

scholarship has not followed in this practice, to avoid confusion with the more widely known Baptist churches that had their origin slightly later in England. Second, and more importantly, it is reductionist. It focuses on one tenet and does not describe the whole program (although that tenet is emblematic for the overall program). The Anabaptists were an endtime-oriented movement, yet to consider them only in those terms would be equally reductionist.

Henry Sturcke

See also Protestantism

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Much has been done in the twentieth century to edit and publish documentation of the movement. The stricture in 1 Peter 3:15 to be in a continual state of readiness to “give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you” was taken seriously by Anabaptists, and they were very open in court interrogations, which for them were opportunities to witness. These records form the bulk of the series of source documents that have been published.

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## Ancient World

Millenarianism or millennialism is the belief in the end of this world or age and the arrival of a New Age or New World of perfected harmony, free of tragedy, suffering, evil, and even death itself. This view of the future is to be distinguished from notions of an escape or release from this world, and an entrance into a perfected existence in a heavenly realm beyond, though these views are often intertwined and related. The earliest fully developed expressions of millenarianism in the ancient Western world are found in the Prophets of the Hebrew Bible (OT), beginning in the eighth century BCE. The early Christians expanded and developed these views, relating them to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and his one thousand year (Latin *mille*, “thousand”) reign before the creation of a New Heavens and New Earth (Revelation 20–22). However, we can find elements of millenarian thinking, or perhaps what might be called protomillenarianism, in ancient Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman texts as well. In the ancient Eastern world, we also find within Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist traditions, ideas about unfolding cycles and epochs of history, but since they never involve the permanent transformation of *this* world, but either an escape therefrom, or a merging into

the cosmos itself, they are not properly classified as millenarian—at least not in the Western sense. This article will concentrate, accordingly, on the ancient Western world.

### Near Eastern Millennial Visions

The Ancient Near Eastern (Egyptian, Babylonian, Hebrew) view of history generally places emphasis on an ordered world, shaped out of primordial chaos, that is essentially unchanging. The gods have created things so that humans have their place on earth, death is an inevitable part of their lot, and the future, though subject to the periodic fluctuations of floods, drought, war, and disease, is essentially immutable. History is an endless repetition of the cycles of the past. The Sumerian poem of the Pickax (third millennium BCE) puts it well:

The lord, he who truly created the normal order,  
The lord, whose decisions are inalterable,  
Enlil, who bring up the seed of the land from the  
earth,  
Took care to move away heaven and earth . . .  
So that the seed from which grew the nations could  
sprout up from the field . . .  
So that humankind could grow from the earth . . .  
He introduced labor and decreed fate,  
The pickman's way of life . . . its fate decreed by father  
Enlil. (Kramer 1944: 51–53)

This order, established from the beginning, provides humankind its proper place. Within that allotted place are decreed a whole set of fates or ways of life, here illustrated by the lowly pickman. The duty of humankind is to affirm and fulfill that place, both in society and in the larger cosmos, as servants of the gods. The ancient Mesopotamian hero Gilgamesh (second millennium BCE), who vainly searches for the secret of eternal life, is admonished at one point in his quest by the barmaid Siduri:

Gilgamesh, why do you wander?  
The life you pursue you will not find.  
When the gods created humankind,  
Death for humankind they decreed,  
Life in their own hand retaining.  
You Gilgamesh, let your belly be full,  
Make merry by day and by night,  
Of each day make a feast of rejoicing,  
Day and night dance and play. (*Gilgamesh Epic* 10.3)

In ancient Egyptian texts the ordered cycle of the seasons, with the regular flooding of the Nile, mirrored the balance

within the cosmos, created and guaranteed by the gods. The birth of Rameses II (1300 BCE) was celebrated by his divine father Amun-Ra: “I have put justice (*ma'at*) into its place, so that the earth is made firm, heaven is satisfied, and the gods are content” (Breasted 1907: 4, 26). This general view of things is echoed in the older parts of the Hebrew Bible—as Psalm 115:16–17 puts it: “The heavens are Yahweh's heavens, but the earth he has given to human beings. The death do not praise Yahweh, nor do any that go down into silence.” After the Flood, humans are given the guarantee: “As long as earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease” (Genesis 8:22).

It is against this decidedly nonmillenarian view of history that one can find minor deviations. The Middle Kingdom (second millennium BCE) delivered Egypt from the severe social disruptions of civil war and anarchy so that the pharaohs who reestablished order were celebrated with a sense of messianic salvation. In the most important text of this type, *The Prophecy of Neferti*, foretells the downfall of the Old Kingdom and the reestablishment of order by Amenemhet I, the first king of the new dynasty. Both society and nature are disorder in this text:

Lo, the great no longer rule the land . . .  
All happiness has vanished,  
The land is bowed down in distress . . .  
I show you the land in turmoil:  
The weak is strong-armed,  
One salutes him who saluted . . .  
The beggar will gain riches,  
The great will [will rob] to live . . .  
Dry is the river of Egypt,  
One crosses the water on foot . . .  
Re will withdraw from humankind:  
Though he will rise at his hour,  
One will not know when noon has come;  
No one will discern his shadow. (Pritchard: 1969  
444–45)

The text closes with a triumphant celebration of Amenemhet I: “It is then that a King will come from the south, Ameni, the triumphant, his name. Rejoice you people of his time. . . Asiatics will fall to his sword, and the Libyans will fall to his flame, and the treacherous of heart will be in awe of him, . . . and justice will come into its place while wrongdoing is driven out” (Pritchard 1969: 446). Although one might call this text protoapocalyptic, because of its declaration of hope and sudden deliverance in the midst of despair, it lacks a fully developed millenarian view of the future. The “salvation” or transformation brought by the new pharaoh is still

wholly of this world. It is essentially the reestablishment of the order that has always prevailed since creation.

One also finds, in Middle Kingdom texts from Egypt, the possibility of a blissful afterlife in a world beyond, but any actual transformation of this world, with its ordered cycles of birth, death, and duty, is never envisioned. This holds true throughout the Ancient Near Eastern world—whether one is dealing with Egyptian, Babylonian, or Hebrew views of the cosmos.

### Greco-Roman Millennial Visions

One finds a remarkably similar view of the cosmos and the human place therein in our oldest Greek materials. Hesiod's *Theogony* (eighth century BCE) celebrates the removal of chaos in the founding of earth, "the ever-sure foundation of all." Zeus banishes the Titans, guaranteeing to humankind that the present order will last forever (lines 713–35). The Homeric Hymns (eighth century BCE) likewise celebrate the earth as the abiding and proper place for humankind, with the established cycle of the seasons of nature maintained forever for the benefit of all creatures (1936: 456–57).

Plato's "Great Year," which became a commonplace in Classical Greek materials, does represent a type of "end of the world" thinking in this otherwise orderly scheme of things. When all the cycles of the planets and constellations complete an entire revolution (usually put at about 36,000 years), there was to be a "return" to the beginning (*Timaeus* 39D, Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods* 2.51). Given Hesiod's scheme of a Golden Age, followed by the declining epochs of silver, bronze, and iron, this notion of a kind of "revolution of the ages" offered a remote hope for future renewal (Plato, *Republic* 546). The Book of Daniel gives a decidedly apocalyptic interpretation to such a scheme, with its succession of four kingdoms (Babylon, Persia, Greek, and Rome), followed by the eternal Kingdom of God (Daniel 2). Josephus, the first-century CE Jewish historian, adapted these Greek ideas to his own apocalyptic notions of resurrection of the dead: "to those who observe the laws, and if they must needs die for them, willingly meet death, God has granted a renewed existence and in the *revolution of the ages*, the gift of a better life" (*Against Apion* 2. 218; *Jewish War* 3.374).

We do find a fully apocalyptic adaptation of Greek cosmology in the Latin *Asclepius*, a second-century BCE work of Egyptian provenance and related to the Greek *Corpus Hermetica*. There the disciple Asclepius is told:

Such will be the old age of the world: irreverence, disorder, disregard for everything good. When all this comes to pass . . . the God whose power is primary . . . will take his stand against the vices and perversion in

everything, righting wrong, washing away malice in a flood or consuming it in fire or ending it by spreading pestilential disease everywhere. Then he will restore the world to its beauty of old so that the world itself will again seem deserving of worship and wonder. (Copenhaver 1992: 82–83)

Book III of the *Sibylline Oracles* (second century BCE), weaves together Greek and Hebrew traditions, predicting a time of moral decline, unprecedented disasters, wars, and cosmic disruptions, followed by the Kingdom of God:

And then, indeed, he will raise up a kingdom for all  
ages among men,  
He who once gave the holy Law to the pious,  
To all of whom he promised to open the earth and the  
world  
And the gates of the blessed and all joys  
And immortal intellect and eternal cheer. (3:767–71,  
Charlesworth 1983: 1, 379)

Virgil (first century BCE) takes these general Greek ideas of the transformation of the world and adapts it to Roman political propaganda, celebrating the age of the Emperor Augustus. His Fourth *Eclogue* celebrates the arrival of a messianic world ruler:

The great order is born anew from the line of the ages.  
The Virgin has now returned; Saturn's reign has  
returned;  
Now a new offspring is sent from Heaven on High.  
You alone grant favor at the birth of the boy,  
By whom the iron age shall cease,  
And a golden race shall rise up on the world . . .

The Iranian prophet Zarathustra (sixth century BCE), or Zoroaster as the Greeks called him, is apparently the first Western figure to develop a fully eschatological view of the future that included a cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil, the cleansing of the world through fire, resurrection of the dead, and final judgment, and a new transformed immortal world of perfect harmony for the righteous of all ages.

### Judeo-Christian Millennial Visions

Isaiah's "Little Apocalypse," (chapters 24–27) contains all of these elements, and most scholars see it as a later interpolation, heavily influenced by Persian ideas, inserted into the main body of Isaiah's eighth-century BCE work. Within the Hebrew tradition Isaiah 2:1–4 and 11:1–9 appear to be our

earliest texts that reflect a rather fully developed messianic millenarianism. The Prophet sees a time when Jerusalem becomes the spiritual capital of the world and as a result the nations “beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, nation shall not lift up sword against nations, neither shall they learn war any more” (2:4). This universal reign of peace and justice is ushered in by a Messiah of the lineage of King David, and the world is transformed into a utopian harmony that effects both humans and animals: “The wolf will dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them . . . for the earth will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh, as the waters cover the sea (11:6–9).

Such hopes and dreams of apocalyptic transformation of the world and the arrival of the Kingdom of God, are found in a host of Jewish texts from the third century BCE into the early Christian era. The book of Daniel (second century BCE) predicts the coming of the Kingdom of God that will stand forever, including a resurrection of “those who sleep in the dust, some to everlasting life, and others to everlasting shame and contempt” (Daniel 2:44; 12:2–3). 1 Enoch (third–second century BCE) traces human history from Noah’s Flood to the Messianic kingdom, which the author expects to arrive shortly after the Maccabean revolt (1 Enoch 83–90). 2 (Slavonic) Enoch (first century BCE) is one of our earlier texts that appears to predict that the present world is to last seven days of a thousand years each, modeled upon the six days of creation with the seventh day of Sabbath rest.

It is the New Testament book of Revelation, written in the last decades of the first century CE, that offers us our first clear and explicit scheme of a *one thousand year* messianic reign, or millennium, followed by a final judgment and the creation of a New Heavens and New Earth (Revelation 20–22). The author John writes:

I saw an angel coming down from heaven . . . he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years . . . so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended . . . They [righteous martyred dead] 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. . . . (20:1–6)

This scheme of six thousand years of human history, to be culminated in a one thousand year “Sabbath” seems to be in the mind of the unknown author of the New Testament book of Hebrews (4:4–11) and is possibly implied in 2 Peter 3:8–9 where the author recommends patience in waiting for the

End: “a day with the Lord is a thousand years, and a thousand years is a day.” The letter of Barnabas (second century CE) declares:

the Lord will make an end of everything in six thousand years, for a day with him means a thousand years . . . so then children, in six days, that is in six thousand years, everything will be completed . . . when his Son comes he will destroy the time of the wicked one, and will judge the godless, and will change the sun and the moon and the stars, and then he will truly rest on the seventh day. (15. 3–5)

This general scheme of things becomes the pillar of all millenarian-oriented Christian traditions, even into the modern age.

James D. Tabor

See also Judaism, Zoroastrianism

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## Antichrist

Many cultures believe that evil is present in the world. There are many myths that describe figures who personify evil, and how their existence impacts the course of events. The Western world is no different, and a fascination with evil can be found throughout the history of Christianity, from its beginnings up to the present day.

In Christianity, beliefs about evil are shaped by a rich lore of legends about Satan and Antichrist. They are two different

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