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THE ORIGIN OF JEWISH ESCHATOLOGY

NATHANIEL SCHMIDT
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

ESCHATOLOGY is the doctrine concerning the last things (*τὰ ἔσχατα*, *novissima*, מִן הַיָּמִינִים). It deals with man's condition after death, the destiny of nations, and the end of the world. The Oxford dictionary defines it as "the department of theological science concerned with 'the four last things': death, judgment, heaven and hell". This is obviously too narrow a definition. In so far as eschatology has to do with religious ideas it is, indeed, a part of theology. But even without religious stimulus man's mind projects itself into the future as well as into the past. His scientific study of nature and his philosophy are as likely as his religion to occupy themselves with things to come. In the field of religious eschatology there are more things than the four mentioned. Even in Jewish and Christian eschatological thought, a place should be given to such conceptions as the Messiah, the kingdom of heaven on earth, the intermediate state, the resurrection, the destruction of the world, the new heaven and the new earth. The sharp distinction between eschatology and messianism drawn by Hermann Cohen¹ cannot be maintained; and the last things on earth can surely not be left out. Other ideas are found in the eschatology of other religions. Hugo Gressmann² confines eschatology to the complex of ideas connected with the end of the world and the renovation of the world, excluding in principle all that concerns "death

¹ *Die Religion der Vernunft*, 1921. Cp. my observations on this important posthumous work in *The Philosophical Review*, Jan. 1922, pp. 68 ff.

² *Der Ursprung der israelitisch-jüdischen Eschatologie*, 1905.

and resurrection, in short the final destiny of the individual" Such limitations do not seem justified either by etymology or usage.

But attention had been too exclusively given to the fate of the individual. Even on the lower stages of religious development speculation upon things to come is not wholly limited to man's condition after death. The shifting fortunes of war and the varying success in obtaining supplies give rise to anxious or hopeful thoughts of what may befall the tribe. Devastating floods, fires, cyclones, earthquakes, or volcanic eruptions, and terror-inspiring eclipses of the heavenly bodies suggest the possibility of a destruction of the world. But the higher forms of eschatological thought presuppose a more complex social organization and a closer observation of natural phenomena. Hope of deliverance from foreign oppression is keenest where it springs from a proud and outraged national consciousness, kept alive by the memory of past greatness; and dreams of empire are born of the example set by mighty conquerors and rulers holding peoples in subjection. It is especially myths of astrological origin that furnish material for strongly developed eschatologies. Only prolonged observation of the movements of the planets and the sun's course through the signs of the zodiac can render possible the thought of a recurrence at the end of the present period of the events connected with the world's origin, and the renovation of the world after its destruction. Eschatology clearly develops with the growth of man's intellectual and moral perceptions, his larger social experience, and his expanding knowledge of nature. While there is a general similarity, the outward forms vary with the character of the environment and the peculiar genius of each people. Ideas, like commodities and fashions, pass from land to land, but if the native soil can produce them a foreign origin must not too hastily be assumed.

These general considerations should be borne in mind in approaching the subject of Jewish eschatology. No one questions that our extant literature reveals a marked difference between earlier and later ideas in respect of man's condition after death, Israel's destiny, and the future of the world. The

great prophets of the Assyrian and Chaldaean periods stand forth in striking contrast with their predecessors and their successors in the Persian and the Graeco-Roman periods. Their tremendous emphasis upon the ethical demands of Yahwe and their opposition to chauvinism and entangling foreign alliances have set them apart and given them an epoch-making significance. It is not strange, therefore, that modern interpreters have been inclined to look upon them chiefly as moral teachers and to overlook the fact that they also were soothsayers and politicians. Their eyes were always turned toward the future, endeavoring to discern what Yahwe was about to do in the earth, and watching with anxiety the fulfilment of their prognostications of coming events. They took part in the raging political party strife of their day, if not with violent acts, as some who had gone before them, at least with fierce denunciations and strong intimidations. But they were powerful personalities, straightforward, fearless, and consistent. This has led many investigators of the books ascribed to them to regard as interpolations and additions sections that appeared to be out of harmony with their distinctive style, their characteristic cast of thought, and the historic situation that confronted them, and especially to athetize passages containing eschatological ideas foreign to the general tone and tenor of their oracles and known to have flourished in much later times. These passages have to do, not with the future of the individual, for on this point even the supposed interpolators, with one single exception (Isa. 26 19), still maintained the older view, but with the future of Israel and of the world.

Against this critical treatment a reaction has recently set in, led by Gunkel, Eichhorn, Gressmann, Bousset, and to some extent Bertholet, Kittel and others. Having discovered in the Hebrew Bible numerous unmistakable allusions to myths apparently of Babylonian origin, in addition to those already recognized as such, Hermann Gunkel³ began to question the current explanation of certain peculiar expressions as merely figures of speech and to reject the *zeitgeschichtliche Methode*,

³ *Schöpfung und Chaos*, 1896.

as Auberlen⁴ had called it, that sees in many of them cryptic references to historic personalities. Suggestions in this direction were also made in academic lectures by that brilliant teacher, Albert Eichhorn. The same tendency was followed by Wilhelm Bousset,⁵ though somewhat more guardedly and with stronger emphasis on possible Persian influence. Besides extending this manner of approach to many of the major problems of Old Testament exegesis, Hugo Gressmann⁶ finally formulated a new theory and presented it in a work characterized by great learning, much ingenuity, and often rare insight. Briefly outlined, the theory is this. Long before the time of Amos many myths of foreign origin had found their way into Israel and Judah and attached themselves to the thought of Yahwe and his dealings with his people, the other nations, and the world. Most important among these was the conception of a coming destruction of the world by fire, preceded by an accumulation of plagues, and followed by a renewal of the world and the return of the terrestrial paradise, with its innocence and blessedness, ruled over by a semi-divine being, the first man. This idea probably originated in Persia, came through Elam (possibly as early as 2000 B. C.) to Babylonia, and then traveled with the Amorites to Palestine, where it had already been saturated with the Jewish spirit in the eighth century B. C. The great prophets applied the myth of the cosmic catastrophe locally, but because of their moral earnestness suppressed the supplementary myth of the cosmic restoration, except that in some passages they made concessions to the popular eschatology. The allusions in these passages cannot be understood unless one bears in mind the original myth. In the Graeco-Roman period this ancient mythical material was again utilized by the apocalyptic seers, and fresh accessions from abroad made it possible for them to rear a more elaborate structure.

A few typical illustrations must suffice to show the method of interpretation and the somewhat startling results. In Amos 5:18 the prophet declares: "Ah! ye who wish for the day of Yahwe!

⁴ *Der Prophet Daniel und die Offenbarung Johannis*, 1854.

⁵ *Die Religion des Judentums*, 1903, 1906²; *Die jüdische Apokalypitik*, 1908.

⁶ *L. C.*

Wherefore would ye have the day of Yahwe? It will be darkness, and not light". Zephaniah says (1 16): "their silver and their gold cannot save them on the day of Yahwe's wrath, when all the land will be consumed by the fire of his anger; for he shall make a terrible end of all that dwell in the land". The conclusion is drawn that "the day of Yahwe" was a technical term popularly understood to mean both the end of the world through fire and its restoration, bringing in the golden age, but that the people generally expected to escape from the conflagration and share in the good time to come, while the prophets were unwilling to hold out any such hope. The thought of this day of Yahwe is supposed to be of foreign origin. So also the idea of a "Remnant", which did not originate with Isaiah. The enemy from the north in Jeremiah and Zephaniah is not a definite people expected to come upon Judah from that direction, neither the Scythian nor the Chaldaean, but a mysterious being connected with the mountain of the gods in the north. "So gut der Nordberg gleich dem Götterberge ist, so gut ist der Nördliche ein göttliches Wesen" (p. 190): and so is also the king of the north in Dan. 11 40ff., whom Porphyrius and others have identified with Antiochus IV Epiphanes. It is thought that an Israelitish origin for this divine being is excluded, "since it has for its foundation polytheism".

The child called Immanuel in Is. 7 grows up in a land where the people live on milk and honey. These are imported products. Palestine was not a land literally flowing with milk and honey. They are "Götterspeise" and belong to the land of the gods. Immanuel is a mythical figure. The divine mother was probably originally Ishtar, not Damkina or Hathor. The hero expected by Isaiah (9 1-6) is a human king and a god, a kind of "Halbgott". The mythical epithets point to Egypt where they are common in the royal protocols (p. 282). The court style used in reference to the reigning prince as well as the eschatological king could not have been invented in a small kingdom, but must have come from a world-power. In some of the Servant of Yahwe Songs, found in the appendix to the book of Isaiah, we have remains of a cult-song, referring originally to the death and resurrection of a god, probably

Hadad-Rimmon or Tammuz-Adonia. In some passages these reminiscences from a pagan cult are applied to the people of Israel. Like the mother of the Messiah, the Messiah himself is of foreign origin. The figure of a divine king could only be based on the apotheosis of kings, not found in Israel, but among its neighbours. "One like a man" (כְּבָר אִישׁ) in Dan. 7 13 is not Michael, the guardian angel of the people to whom the kingdom is to be given, as I endeavoured to show in a paper read before this Society,⁷ but the highest angel, a semi-divine being, known as "the man", an abbreviation of "the first man", the king of paradise, originally a foreign god, possibly the Persian Gayōmarṯ (Bousset), but more likely some divinity surviving as an aeon in Gnostic speculation. This non-Jewish figure traveled to Palestine for the first time long before the days of Amos and Hosea, and a second time shortly before the Christian era.

Criticism in detail is not possible within the limits of this paper. A few suggestions, however, may be offered. There is no room for doubt that myths of Sumerian, Akkadian, Arrapachitian, Amoritish, Aramaean, Canaanitish, Hittite, Egyptian, Cretan, and Assyrian origin found their way into Palestine and may have become known in Israel and Judah. This must certainly be the case with the stories concerning the creation of the world and primeval times. Nor can it be questioned that the rich development of eschatology in the Hasmonaean and Roman periods was influenced by Persian and Greek speculation. But the assumption of a foreign origin whenever a peculiar looking conception presents itself may easily become an obsession. Real evidence of advanced eschatological thought outside of Israel in the early times contemplated by the theory does not yet exist, or is at least extremely rare. Gunkel⁸ rightly observes: "Aus der Beobachtung der Präcession der Sonne erklärt sich . . . die Gleichung von Urzeit und Endzeit, die in der Eschatologie eine solche Rolle spielt". It is quite uncertain, however, how early observers in Babylonia were able

⁷ JBL, XIX, 1900, pp. 22 ff.

⁸ *Genesis*,² p. 234.

to compute, even roughly, the precession of the equinoxes and consequently the cosmic year. Eduard Meyer⁹ ascribes the division of the equator and the ecliptic into 360 degrees, and of the latter into the twelve signs of the zodiac, to the Chaldeans in the first millennium B. C. and the more important progress in astronomy as well as astrology among them to the time of the Chaldaean Kingdom and the Achaemenian and Seleucid dynasties. According to Seneca,¹⁰ Berosus maintained that "the world will burn when all the planets that now move in different courses come together in the Crab, so that they all stand in a straight line in the same sign, and the future flood will take place when the same conjunction occurs in Capricorn". How much older this conception is than the third century B. C. we cannot tell. If the idea of the cosmic catastrophe and the restoration of the world came from Persia, we have absolutely no datable documents to show when it first appeared there. Nor is there any evidence of its presence in Elamitic inscriptions or any indication of what could be identified as Persian influence in Elam in the remote period suggested.

The prophetic texts thus far discovered in Egypt do not show any idea of the destruction of the world through fire or reconstruction after such a catastrophe. They are important, however, because they clearly reveal the tendency of putting on the lips of ancient seers prophecies of historic events known to the real authors and of interpolating earlier texts, and also because the descriptions of present misery and future prosperity, in spite of the "Lust am Fabulieren" so characteristic of the Egyptians, keep within such modest bounds. A priest in the time of Snefru is credited with having predicted the coming of Ameni, probably Amenemhat I, and his successful reign, in a Petrograd papyrus and a wooden tablet at Cairo from the eighteenth dynasty. A demotic papyrus from the year 7 A. D. tells of the prophecies of calamity and Assyrian conquests uttered by a lamb in the 6th year of Bocchoris (c. 730 B. C.). The fragment of a Greek papyrus from the third century

⁹ *Geschichte des Altertums*, I³, 1918, pp. 591 ff.

¹⁰ *Questiones naturales*, III, 29.

A. D. apparently contains a translation of a defense made before a king Amenophis by a potter accused of godlessness, who turns prophet, predicts disasters for Egypt, and then suddenly dies. Unless the whole production is very late, there is an interpolation threatening "the city on the sea"—as the reference to Agathos Daemon shows, clearly Alexandria—with so complete a destruction that fishermen will dry their nets where it once stood. It goes on to foretell the coming of a king from the east, set up by Isis, in whose reign there will be such blessedness that those who survive into that period will wish the dead to rise in order to share their joy. The time is obviously approaching when the movable year will coincide with the fixed year, the end of a Sothis-period in 139 A. D. One is tempted to think of a Jewish hand retouching an older text in the reign of Hadrian, or that of a native Egyptian having some familiarity with Jewish ideas and phraseology. "The Admonitions of Ipuwer", in a Leiden papyrus, though supposed by Lange, Breasted, and Eduard Meyer to contain "messianic" elements, do not seem to refer to the future at all, as Gardiner and Gressmann¹¹ have recognized. It is indeed astonishing that so few analogies to Jewish eschatological ideas have yet been found. It may be confidently expected that more will be discovered in course of time, giving a firmer foundation for theories of foreign influence, even where they seem today quite plausible.

There is no logical necessity for supposing that the notion of a destruction of the world through fire and a new creation, admittedly based on very advanced astronomical knowledge, must have preceded the simpler thought of local catastrophes. The more clearly it is perceived that Yahwe was regarded as manifesting himself in the earthquake, the cyclone, the volcanic eruption, the shirokko, the fire from heaven, and the pestilence, the more natural it is to assume that such plagues were expected as punishments for sin, whether alone or in groups, long before they were looked upon as signs of an impending cosmic conflagration. Similarly, the blessings of

¹¹ *Afforientalische Texte und Bilder*, 1909, p. 210.

Yahwe, abundant harvests, plenty of flocks and herds, security against wild beasts, victories in war, rich booty, health, longevity and numerous progeny, would be expected as gracious rewards long before they were thought of in connection with a restoration of the world after a cosmic conflagration and a return of the terrestrial paradise. The day of Yahwe looked for by the contemporaries of Amos may very well have been a day of victory and consequent prosperity, and the day of wrath, that fearful day, with which an Amos and a Zephaniah threatened the people, need be no more than a day of terrible defeat at the hands of foreign foes. If Yahwe afflicts them, not only with war, but with all its hellish train, and hurls at them the plagues that are his ancient agencies, this does not necessarily imply that he destroys the whole universe. There is no hint before Isaiah, either in Judah or among the other nations, of a mythical Remnant. His expectation that only few Judaeans would survive the devastating judgment to turn to Yahwe, as those who perished failed to do, does not necessarily suggest an already extant eschatological conception, nor a return from exile, nor the salvation of the elect.

It is perfectly natural that Jeremiah should have interpreted his vision of the seething caldron as indicating the coming of an enemy from the north, that he should have been ignorant of the name of the Scythians approaching from that direction, of their alliance with Assyria, and of their purpose to attack Egypt rather than the Assyrian vassal-state, Judah, and that he should have been convinced that Yahwe was watching over the oracle he had given to fulfil it, and therefore applied it later to the Chaldaeans. Nowhere, except in the thought of Jeremiah and Zephaniah, is there an indication of any such northern enemy. The court-style, which has been so illuminatingly described by Gressmann, may indeed have been in part borrowed. But the modesty of small courts can scarcely be urged against Jewish originality. Isaiah may certainly have expected that a young woman looking forward to motherhood would call a son Immanuel, with the easy confidence which the overthrow of Damascus and Samaria would inspire, and that an Assyrian invasion would soon work such havoc in Judah

that a limited amount of milk and honey would suffice for the few survivors in a land reduced to a desert. Of a mother-goddess there is not the slightest suggestion; and though Palestine may not literally be flowing with milk and honey, this diet would not have to be imported from the land of the gods. A shoot springing up from the root of Jesse obviously presupposes the fall of the Davidic dynasty and the birth of a scion of the old royal family on which the legitimatist hope centered. Whether a "Götterkind" or not, it is not necessary to think that the dominion would rest on his shoulders before he had grown up. That the singer of the Servant of Yahwe, even in some passages, drew upon a cult-song, celebrating the death and resurrection of a foreign deity, seems an unnecessary hypothesis, however ingenious it may be. Semites love to represent nations as individuals; and the death and quickening to new life of a nation is a figure of speech that does not necessarily imply complete extinction and an absolutely new creation. If the resurrection had not been barred out from the eschatological scheme, one would not have been startled to find the bones in Ezekiel's valley interpreted as the *disjecta membra* of a god, possibly Osiris.

Seeing that the everlasting kingdom is to be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, or the exalted saints (קדש עליזין), the angelic nation, (and Gressmann himself admits that the one like a man in Dan. 7 13, as everywhere else in the book, is an angel), there appears to be no good reason why we should not regard Michael, the guardian angel of his people, as the highest of the angels. That he fights with the guardian angels and former gods of the world-powers does not militate against but rather strengthens this conclusion. He may indeed have been a god originally, as Gressmann thinks, and I suggested long ago. He was in course of time merged with the Messiah. No evidence has been brought forward to prove Gressmann's assertion that the Messiah was once a foreign god (p. 282). The hope of an Anointed One, either a righteous and victorious king who shall be a genuine descendant of David, as in the Psalms of Solomon, or a high-priestly ruler "of Aaron and Israel", as in the Zadokite

documents, is altogether explicable as a native growth. Neither in Daniel, nor in the Parables of Enoch, nor in Baruch, nor in IV Ezra can the original **בַּר נִשְׂא** "the man" have been a *title* of either the angel or the Messiah. No arguments urged from any side—and they have all been carefully considered—have changed my conviction as to the essential soundness of the position laid down for the first time in a paper presented to this Society twenty-seven years ago¹³ both as to the employment of the term **בַּר נִשְׂא** in the original Aramaic texts of these apocalypses and as to its use by Jesus. Especially Grotius, Lagarde, Arnold Meyer and Eerdmans had paved the way. The same conclusions were reached independently, though published later, by Lietzmann; and they subsequently met with the approval of Wellhausen. In various publications¹⁴ I have continued the discussion, dealing with such objections as have been made. It has more recently been suggested that Jesus may have used the term **בֶּן אָדָם**; this seems to be precluded by the definite article before the genitive in the Greek which evidently seeks to render very literally the Aramaic phrase, just as the Aramaic versions by their **בְּרָה וְנִבְרָא**, **בְּרָה וְנִשְׂא**, and **בְּרָה וְרַבִּי נִשְׂא** seek to render word for word the Greek. Dalman¹⁴ recognizes that **בַּר נִשְׂא** was used by Jesus, and that it was not a messianic title. He thinks that **אֲנִישׁ** rather than **בַּר אֲנִישׁ**, was used in Galilean Aramaic in the first century A. D. It is not impossible that one was used more frequently than the other, though in the absence of texts from that century it cannot be proved. His strange conjecture that, when it actually was employed at that time, as by Jesus, it was not understood, and not intended to be understood, in the sense it always has wherever it occurs in any of the Aramaic dialects certainly lacks all plausibility. In regard to the later apocalypses there is still too much confidence in the integrity and accuracy of late versions, themselves sometimes made from translations. This is not to be wondered at, when even in the interpretation of the prophetic books the simple duty is

¹³ Published in JBL, XV, 1896, pp. 36 ff.

¹³ *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, 1908; *The Prophet of Nazareth*, 1906, etc.

¹⁴ *Die Worte Jesu*, 1898.

neglected of comparing long-suspected passages with those that are all but universally recognized as genuine. It is too late to question that much mythical material of foreign origin was taken into the thought of Israel and adopted by its own religious genius, and there is no disposition to undervalue the real services rendered by scholars like Gunkel and Gressmann in detecting such alien elements. But some considerations are often overlooked. Before the prophets, and in spite of them, polytheism flourished in Israel; and there were native myths as well as foreign. Myths are what men say about the gods. What are the stories told about Yahwe himself but myths? Concerning the so-called "schools of the prophets" we know next to nothing. If the stories of Elijah and Elisha come from these "sons of the prophets", they reveal little that can be traced to a foreign origin, but have many mythical as well as legendary features. On the other hand, there is a tendency to underestimate the creative power and originality of the great prophets and of those who struggled with the problems of thought under the mighty ethical impulse they had given. In respect of man's condition after death the adoption of the Persian doctrine of a resurrection seems to have been prepared, not only by the belief that Yahwe had taken certain heroes directly up to heaven and brought others back from Sheol by empowering his prophets to raise them from the dead, but also by peculiar moral considerations. While Job himself resolutely brushes aside "the hope of man", he touches with infinite pathos upon the longing of the creator for the work of his hands that might lead him to call this creature back from Sheol into life. In the struggle for monotheism the simple explanation, in the appendix to Isaiah, that the other gods were simply stocks and stones did not satisfy. They were thought of as living beings reduced from their divine rank to be angels, among whom Yahwe must reign and rebellion be quelled. Thus justice was extended to the invisible world, and the way was paved for heaven and hell. In annotations to the prophecies against foreign nations, the idea of a return from exile was applied to some of them, and places of honor were given even to enemy nations by the side of Israel. When

the notion of a cosmic conflagration and a following restoration, an **תְּשׁוּבָה** corresponding to the **תְּשׁוּבָה**, appears in tangible form, the dominant note is the hope of a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. This ethical motivation is of the greatest importance.