A Glimpse at Apocalyptic Thinking in Other Cultures and at How Scholars Work

All the readings for this assignment are attached to this handout. I have numbered the pages in the upper right corner.

1. The first reading, Todd Olsson’s “The Apocalyptic Activity. The Case of Jamasp Namag,” (starting pg. 2 of handout) is a super-scholarly article written in complicated high-falutin’ English. It even has a decimal system for numbering sections and paragraphs! Sorry. Read my short introduction on the left-hand side of pg. 2. You should know what a “phenomenological” approach is; you may encounter it again in higher education. In 1.5.1, where does Olsson say phenomenological parallels may be found to Near Eastern and Mediterranean types of apocalypticism?

2. Read fast through the next few paragraphs, pausing over the first sentence of the second paragraph in section 1.5.3. Echoes of which other scholar here?

3. In 1.6.1 and 1.6.2, Olsson describes what he calls a revelatory world-view. An important section, but read it fast. The key sentence is the one in 1.6.2 in which Olsson says this world-view believes “in the possibility of communication between man and the supremundane world.” You’ll be able to guess what “supramundane” means, if you don’t know. No question to answer here.

4. I do want you to pay close attention to the third paragraph in 1.6.2 (“If we consider. . .”) and the first paragraph of 1.6.3. In writing: How does Olsson’s description of apocalypticism in this section fit with what we know of the apocalyptic parts of the Bible we have read?

5. Read quickly through the whole of part 2 of the article, “The Case of Jamasp Namag.” (You can skip the very last section, 2.4.1.) Jamasp Namag seems to be an Iranian text written in the 600’s CE, when Iran/Persia, the home of Zoroastrian religion, was being attacked by Arabs, who imposed their Muslim faith (and today Iran is mostly Muslim). But thought it was written at the time of the Arab invasion, Olsson tells us in the beginning of 2.2 that “The apocalypse is presented as a vaticination delivered by Jamasp, a pseudonymous sage of the past.” It then “foretells” things, including the Arab invasion. Where have we seen this before?

6. Back to the end of 1.5.2 for a minute. There Olsson alludes to how the Aztecs interpreted the coming, in 1519, of the Spanish conqueror Cortez to Tenochtitlan, the great Aztec city that is now Mexico City. Now turn to pg. 9 of the handout and read the one-page excerpt from C.A. Burland’s The Gods of Mexico. On the left side of the page, read about the Aztec emperor’s interesting responsibilities. (The last page of the handout has a little more on Aztec religion.) In writing: (a) In two words at the most, what was the thing he was supposed to study in order to “adduce the quality of the time and the nature or events which were about to befall”? (To “adduce” means to cite as proof.) (b) On the right side of the page, Burland tells us how “Moctecuzoma” (more often referred to as “Montezuma,” a spanishification of his name, I
believe) “predicted” the coming of this new manifestation of the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl in the form of the white man Cortez (whose name Burland spells with an “s”). If Burland is right, what were the real “signs” that told Moctecuzoma of this impending event?

7. Finally, on pp. 10-11 of the handout, a strange little reading from a 1937 study by a great University of Chicago anthropologist, Philleo Nash. Nash studied the impact upon “primitive” cultures (his old-fashioned word) of encounters with white European cultures. One of his most famous studies, from which this excerpt is taken, was of Klamath Indians in Oregon. He studied “religious revivalism” that occurred among the Klamath Indians shortly after their encounter with whites. “Religious revivalism” means, roughly, an upsurge in intensity of religious faith and practice. This revival often includes apocalyptic themes: the end is coming, and we must embrace our faith even more tightly. Nash saw a revival of “nativistic cults” – groups that advocated returning to native Klamath Indian religious tradition – but, interestingly, intermixed with elements of Christian faith brought to them by the whites! You have to gather all this from the very shrot excerpt from Nash’s very long article. In writing: (a) This is hard stuff because of all the scholarly anthropological lingo, but, if you can, summarize the difference between Nash’s hypothesis (bottom of the left hand side of pg. 10) and his revised hypothesis (his thesis) on the next page. Here is a scholar at work – not unlike a scientist. Don’t spend too much time on this if it sets your head spinning. (b) Do write a sentence or two about any connection you can draw between all this and what we have learned about how and why Near Eastern apocalyptic (the late prophets, Daniel, Revelation) got written. Does any of the language in Nash’s hypothesis and revised hypothesis describe the Jews in the last few hundred years before Jesus and the first hundred years after Jesus?