁴³ On this idea in Qumranite literature, see e. g. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, p. 143-149.

sense, whose souls cry out from under the altar in 6 : 9-11 — cf. the different formulations in 6 : 9 and 20 : 4 ; these will have to await the resurrection to final judgment), who have been purified and cleansed from all their sins, and who now share angelic status before the throne of God. This blessed paradoxical and mystical existence as God's chosen in the Time of the End, which in Rev is a result of the appearance and victory of the Messiah, may in Qumran come to particularly clear expression in some lines of 4Q181, which is a commentary on the division of times according to God's plan ; cf. fr. 1 ll. 2-4 :⁴⁴

According to the powerful deeds of God and in line with their evil, according to the foundation of their impurity, he delivered the sons of the heavens and the earth to a wicked community until the end. In accordance with God's compassion and in accordance with his goodness and the wonder of his glory he approaches some from among the sons of the world [...] so that they can be considered with him in [the community of] the gods like a holy congregation in the position of eternal life and in the lot of his holy ones [...].⁴⁵

When this idea of the communion between man and heaven became less prominent in more down-to earth Early Christianity (maybe discredited by pneumatic charismatics such as the second century Montanists), the present, mystical character of the millennium in Rev was forgotten. Parallel to this development, Qumranite mystical theology, combined with priestly ideology and self-understanding, was supplanted by mainstream Rabbinic Judaism. What remained was a materialistic understanding of the millennium and its blessings, both among Jews and Christians, that to this day has caused confusion, schism and much unnecessary

⁴⁴ Cf. Milik, *The Books of Enoch*, p. 251-252.

⁴⁵ Cf. the ideas of the elevated status of the elect (1QH 11(3) : 21 ; 14(6) : 12-13), of the community as a « temple of man » (4Q174 [4QFlor] fragm. 1-3, col. 1, l. 6), and of the angelic status of the Qumranite priesthood (1Q28b [1QSb]). The perhaps most fascinating expression of this transcendence, set within a liturgical context, is found in the « Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice » (4Q400-407, 11Q17, MasShirShab) ; cf. C. Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice : A Critical Edition* (Harvard Semitic Studies 27), Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1985, and the reflections in Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, p. 136-143. On the connections between these liturgical texts and Rev, see my « L'Apocalypse entre judaïsme et christianisme : Précisions sur le monde spirituel et intellectuel de saint Jean », forthcoming in *RHPR* 1999 as part of the « Festschrift » for prof. Pierre Prigent.

Håkan Ulfgard

speculation among (perhaps) well-meaning, but historically and ideologically not very well informed believers.