APOCALYPTIC TEXTS

*Apocalypse* is a Greek word meaning *revelation*, and *apocalyptic* as an adjective describes the genre of literature that contains visionary or revelatory experiences. Although such writings have been known from ancient times (examples include sections of *Isaiah*, *Ezekiel*, *Daniel*, and the New Testament Revelation of *John*), discoveries since the late nineteenth century of apocalyptic texts have increased scholarly interest in the subject. The apocalyptic tradition was one of those the early Christian church rejected in the third through the fifth centuries, only to be recovered in modern times through these discoveries. The importance of revelation in the Restoration of the gospel through the Prophet Joseph Smith makes the study of apocalyptic texts as worthwhile to Latter-day Saints as it is interesting to scholars.

The relationship between the canonical prophetic and the apocalyptic in Jewish and Christian sources is acknowledged to be very close. Some of the major characteristics of revelation literature are as follows:

1. The seer often gives a brief autobiographical account in which he recounts his initial experiences and important personal events.
2. The recipient of a vision is often, but not always, ecstatic (the spirit apparently leaving the body during the vision).
3. The prophet may be taken on a journey through the heavens.
4. Visits to the *Spirits World, Heaven,* and *Hell* are common.
5. The teachings imparted during such experiences are secrets that the prophet is counseled to keep to himself or share only with the community of believers (the experience may be shared, but most of what is learned cannot be disclosed).
6. Usually an account of the suffering that the righteous must endure is given.
7. The descent from heaven of a new order of society in the *Last Days* is described.
8. Commonly an *angelus interpres*, a heavenly messenger, is sent to explain and interpret the vision.
9. After receiving such visions, the prophet is almost always overcome and has to wait some time before receiving back his strength or per-

haps is raised up quickly by the right hand of divinity.

Although scholars have specifically identified and studied the genre of apocalyptic literature mainly since the 1950s, students of the Restoration will recognize every aspect of this ancient literary form in the life and writings of Joseph Smith before 1844. Accounts of the *first vision* contain an autobiographical introduction, as do visions of *Nephi* in the Book of Mormon and of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price. In *1 Nephi* 11, Nephi is taken in the spirit to a high mountain (a very popular theme in revelation), and Moses, *Alma* 2, Joseph Smith, and others speak of being overcome by the visions they received (Moses 1:10; Mosiah 27:19; *JS—H* 1:20). Enoch (Moses 7; see also *1 Enoch*), Moses (Moses 1), and Joseph Smith (e.g., *D&C* 76) describe journeys into and through eternal realms, recording the infinite creations of God and numerous places where men may ultimately dwell. Those same prophets, and others whose accounts are found in the Book of Mormon, report visions of the last days, the wars and destructions among men, and the ultimate victory of God. In keeping with apocalyptic tradition, the details of such visions are sealed up with a promise that they will be given to the righteous in a time determined by the Lord. Angels appeared to Joseph Smith to instruct him and explain such things as how to find and recover *plates* seen in a vision and how to baptize properly and with the authority given by a messenger from God. In the Book of Mormon, Nephi saw a vision more completely through the assistance of an angel who pointed out and explained details of the apocalypse to him. These representative examples show how the apocalyptic tradition is as interwoven in the fabric of the Restoration as it was in the traditions of ancient Judaism or early Christianity.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


C. Wilfred Griggs