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INTRODUCTION

THE NEW TESTAMENT IS ESCHATOLOGICAL. THE EARLY CHURCH which gave us our NT saw itself as an end-time phenomenon (cf. 1 Cor 10:11; Heb 9:16; 1 Pet 1:20; 1 John 2:18). In fact the NT breathes the air of fulfillment of the OT prophetic (eschatological) hope; and beyond that, anticipation of a yet greater fulfillment. Therefore, to understand the eschatological orientation of the NT is essentially to understand the NT. Conversely, not to understand the eschatological origin of the NT is really not to understand the NT.

At the center of NT eschatology is expectation—that is, anticipation of the final victory of God in the parousia (coming) of Jesus Christ.¹ In this monograph I focus primarily on understanding the eschatological expectation of the early (NT) church. In the process we shall examine attending motifs that were part of that hope.

In exploring this theme, I shall trace eschatological expectation in the way in which I understand the early church to have interpreted Jesus' message, particularly as found in the eschatological discourse of the Synoptic Gospels, in 2 Thessalonians 2, and in the Apocalypse.² But since the origins of NT expectation are firmly rooted in the OT and apparently to a significant extent in Jewish apocalypticism, I shall first give attention to both of these relevant

¹Cf. Moltmann, *Hope*, 325: "The risen Christ calls, sends, justifies and sanctifies men and in so doing gathers, calls and sends them into his eschatological future for the world." Eschatology "announces the future" of a present reality, *ibid.*, 17.

²The homogeneity of these three main examples of apocalyptic in the NT has been recognized by scholars, cf. Vielhauer, "Apocalyptic," 2.624f.; Moule, *Birth*, 151; Jeremias, *Theology*, 124; Dunn, *Unity*, 326–34; Ford, *Abomination*, 254.

literatures. We must reckon with the fact that while early Christian hope is rooted in the prophetic hope of the OT, the NT reflects a *transformed* hope. In part this may be explained in light of apocalyptic Judaism, which both preceded and accompanied the Christian era. We will also consider ways in which the NT hope sharply contrasts with Jewish apocalyptic thought, and then ponder the reasons why.

In Part One I look at the development of the origins of expectation as found in the OT and especially in the writings of the prophets. In order to appreciate the fundamental role of the OT in NT eschatology, we will need to identify certain NT themes that are an extension of OT thought.

New Testament fulfillment largely centers on the messianic hope (e.g., Acts 3:18–26; 1 Pet 1:10–12). Behind this lies the fulfillment of a covenant relationship which Yahweh established with Israel. The early church traced the roots of its faith back to three prominent OT figures: Abraham, David, and Moses. A covenant relationship that distinctly determined the future of Israel is associated with each of these men. Consequently, the fulfillment of the covenants relates to these three pillars of OT faith. This may be seen in various ways.

(1) It is clear that realization of Israel's eschatological (messianic) hope amounts to fulfillment of covenant promises made to Abraham and to David (cf. Luke 1:32–33, 54–55, 67–79; Acts 3:26; Rom 4:13–18; Gal 3:6–9, 14, 19). The NT abounds with references to these two OT heroes to whom promises for Israel's glorious future were made. The critical role of Abraham and David in the NT hope is underscored by the linking of these two in the NT. They appear together in Matt 1:1 as heading the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah. Eschatological fulfillment revolves around these two in Luke 1 (vv. 32–33 with vv. 68–73). In Rom 4 Paul uses both (and only these) as models of justification by faith. In Acts 2–3 Abraham and David, along with Moses, are the key OT figures around which fulfillment of the messianic salvific blessing is interpreted.

(2) Fulfillment is also seen against the backdrop of Yahweh's covenant with Israel through Moses. But here the Sinaitic legal code is more conspicuous than is the covenant promise. Consequently fulfillment is more markedly type to antitype, with contrast highlighted (e.g., the new covenant versus old in 2 Cor 3:7–18; Heb 8–10). Nevertheless the new covenant with life in the Spirit provides fulfillment of the moral and ethical dimensions of the Mosaic law (e.g., 2 Cor 3:3–6 with Rom 8:1–4 and Gal 5:13–18). Jesus' own prophetic ministry is in fact understood as modeled after that of Moses (Acts 3:22f.).

(3) It is the uniform testimony of the NT that the messianic mission which started in the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth preaching the gospel of the kingdom will only be consummated with the future coming of the Son of man (the parousia) in his glorious kingdom. This will usher in the ultimate fulfillment of the OT eschatological hope, howbeit, a more glorious and radically transformed hope.

In Part Two I deal with selected Jewish apocalyptic documents, both canonical (Daniel) and extra-canonical. These help further to explain the background of early church eschatological expectation. At times there appears in the literature an apocalyptic hope wherein the present earth gives way to a future world that is radically different in its suprahistorical and transcendental character. It is somewhat more prominent in the later Jewish works that are contemporaneous with those of the late first century Christian church. This section is first concerned with the earlier Jewish works, starting with Daniel, and then turns to three late first century (or early second century?) Jewish apocalypses. The greater attention I give to Jewish apocalyptic literature is hopefully justified in the interesting and somewhat controversial background it provides to early Christian eschatology, especially since this is often not sufficiently considered in background studies of the NT.

In Part Three I trace eschatological expectation through the key NT writings (see above) in the chronological order in which I perceive them to have been written. The accent is clearly on apocalyptic, as a significant part of that worldview becomes the locus of NT expectation. To speak of the expectation of Jesus and the early church immediately raises a number of critical questions for scholars. Especially in the fore is the question of the extent to which the early church and the Evangelists have reinterpreted the original Jesus message. In this study, my intent is not to explore fully this relevant subject, though there is a brief discussion in an excursus at the end of Part Three. Rather, I shall work with the NT documents as they stand, but nevertheless do so with sensitivity to identifying the tradition which apparently lies behind the documents. We shall look at the use the Evangelists have made of the gospel tradition which they received, which is commonly called "the Jesus tradition."

With Part Four I summarize and draw conclusions from this discussion of the progressive development of eschatological expectation in its varied historical settings. Here I include hermeneutical implications for understanding the relevance of biblical eschatology today, along with a final challenge.

As we track eschatological expectation through the OT prophetic literature, through Jewish apocalyptic documents, and then through the indicated NT literature, it will become evident that a near-expectation/delay tension is often present. I believe that the historical and theological reasons for this are instructive for us, as we seek to relate to biblical hope today.

Our investigation leads to several questions. Why is the NT hope so different from that of ancient Israel? What are the pivotal points which account for a transformed hope by the time of the Christian era? How decisive was Jewish apocalypticism in shaping early church expectation? What hermeneutical implications might there be for the church today in reckoning with a biblical hope? These are not new questions. However, consideration of tension between near expectation and delay, which occurs throughout much of the pertinent literature, has seldom received the attention that it deserves. I believe that this is important for understanding NT expectation and how this NT hope might inform the contemporary church.

I am aware that the contemporary background against which explorations such as this are undertaken is that of a revival of interest in apocalypticism.

On the scholarly level, there is much ongoing research in the ancient literature, with at times a delving into the relevance of such studies for the contemporary world. For example an international colloquium on apocalypticism convened in Uppsala, August 12–17, 1979 resulted in a work first published in 1983 and revised in 1989, entitled *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*.³

On the popular level, we have witnessed great interest in “end of the world” predictions, especially as we approach the end of the century and another millennium. For example, in 1993 Russell Chandler, formerly a religion writer for the Los Angeles Times, published a book entitled, *The End of the World: A View Through Time*.⁴ This volume surveys end time predictions historically and reflects current interest in the same. In an earlier work, the bulk of which was submitted as a doctoral dissertation to the University of Chicago in the '70s, Timothy P. Weber observes that “premillennialism suddenly became big news” after 175 public radio stations in

³Edited by D. Hellholm (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 2d ed., 1989).

⁴Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant Publications, 1993. Cf. Cohn, *Pursuit*, which surveys movements of eschatological anticipation in Europe in the latter Middle Ages.

1984 aired a documentary on “Ronald Reagan and the Prophecy of Armageddon.”⁵ In *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*, Paul Boyer, history professor at the University of Wisconsin, asserts that “prophecy belief is far more central in American thought than intellectual and cultural historians have recognized.”⁶ He further states that since World War II popularizers of dispensational premillennialism have played a large role in shaping public opinion on a wide range of topics, such as the Soviet Union and the Common Market.⁷

For the following study the English biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, unless otherwise indicated. Similarly, for the pseudepigraphical references I commonly use *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, two volumes, edited by James H. Charlesworth (1983, 1985). The Dead Sea Scroll references are from Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 1987 edition, unless otherwise indicated. When Hebrew is given for the Scrolls, I refer to Eduard Lohse, *Die Texte aus Qumran* (1971). For the ancient historians Josephus, Tacitus, Plutarch, Suetonius, Dio Cassius, and Eusebius, I have used the Loeb Classical Library series.

⁵*Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1975–1982* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979, expanded edition 1983, 1987), viii.

⁶Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992, ix.

⁷*Ibid.*

1

EMERGENCE OF EXPECTATION

AMONG ITS SEVERAL NEIGHBORING NATIONS IN THE ANCIENT world, pre-exilic Israel was evidently the only culture which had a growing national eschatology that was rooted in history.¹ Despite its disappointed hopes over the centuries, from the pre-exilic era on, Israel never lost hope of a revival of the Davidic-Solomonic kingdom in all its grandeur and dominance. Furthermore, a radical reinterpretation of this hope in early Christianity in relation to the kingdom of God eventuated in both a vivid awareness of fulfillment and also further expectation within NT Christianity. In fact, the faith of OT Israel has resulted in three great world religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Nothing of the sort can be said of the religions of the ancient Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Hittites, Canaanites, or any other culture of the ancient Near East. Why did Israel's monotheistic faith remain, and in particular why did its eschatological expectation continue to thrive, eventually giving birth to Christianity?

¹Working from an OT perspective, our definition of "eschatology" includes the last days of history as well as a new world that is inaugurated by God through human mediation. At the same time our definition allows for an "apocalyptic" eschatology that is an outgrowth of Israel's earlier hope. Some scholars have defined "eschatology" solely in apocalyptic terms, with a "cosmic" and "catastrophic" end of the world and an entirely new order emerging independent of human activity, e.g., Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 125f. Such OT prophecies are regarded as post-exilic, *ibid.*, 126–33. For our use of the term, see cf. e.g., von Rad, *OT Theology*, 2.113–19, esp. 118; cf. Bright, *Covenant*, 18f.; Clements, *Prophecy*, 113f.; Koch, *Prophets*, 2.117f. McCullough says the term is relative and conditioned by the age in which it appears, "Israel's Eschatology," 86.

Israel's Sense of Salvation History

Israel's awareness of history as the scene of God's mighty acts in its past was the backbone of faith for the future. The exodus deliverance was *the* act to which Israel looked back. The monumental importance of the exodus for Israel is underscored in the attention given it in the Pentateuch. The account covers Exodus 1–15, culminating in a hymn of praise to Yahweh in chapter 15. Except for the Joseph story in Genesis (which explains why Israel was in Egypt), no other single episode within the first six books of the OT receives the same amount of attention.² Memory of the exodus events was preserved in Israel's annual Passover observance (e.g., Exod 12; Deut 16:1–8; Josh 5:10), although for some centuries the Passover was apparently not observed (2 Kgs 23:21–23). The prophetic writings helped to preserve memory of the exodus (e.g., 1 Sam 2:27; 10:18; 12:6–8; 1 Kgs 8:9, 16; 2 Kgs 17:7; Hos 11:1; Isa 11:16; Jer 2:6; 11:7). Also the exodus was commemorated in Israel's hymnology (e.g., Pss 78:9–20, 42–53; 105:26–45; 106:6–33; 114:1).

The deliverance by Yahweh from Egyptian captivity was the foundation of Israel's national birth, which in turn formed the basis for covenant relation with its God (cf. 2 Sam 7:6, 23–24; 1 Kgs 8:53; Jer 7:25). Yahweh's prior saving act was followed by a covenant, often called the Mosaic or Sinaitic covenant, in which Israel pledged obedience to the God who had rescued them out of bondage (cf. Exod 19:4–6; 20:1ff.; 24:1–8). But deliverance was at the focal point of its faith.³ Yahweh was the God who saves his people. Subsequent acts of Yahweh on behalf of his people would form a path of salvation history and thus stimulate hope for the future.⁴ Eventually Israel's sense of destiny would clearly extend far beyond its ethnic boundaries and include other peoples.

Israel's Covenant Initiated

At the heart of ancient Israel's tradition and expectation is the idea of covenant. Covenant promises to the Patriarchs are rehearsed

²Dentan, *Knowledge of God*, 52.

³Hanson says that Israel's origin through the Egyptian deliverance is "the most ubiquitous theme of Hebrew scripture, permeating hymns, historical narrative, and legal documents from the earliest to the latest point of oral and then written transmission," *People Called*, 11. See also Noth, *History*, 111f.

⁴Cf. von Rad, *OT Theology*, 2.411.

again and again in Genesis. Then initial fulfillment of covenant promise is detailed, as Yahweh enters into covenant with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (esp. Exod 19–24).

The Hebrew term for “covenant” (בְּרִית) is found frequently throughout much of the OT as descriptive of Israel’s relation to Yahweh. Even where the term is absent the concept is often presupposed. There are of course several closely related themes that run throughout the OT such as election, promise—fulfillment, communion, and redemption. These themes speak of Israel’s special relationship with Yahweh, which the OT specifies as a covenant relationship.⁵ While recognizing that there are various themes which unify the OT (and in fact the Bible), we may not be too far from the mark in saying that more than any other single theme, the idea of covenant comes the closest to explaining the events and the significance of those events from the standpoint of the biblical authors.⁶

We have already seen how Israel’s national identity as a covenant people was anchored in its memory of the exodus event. In order to explain why this covenant relationship between God and the ancient people of Israel was established in the first place, the Pentateuch introduces covenants made centuries earlier between God and the patriarchal ancestors of the Israelites.⁷ Here the focus is not mainly

⁵Kutsch, *Verheissung*, contends in a widely recognized study that the biblical meaning of בְּרִית is “duty” or “obligation,” note summary on 203, 205. This speaks of promise with reference to God and of law with reference to humankind. At this point Nicholson critiques Kutsch for holding that a bilateral significance of “covenant” between God and Israel is only a secondary or exceptional use of the term, *God and His People*, 89–109.

⁶Cf. Nicholson, *God and His People*, esp. vii–viii; Goldingay, *Theological Diversity*, 60; Eichrodt, *Theology*, 1.17f. Note Hubbard, “Hope,” 47: “Scarcely anything more firmly underscores the historical nature of Israel’s eschatology than [the] emphasis on covenants.” The concept of “covenant” seems to have been a metaphor rather analogous to treaty in the ancient world. Mendenhall’s seminal work, *Law and Covenant*, orig. published in the *Biblical Archaeologist*, 1954, argued that the concept was borrowed from the ancient world. Since, his theory has come under heavy fire, see survey in McCarthy, *OT Covenant*; however McCarthy himself argues for the “analogy” theory, *Treaty and Covenant*, esp. ch. 13; cf. Levenson, “Davidic Covenant,” 205. In assuming as an underlying unity of the OT we are not discounting the diversity which has provided much grist for the mill for OT specialists.

⁷Some scholars have turned in part to the old Wellhausen hypothesis that a well-developed covenant theology in ancient Israel does not pre-date the eighth or seventh centuries, cf. Nicholson, *God and His People*. This is based on: (1) a particular source critical interpretation and late dating of relevant Genesis and Exodus texts, (2) observation that בְּרִית is scarce in the

upon the demand of obedience, but upon the promises of God for Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants. The promises pertain largely to having: innumerable descendants (cf. Gen 12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 17:2, 4–6, 16; 18:18; 22:16–17; 26:3–4; 28:13–14; 35:11; 46:3); a homeland (Gen 12:1, 7; 13:14–15; 15:7, 13, 16, 18–19; 17:8; 26:2–4; 28:13–15; 35:12; Exod 3:8, 17; 6:8; 23:23, 31; 34:24); to being a source (or standard) of blessing to other peoples of the earth (Gen 12:2–3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14);⁸ to identifying a unique relationship between God and his people. This last promise constitutes the very heart of covenant relationship, even if it identifies a covenant relationship only in the broadest sense. It is found repeatedly throughout the OT in various phrases such as “your God,” “the God of Israel,” “my people,” etc. In the patriarchal covenant prom-

eight-century prophets, and (3) the supposition that the Deuteronomist literature (usually regarded as including Deuteronomy—2 Kings in the Hebrew Bible) dates from the seventh and sixth centuries. Cf. Nicholson; Peritt, *Bundestheologie*; Kutsch, *Verheissung*. However, Zimmerli, “History,” 378–80, understands the covenant concept to date from the Mosaic period, but sees it receding and then reappearing in the Deuteronomist era. McCarthy, *Treaty*, is convinced of the antiquity of the Sinai covenant which has “very old origins and a long history of development,” 277–79. Clements, *Abraham*, stresses the influence of the Abrahamic covenant in Israelite tradition and its relation to the *later* Davidic covenant. In a review of Nicholson’s book, J. L. Mays in effect speaks to all theories which “post date” an Israelite covenant tradition to the eighth or seventh century by stating, “the question of emergence of Israel in history is left without a credible convincing answer,” *JBL* 107 (1988), 120. A careful investigation of covenant origins lies beyond the scope of this study. It is important to note for our purposes that the eschatological expectation which emerged from the times of the pre-exilic prophets (to be discussed) was rooted in ideas that belonged to Israel’s awareness of a special relation to Yahweh. I take the position that this in turn was determined by memory of its distinctive past.

⁸Albrektson indicates that it is debated whether these texts refer to nations “being blessed” (cf. KJV, NASB, NIV, RSV for the Niphal verb, in a note, NRSV) or in a proverbial way “blessing themselves” (RSV, NRSV for the Hithpael verb, in a note) by Abraham and/or his descendants. The verb is in the Niphal form in 12:3; 18:18; 28:14, and in the Hithpael form in 22:18 and 26:4. See his discussion in *History*, 78–81. The LXX however uniformly renders the verb in these texts as passive, as does the NT when quoting (Acts 3:25; Gal 3:8). Favoring rather the reflexive sense, Albrektson contends that no “divine plan” is suggested, as would otherwise be the case. We may say that either way Abraham and his descendants (from the Genesis texts alone) are seen as in some manner positively affecting the peoples of the earth, either as the source or the standard of blessing. As time passed the idea at least included Abraham’s descendants being the *source* of blessing to the world (cf. Isa 19:24 and the LXX of the Genesis texts), cf. von Rad, *Genesis*, 160.

ises the idea is introduced in Gen 17:7f. (“to be God to you [Abram] and to your descendants after you. . . . I will be their God.”). It recurs in the patriarchal narratives in phrases such as “the God of Abraham”; “the God of your father”; “the LORD your God” (e.g., Gen 27:20; 28:13; 31:29; 49:25). In 22:17b Yahweh also promises that Abraham’s descendants will possess the gate of their enemies. This particular promise will later be recognized as noteworthy when we track the eschatological hope of ancient Israel.⁹

From the above we can see how the covenant promises explain to Israel the mighty acts of Yahweh on its behalf. This is plainly stated in the Pentateuch itself (e.g., Exod 2:6–8, 16–18; 6:2–8; Num 14:22–25; Deut 6:20–23; 9:4–5). Probably more than anything else, this understanding of covenant relationship with Yahweh served to define Israel’s national consciousness. Wedded as it was to the history of Yahweh’s mighty acts on Israel’s behalf, awareness of such covenant relationship made possible expectation of the future great event often referred to as the day of Yahweh. In fact this consciousness eventuated in an eschatological hope which was evidently unprecedented in the ancient Near Eastern world, however imperfectly it may have been popularly held in its earliest forms. Other peoples, particularly in Mesopotamia, may have had some awareness of an unfolding of their history under the hand of their pagan gods; but Israel’s sense of destiny remained unparalleled in notable ways, as far as we know.¹⁰

⁹Clines has extensive listings of pentateuchal references to covenant promises, including a large number of “allusions,” *Theme*, 32–43. Clines understands the theme of the Pentateuch to be fulfillment (or partial fulfillment) of the patriarchal promise; *ibid.*, esp. 31, cf. 60, 89, 91.

¹⁰Cf. Hubbard, “Hope,” 46f. It has been common to assert Israel’s historical uniqueness and its unique sense of history, e.g., Noth, *History*, 2f.; Vriezen, *Outline*, 39; Wright, *Environment*, esp. 71f. Others have critiqued this approach for not sufficiently acknowledging an ancient sense of divine activity in history elsewhere and especially in Mesopotamia, e.g., Albrektson, *History*, much of the book, but note esp. 95–97. However Albrektson himself is inclined to conclude that historical events were perceived in Israel as divine manifestations in a way unparalleled among Israel’s neighbors (115). He adds that “the deity’s saving acts in history are nowhere afforded so central a position in the cult as in Israel,” where they dominate in festal celebration (116). Saggs, *Encounter*, supports Albrektson’s main critique, but also says that in Israel’s prophetic movement the bounds of Near Eastern religions were burst (and also those of traditional Yahwism) in the universality of the messages, chs. 3, 5, and in particular pp. 151f. Somewhat less sympathetic responses to Albrektson may be found in Porter, “OT Historiography,” and

Development of a “Golden Age” of Hope

Three Early Oracles

There are three poetical portions of the Pentateuch which reflect confidence for a successful future, portions which are often recognized as derived from ancient tradition prior to being recorded. These are the Blessing of Jacob (Gen 49); the oracles of Balaam (in Num 23–24), and the Blessing of Moses (Deut 33).

The so-called Blessing of Jacob (“blessing” is not in the text itself) is a mixed bag, but it emphasizes Judah’s rulership (vv. 9–12) and Joseph’s help and blessing from the Almighty (vv. 22–26). The possibility or likelihood of a pre-monarchic life setting of the Gen 49 oracles is often acknowledged, based on internal evidence of the sayings themselves.¹¹ Thus these oracles provide some reason to trace a future hope to the earlier history of Israel.

In the Balaam oracles the prophet finds it impossible to pronounce misfortune on Israel, for God is with them (23:7–10, 18–24); Balaam desires an “end” (אַחֲרֵיהֶם) for himself like that destined for Israel, who are like the dust of the earth for number (23:10; cf. the promise to Abram in 13:16 and repeated in 28:14); Israel will destroy her enemies and those who bless her will be blessed, even as those who curse her will be cursed (24:3–9, especially vv. 8f.; cf. Gen 12:3; see also Num 24:17–19 with the promise to Abraham in Gen 22:17b). The canonical context is very appropriate, as Israel is about to enter the land of promise and experience fulfillment of covenant blessings. The feeling of national confidence, success, prosperity, and contentment in the poems has been considered a strong point in favor of their antiquity.¹²

Lambert, “Destiny.” The latter concludes “it is a fact that many prophets looked forward to something that had not occurred in human history prior to their time. It is this idea which gave to the Hebrews a real concept of history, which the ancient Mesopotamians lacked,” 72.

¹¹Cf. Bright, *Covenant*, 45; Speiser, *Genesis*, 371; Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, 221. Aalders says: “It is generally accepted that we are dealing with some of the oldest records that were incorporated into the ‘J’ source,” *Genesis*, 2.267.

¹²Gray, *Numbers*, 313f., who sees these poems closely connected with the Blessing of Jacob, (Gen 49) and the Blessing of Moses (Deut 33). Albright, “Oracles,” has had some following in understanding these oracles to predate the “J” and “E” documents, in which they are usually considered to be found, cf. Budd, *Numbers*, 258f.; Bright, *Covenant*, 45; Noth, *Numbers*, 189 with 8, on the ch. 24 discourses. In fact Albright has said that the oracles are most likely a reflection of Balaam’s day (“Oracles”). Sturdy, *Numbers*, 158, suggests the eleventh or tenth century and composed by “J” himself.

In the Blessing of Moses (Deut 33), both success against enemies and agrarian prosperity are reflected (vv. 7, 11–16, 24f.). Verses 26–29 emphasize these blessings for all Israel, with prime attention given to its success over enemies. For a variety of historical and linguistic reasons some scholars prefer a date around the tenth century or earlier. The positive anticipation of the future well suits the early history of the monarchy.¹³

A number of poems, including those presented above, have been placed in “the earliest period of Israel’s history” in light of similarities with Canaanite literature from Ras Shamra (fourteenth century).¹⁴

We thus see the makings of a golden age hope from possibly a pre-monarchic period. This in turn is all the more understandable if Israel was aware of being in covenant relation with Yahweh, as we have discussed above. In any case the hope represented in the above three pentateuchal poems became part of the written tradition of Israel. This should help us to appreciate the strength of Israel’s eschatological hope when it fully blossomed in the exilic and post-exilic times.

The Davidic Throne and Covenant

More than any other, the Davidic-Solomonic era proved to establish a golden age hope in Israel. The territorial boundaries of Israel were greatly enlarged. King David had subjugated vast territories in victory after victory (2 Sam 8). Twice in this chapter the author of Samuel says that Yahweh gave victory to David “wherever he went” (vv. 6, 14). Subsequently the nation flourished in many ways in the reign of Solomon. This is graphically implied in the concise statement of 1 Kings 4:20–22:

Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea; they ate and drank and were happy. Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt; they brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life.

This era of political and economic greatness was undoubtedly viewed in succeeding generations as a considerable fulfillment of

¹³ E.g., Driver, *Deuteronomy*, 387f.; von Rad says the ninth or early eighth century, *Deuteronomy*, 208. All do not agree on the linguistic evidence, see Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, 397, who puts the collection as a whole in the eighth century, but with the collection also in existence a considerable time prior to its later incorporation.

¹⁴ Bright, *History*, 143, with notes. Bright provides representative documentation from the secondary literature for the various poems.

covenant blessing, and in particular, fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. In the text itself the narrator makes a “fulfilled covenant” interpretation of the Solomonic era fairly apparent.¹⁵ In chapter 4 a detailing of Solomon’s servants and of provisions for the royal household is twice interrupted with descriptions of Judah and Israel which hark back to covenant promises (vv. 20f. and vv. 24f.).

First, the population count is compared with the innumerable sand of the sea (v. 20 with Gen 22:17; 32:12 [MT 32:13]). Although “sand by the sea” is used a few times elsewhere in the OT to indicate population proliferation (or a large crowd) without covenant fulfillment being indicated or made clear (Jos 11:4; Jud 7:12; 1 Sam 13:5; 2 Sam 17:11; Hab 1:9), the phrase is also found in the eighth century prophets and later, with covenant associations (Hos 1:10 [MT 2:1]; Jer 33:22; and possibly Isa 10:22; 48:19). In view of other covenant comparisons in our 1 Kings 4 passage, the likelihood is that “sand by sea” is to be interpreted similarly.

Second, the territorial boundaries now under Solomon’s rule compare with those mentioned in the Abrahamic covenant (cf. Gen 15:18; Josh 1:4). It is true that Israel itself does not occupy land from the Euphrates to the border of Egypt. But does not reference to these boundaries at least indicate movement toward covenant fulfillment? This appears to be the point of the author in stating these particular boundaries.¹⁶ At this point we also note that partial fulfillment could easily stimulate hope toward greater fulfillment in the ensuing generations.

Third, Israel’s hegemony over surrounding peoples and the resultant security is emphasized in 1 Kings 4 (vv. 20b–21, 24f.) and corresponds with Abraham’s descendants possessing the gate of their enemies (Gen 22:17).

This high point in Israel’s history would serve as a kind of model for centuries to come. David’s throne would endure and

¹⁵From a source critical or at least a tradition historical viewpoint, this of course presupposes the prior existence and awareness of the Abrahamic covenant in some form, cf. Clements, *Abraham*, ch. 4. The alternative would probably be to understand later authors composing the Abrahamic covenant almost entirely in light of the glories of the Davidic-Solomonic era, and thus reversing the canonical context. Cf. note 9 above.

¹⁶Cf. Bright, *Covenant*, 55, with n. 4. By the same token, scholars have dated the “J” source of Genesis from the tenth century, partly because the land-promises in Genesis are “fulfilled” in this period, e.g., Clements, *Abraham*, ch. 2, and pp. 59f. Clements also believes an earlier form of the land promise was limited to south Canaan, 21.

future kings would sit upon it (e.g., Isa 9:7 [MT 9:6]; 16:5; Jer 13:13; 22:2, 4; 33:15, 17). With the emergence of an eschatological hope, a new “David” would sit on the throne (Jer 30:9; Ezek 34:24; 37:24; Hos 3:5). The hope became messianic at this point and of course reaches into the New Testament, where Christ is the “son of David” (e.g., Matt 1:1; 9:27 = Mark 10:48 = Luke 18:38, 39; Matt 12:23; 21:9, 15; cf. Rom 1:3; Rev 5:5; 22:16).

The enduring character of the Davidic dynasty is traced by biblical authors to a covenant which Yahweh made with David, a covenant apparently found first in 2 Sam 7:1–17 (though not termed a covenant there), and then in Pss 89; 132:10–12; Jer 33:19–21. These diverse references are further evidence that the Davidic covenant became quite well rooted in Israelite tradition.¹⁷ The covenant has certain parallels with the Abrahamic covenant, as follows:

1. David’s name is to be great, as was that of Abram (2 Sam 7:9; Gen 12:2);
2. Israel is to have its own dwelling place and is to be secure from/triumphant over its enemies (2 Sam 7:9–11; Ps 89:20–27 [MT 89:21–28]; Gen 12:3, 7; 13:14–15; 17:8; 22:17);
3. Perpetuity of the Davidic dynasty is underscored, as is perpetuity of the Abrahamic covenant (2 Sam 7:12–16; Ps 89:4, 20, 29, 36 [MT 89:5, 21, 30, 37]; Gen 17:7f., 19);
4. Intimacy of relationship with Yahweh is stated, although in 2 Sam this is *immediately* associated with chastisement when the relationship is violated (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 89:26; Gen 17:7f.).

It is evident that the Davidic covenant stresses what Yahweh will do, and thus it is a covenant of promise, as is the Abrahamic covenant. However, as with the Abrahamic covenant, the disobedient are punished (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 89:30–32 [MT 89:31–33]; cf. Gen 17:14). But neither covenant is ever to be finally abrogated (2 Sam 7:15f.; Ps 89:28–37 [MT 89:29–38]; Gen 17:7–9). In light of the foregoing similarities of the two covenants, it appears that the covenant with David afforded an *extension* of the Abrahamic covenant. It was for an age in which earlier promises of numerous descendants and acquisition of the land had been/were being realized, and in which a monarchy now existed.¹⁸ The continuity between these two

¹⁷Cf. Hubbard’s succinct detailed discussion in “Hope,” 39–42. Clements refers to the 2 Sam 7 passage as “the seed-bed” of the messianic hope, “Messianic Hope,” 12.

¹⁸Clements, *Abraham*, ch. 5, concludes that the form of the Davidic covenant was probably influenced by recollection in Jerusalem of the ancient

covenants highlights hope and thus helps to explain how the NT is able to understand both covenants together as pointing to the coming of Christ (e.g., Matt 1:1).

How does the Davidic covenant compare with the poems of Genesis 49, Numbers 23f., and Deuteronomy 33 (discussed above) in setting forth the hope of Israel? One theme is fairly pervasive: Israel's success over its enemies. With the success of the Davidic-Solomonic monarchy, coupled with the Davidic covenant which promised future success, hope for a golden age was set. In this age Israel would dominate over its enemies and enjoy prosperity.

Demise of the hegemony of Solomon's tenth century kingdom (cf. 1 Kgs 14:25–28), must have brought a longing for the “good old days.” And the fact that the monarchy in the southern kingdom of Judah never departed from the Davidic line would seem to testify to the seriousness with which Judah took the covenant promise.¹⁹ This promise, together with the frequent religious infidelity under succeeding kings in Judah, surely fueled, if not triggered, the eschatological and messianic hope of prophetic inspiration as generations passed (cf. Jer 23:5–6 = 33:14–16 with 23:1f.).

Israel's hope is also reflected in Psalm 72. The psalm (difficult to date) anticipates justice in the land, dominion over enemies, and agrarian prosperity. These themes became prominent in messianic expectation (cf. Isa 9:1–7 [MT 8:23–9:6]; 11:1–9; Jer 30:8–11, 18–22; 31:10–14; Ezek 34:24–28). Psalm 72 concludes with a prayer that through the rule of the king all nations will be blessed (v. 17). This corresponds with the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4) and helps to confirm that the Davidic covenant was regarded as an extension of the Abrahamic covenant.

covenant with Abraham. He speculates that the Abraham covenant tradition was located in Hebron (cf. Gen 13:18; 23:29; 35:27), where David had close ties at the start of his reign over Judah (cf. 2 Sam 2:1–4). I do not find Clements discussing how this might relate to the biblical explanation that the Davidic covenant came from the prophetic inspiration of Nathan (cf. 2 Sam 7:4ff.).

¹⁹Bright, *Covenant*, 57ff., regarding 2 Samuel 7:12–16. (This need not depreciate recognition of the divine hand in history sovereignly seeing through the promise made in 2 Sam 7:16.) Bright here reckons with the debate over the date of the passage, but observes that reference to the Davidic Covenant is found in 2 Samuel 23:5, “which is in all probability of tenth-century date,” 57. Cf. Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 234–37. Cross believes the oracle of 2 Samuel 7 “in poetic form . . . goes back to Davidic times,” *ibid.*, 255; see 241–64.

We ought not to think that the messianic hope was limited to what was experienced in the Davidic-Solomonic reign. Psalm 72 itself would seem to go beyond this in its prayer for a universal kingdom and blessing for all nations (vv. 8, 11, 17).²⁰ But the conception of Yahweh's promise to bless His people had now entered a new dimension, and hope for the future became more concrete along the lines so gloriously displayed in Israel's first golden age.

Expectation in Pre-exilic (Eighth Century) Prophets

The earliest evidence of truly eschatological expectation in Israel and Judah is probably in the eighth century B.C. prophets. There we first witness the prophetic warning of a dissolution of the existing kingdom(s), but also the promise of a new start.²¹ Beyond judgment the prophets, both pre- and post-exilic, foresaw a new age. The former times would terminate in a display of Yahweh's righteous anger, but he would yet fulfill his covenant promises in the new day.

Amos

We begin with what is often considered the initial reference to the day of Yahweh, Amos 5:18–20. It is impossible to know just when Israel began to think of a day of Yahweh in conjunction with its hope. But it is clear that Israel anticipates Yahweh's blessing in such a day. We have already surveyed the likely reasons for this hope. In 5:18–20 the eighth century B.C. prophet points his finger at Israel for violation of its covenant vows.

Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! Why would you have the day of the LORD? It is darkness, and not light [v. 18].

The concept of a day of Yahweh seems to have its origin in the idea of Yahweh "visiting" (בָּקַעַ) his people or the nations. This was

²⁰ Cf. Bright, *Covenant*, 66. Bright also points to an allusion of the river of paradise in Psalm 46:4 (cf. Gen 2:10–14; Ezek 47:1–12; Zech 14:8; Rev 22:1), *ibid.*, 68.

²¹ Cf. our definition of eschatology on p. 1. Vriezen finds four OT views of the future: "pre-eschatological" (prior to the eighth century prophets); "proto-eschatological" (eighth-century prophets to Jeremiah); "eschatological with reference to the near future" (exilic, including Deutero-Isaiah); "transcendental-eschatological" (the apocalyptic period of "dualistic eschatology"), *Outline*, 456–58; cf. Ladd, *Presence*, 55f.; Frost, *OT Apocalyptic*, 46–50, 233–44.

often for purposes of blessing or deliverance (e.g., Gen 21:1; Exod 3:16; Ruth 1:6; Jer 27:22; Zeph 2:7); but frequently it was for punishment, especially seen in the prophets (e.g., Exod 32:34; Ps 89:32 [MT 89:33]; Isa 13:11; 23:17; Jer 6:15; 13:21; 44:13; Hos 1:4; Amos 3:14; Zech 10:3). Note in particular Amos 3:14 (“*on the day I punish* [יָרַקָה] Israel”). The prophets warned of a day of judgment that was coming instead of the golden age that was yet hoped for by a backslidden Israel. This is clearly the dominant message of Amos. See especially 3:1–2 and the themes of reproof and warning throughout the book. In the conclusion of the book (9:11–15) there is a sudden turn of events with the triumphant restoration of Davidic rule (v. 11, particularly interesting in that Amos addressed the northern kingdom of Israel) and the promise of agrarian prosperity.²²

We should observe that the prophetic correction of popular expectation amounts to a delay in fulfillment of the popular hope. Apparently the political/military success and prosperity of the eighth century B.C. had rekindled “golden age” hopes.²³ Thus we see a significant number in Israel “desiring” the day of Yahweh, even though their era was already a time of national material success (Amos 5:18)!

Hosea

The prophetic linking of Yahweh repudiating faithless Israel with Israel’s restoration in covenant faithfulness is seen most vividly in Hosea. Note 1:9 (“Then the LORD said, ‘Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not my people and I am not your God’”) with the following verse (“Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea . . . and in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ it shall be said to them, ‘Children of the living God’”). Both Israel and Judah were to be restored (1:11 [MT 2:2]). The salvation message of Hosea continues in 2:14–23 [MT 2:16–25]. But chapter 11 is even more revealing of Yahweh’s love and compassion. Observe the abrupt sequence of ideas (dare we say emotion?) in

²²Many think these verses are a later addition, as they are without analogy earlier in Amos, e.g., Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 351–53. If this is correct, then there is no clear note of restoration in Amos. Note discussion in Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, 236–39, who observes thematic contrasts with the earlier portions of Amos and holds out for the reasonableness of vv. 9–15 being original with Amos. Cf. Stuart, who cites orthographic evidence, *Hosea–Jonah*, 397.

²³For the return of “success” in the time of Israel’s Jeroboam II, note 2 Kings 14:23–29; cf. Amos 3:15; 5:11; 6:1, 4–6; Hosea 1:8–12; 4:7; 10:1, 13f.; 13:15.

verses 1–9: “When Israel was a child I loved him” (v. 1); “yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk” (v. 3); “they shall return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me” (v. 5); “how can I give you up, O Ephraim! . . . My compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger” (v. 8f.); “they shall go after the LORD . . . they shall come trembling like birds from Egypt . . . I will return them to their homes” (v. 10f.). Hosea’s own personal life was a kind of parabolic enactment of this covenant love of Yahweh for his people, which found expression in promises of salvation after judgment:

And the LORD said to me, “Go, love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress; just as the LORD loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins”(3:1).

Thus Hosea is characterized more with the message of hope beyond judgment than is Amos. The sequence of judgment and then blessing is in fact in all the eighth century B.C. prophetic books as they now stand. Many contemporary scholars, however, believe that such passages are later additions to the respective works, with the post-exilic age often said to be reflected. Thus even though we have so far only examined (quite briefly) two eighth-century B.C. prophets, it should be useful at this point to examine critically the possibility of restoration oracles appearing amidst those of judgment. In so doing we shall at the same time note further judgment/salvation texts, including those in Isaiah and Micah.

A Critical Evaluation

We may make the following observations:

(1) The burden of the pre-exilic prophets was a message of warning and woe to both Israel and Judah who had consistently violated their national vows of allegiance to Yahweh (e.g., Amos 3:1–2; 5:18–20; Hos 4:1–3; Isa 6; Mic 3:8–12).

(2) The oracles of restoration which extol future glories for Israel and Judah under a new David, with blessings extended to the nations of the earth, would have been especially appropriate in the exilic and post-exilic periods.

(3) However, it is unlikely that later redactors of the eighth century B.C. prophetic books would have inserted extensive predictions of future glory into writings which were intended to declare only warning and judgment. Instead it is likely that there was at least some glimmer of such hope already present within the prophetic tradition which they received.

(4) There are passages within the eighth-century prophetic books that speak of future hope, which also have the appearance of being original and are taken that way by at least some scholars. (a) Amos 5:4–6, after lamenting the decimation of Israel in judgment (vv. 1–3), holds out hope (“Seek me [Yahweh] and live”), although “Gilgal shall surely go into exile, and Bethel shall come to nothing.” This hope (repeated in v. 14) is only a glimmer; but it marks a departure from the usual severe denunciatory tone of the oracles.²⁴ (b) We have identified Hosea passages above.²⁵

(c) Isaiah is very important because of its extensive development of salvation after judgment and its prophecies of the messianic era. Here we note 1:24–26:

Therefore says the Sovereign, the LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel: “Ah, I will pour out my wrath on my enemies. . . . [v. 24] I will turn my hand against you. . . . [v. 25] And I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city.” [v. 26]

From the context we see that the “enemies” of Yahweh are his covenant people (1:1–3; 2:6); it is they who are to receive the wrath. But restoration is seen in verse 26, where the ungodly rulers of verse 23 are replaced and Jerusalem becomes a city of righteousness.²⁶ It may be that Isaiah’s call in chapter 6 anticipates the gathering of all nations to learn the torah, as seen in 2:1–4:

And one [seraph] called to another and said: Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth [יְרֻשָׁה] is full of the his glory” (v. 3).

Various scholars consider an eighth-century date possible or very likely for 9:2–7 (MT 8:23–9:6) and 11:1–9.²⁷ Here themes of national deliverance from enemies (esp. 9:2–7) and messianic reign in righteousness on David’s throne stand out. Not to be overlooked is the remnant idea in Isaiah 10–11. After punishment has been

²⁴ Cf. Mays, *Amos*, 87–90, 99–102; Stuart, *Hosea*, 346f., 349; Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 237–39. On Amos 9:11–15, see note 14 above.

²⁵ For eighth-century authorship, though not necessarily Hosea himself, cf. Mays, *Hosea*, 31, 46f.; Wolff, *Hosea*, 12, 24–26.

²⁶ Cf. Bright, *Covenant*, 177; Clements, *Isaiah 1–39*, 35f.; Kaiser, *Isaiah 1–12*, 19.

²⁷ On 9:2–7, Bright, *Covenant*, 107, Clements, *Isaiah 1–39*, 104; von Rad, *Theology*, 2:171; Young, *Isaiah*, 1.324–46; on 11:1–9, Bright, *Covenant*, 108; Kaiser, *Isaiah 1–12*, 155; Young, *Isaiah*, 1.378–94; Clements, *Isaiah*, says “a large number of modern critical commentators” have regarded this “as authentic to Isaiah,” though he himself demurs, 121.

accomplished against Assyria (the cruel eighth century B.C. nemesis of Israel and Judah), spiritual restoration with messianic blessing is destined for Israel and Judah (10:20–11:10).²⁸ The eighth-century life situation is prominent in that Assyria is the prominent heathen nation with whom Yahweh reckons (cf. 10:24; 11:16).

(d) Mic 5:5–6 [MT 5:4–5] is an oracle that promises deliverance from Assyrian invasion. This message of hope follows the burden of the prophet in 3:8–12, wherein the destruction of Jerusalem is envisioned. The important fact for our study is that the prophet proclaims deliverance for a people under the verdict of judgment, with eighth century Assyria and not sixth-century Babylon the aggressor (contrast 4:10).²⁹ Similarly, at least much of Mic 7:7–20 appears to be pre-exilic. The references to Assyria and Egypt in verse 10 fit that period (cf. Amos 4:9; Hos 11:5; Isa 7:18f.; 10:5–19), as do geographical references to northern Israel.³⁰ Themes of triumph over enemies and God’s forgiveness are prominent. National physical and spiritual restoration occur together, with the latter seemingly explaining the former (note Mic 7:18–20).

Another solution to the problem of “hope” prophecies being juxtaposed with the calls to repentance and warnings of judgment is that the latter were given in public, while promises of restoration and salvation were privately given and incorporated into the original documents at the time of their composition.³¹ But however we explain the matter, we may find enough evidence in the eighth-century prophets to consider them messengers of hope in the face of Israel’s and Judah’s national failure and prophesied collapse. Thus we may find true eschatological expectation in these prophets.

The themes that constitute Israel’s eschatological hope are broadly: national physical restoration, with triumph over enemies and prosperity in the land; spiritual restoration, including renewal of covenant fellowship with Yahweh; and, if we allow Isa 2:1–4

²⁸Vv. 20–23 speak of Northern Israel, if we follow Watts, *Isaiah*, 152f.

²⁹The reference to Assyria points more to the era of Micah than much later, cf. Hillers, *Micah*, 69; *contra* Mays, *Micah*, 118f.

³⁰Willis provides striking evidence (with abundant secondary references) for an original provenance in eighth-century northern Israel, but with a reuse of the essential pericope in Judah, perhaps by Micah himself, “Prophetic Hope Oracle”; cf. Hillers, *Micah*, 89; Mays, *Micah*, 152–56.

³¹Cf. von Rad, *Theology*, 2.171; Carroll, *Prophecy*, 19. Carroll argues for a dialectical tension of judgment and salvation in eighth-century prophecy, *ibid.*, 16–21. However, I do not disallow the possibility of later editorial activity at points within the prophetic tradition.

(= Mic 4:1–5), the Torah ministry to the nations of the world out of Jerusalem.³²

The *hope* expressed in these pre-exilic prophets is not particularly imminent. If in any sense it was so viewed, it would have been only by implication in light of the fact that judgment seemed fairly near at hand, the warning oracles being addressed to a people then deserving punishment. A common phrase in the hope oracles is “in that day”—not in itself very suggestive of imminence (e.g., Hos 2:16, 20 [MT 2:18, 22]; Amos 9:11; Mic 7:12; Isa 4:2; 11:10f). However the same phrase refers to the day of judgment in Isa 2:20 and 3:7, 18, where judgment does seem near at hand in the contexts of those passages. The “day” indicated is the day of Yahweh (cf. Isa 2:12 and our discussion under “Amos” above). In the case of Judah, delay could well have been apparent to later generations in that exile did not occur for over a hundred years after the eighth century. Thus an “imminent-delay” tension with respect to the day of Yahweh for judgment probably appears in Israel’s experience at this point.

We should also keep in mind that the eschatological blessings of success against enemies and prosperity in the land are in continuity with ancient Israel’s traditional golden-age hope (as discussed above), wherein a distinctive relationship with Yahweh may be presupposed. But with the pre-exilic prophets, such hope takes the form of restoration following judgment. Are not the prophets implicitly saying that Yahweh will be true to his covenant promises, even though Israel fails and comes under divine judgment (cf. 2 Kgs 13:22f.)?

Summary

We have considered the possibility that Israel’s national hope for a bright and prosperous future is to be traced back to its pre-monarchical history. The subsequent golden-age hope was based upon the earlier splendors of the Davidic-Solomonic kingdom and anchored in the Davidic covenant. We clearly see eschatological expectation for the first time in the eighth century prophets. At this time the hope takes the shape of national physical restoration and spiritual renewal (with inclusion of the nations in Israel’s blessings?). But the old order is first ended, as divine judgment falls upon Israel and Judah. Especially at this point we observe critical events in history as instrumental in the shaping of a developing eschatology.

³²Cf. the careful but positive assessment by Hillers, *Micah*, 51–53.