

QUESTION

*To what extent can Jesus' own teaching be considered "apocalyptic"?
Use the references given (and others if you wish) to compare and/or
contrast Jesus' teaching and that of other apocalyptic writing.*

Mark 10:30
Mark 3:22-26
Luke 17:24
Mark 12:25
Mark 13:8-9, 14-26
Mark 1:15; 9:1; 13:30; Luke 10:9, 11-12
Mark 13:32f
Luke 17: 26-28.

DEFINITION

The term '*apocalyptic*' derives from Revelation 1:1, where the Greek word *apokalypsis* is used to describe the literary genre of John's book. It is an '*unveiling*' of '*what must soon take place*', given by God through His angel to John. The term '*apocalypse*' has thus come to be used to describe other writings - Jewish and Christian - which purport, by revelations through visions, dreams or angels, to describe the heavenly world and God's plan for the future. In the light of the characteristic features of Apocalyptic writing, I would be better able to determine the extent at which the given teaching of Jesus can be considered apocalyptic.

S. Russell's list of Jewish writings '*generally accepted as apocalyptic or having apocalyptic elements*'. His list includes the biblical book of Daniel, the apocryphal 2 Esdras (= 4 Ezra), fifteen non-canonical works and several of the Qumran Scrolls. In addition we could mention certain passages in the Old Testament which lean towards an apocalyptic eschatology, such as Jeremiah 4:23-28; Ezekiel 47; Isaiah 51:9-11; Zechariah 9-14 to mention but few. In the New

Testament, for example, the book of Revelation, Mark 13 and parallels, Luke 17:20-37, and scattered fragments of “*apocalyptic-looking*” material: 1Corinthians 15:20-28; IICorinthians 12:4; Ephesians 3:3f; 1Thessalonians 4:13-5:6; IIThessalonians 1:4-10; 2:1-12; Hebrews 12:22-29; James 5:7-11; 1Peter 1:13ff; IIPeter 3; 1John2: 18-28; 4:1-6; II John 7.

THE KEY FEATURES OF APOCALYPTIC WRITING

Writings are commonly designated as apocalyptic if they bear features such as the following: pessimism about the course history (*i.e., the view of the present time is pessimistic*). It is under the domination of Satan and hostile powers; full of sorrow, ills and oppression; dualism between God and Satan, between the earthly world and the heavenly world, between the present age and the age to come (*i.e., a contrast between the present age which is perishable and temporary, and a new age which is imperishable and eternal*); prediction of future events leading to an imminent end of history (*i.e., Predestinarian elements*); faith in the triumph of God; belief in resurrection, final judgement, and the reality of heaven and hell.

In other words, the coming eschatological salvation is envisaged in transcendent and universal terms i.e., the new age is of a transcendent king which imminently breaks in from beyond through divine intervention and without human activity. It is an event, which far transcends the great events of the salvation-history of the past. It amounts to a new creation, in which all forms of evil and suffering will be eliminated. It is

characteristic of apocalyptist to believe that even death will be conquered, this belief appears in the form both of bodily resurrection and of spiritual immortality. Other typical features include; Cosmic scope, though still centred on the destiny of Israel; History often seen in numerical patterns; Visions, dreams, heavenly journeys, angels; Symbolism (*often of animals*); Pseudonymous authorship by Old Testament saints.

ANALYSING THE REFERENCES

Mark 13:8-9; 14-26 - In context, these scriptures seem to refer plainly to the forthcoming historical events; referring to events of a wholly supernatural order. Here Jesus unmistakably speaks of His coming again. He clothes the idea in pictures, which are part and parcel of the apparatus connected with the Day of the Lord as found in apocalyptic writings. For example, 4 Ezra declares that the Day of the Lord was to be preceded by a time of wars and there will be quaking of places (9:3). The same book says, “*And there shall come astonishment of mind upon the dwellers on earth. And they shall plan to war one against another, city against city, place against place, people against people, and kingdom against kingdom.*” (13:31). Baruch has the same ideas. “*All the inhabitants of the earth shall be moved against one another.*” (48:32).

Further more, it is abundantly clear that the Old Testament itself is full of apocalyptic elements such that are similar to what Jesus was saying in these context. For example, the prediction that the Day of the Lord was to be preceded by the darkening of sun and moon could be found in it (Amos 8:9; Joel 2:10,3:15; Ezekiel 32:7-8; Isaiah 13:10, 34:4). Thus, the text is obviously an *imminent eschatological statement*, so it is apocalyptic.

Mark 10:30 - “*will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brother, sisters, mothers, children and fields-and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life*”. The teaching of Jesus, as recorded in this text, has reference to the future as well as to the present. It resembles the visionary forecasts of the apocalypses, and it contains predestinarian elements. Looking into the phrase “*this present age*”, one can easily conclude that the text is particularly an ‘*inaugurated eschatological statement*’, which central emphasis is that, ‘*God’s end-time rule and salvation has already begun to penetrate the world of men and women, in and through Jesus’ ministry*’.

Mark 1:15; 9:1; 13:30; Luke 10:9, 11-12 - The apocalyptic predictions of a future, and final, manifestation of the sovereign power of God are echoed in these particular texts. For example in Mark 9:1, “*And he said to them, I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Kingdom of God come with power*”. A similar text to this is, “*I say to you that many will come from east and west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven*”(Matthew 8:11). Like some of the apocalyptists, it would appear that Jesus placed the ultimate Kingdom of God in an order beyond space and time, where the blessed dead live forever ‘*like the angels*’(Mark 12:25).

The use of the expression “*The Kingdom of God*” in this text agrees with the contemporary Jewish usage. The Kingdom of God may be accepted here and now, and its blessings will be enjoyed in the end by those who have fulfilled the necessary conditions. Therefore, those scriptures are apocalyptic in context.

Mark 13:32f - Here, Christ was talking of the ‘*last day*’. He counters both the undue speculations about the end. From His little parable of the absent master, He illustrates that at some date in the future, there would be God’s kingly rule, then there will be judgement on all the wrong that is in the world. This is the idea of ‘*futurist eschatology*’ that proposes that, ‘*Jesus in his teaching envisaged an imminent, apocalyptic arrival of God’s kingdom*’. According to Him, not even the angels in heaven know God’s appointed time for the consummation of the age. Bearing in mind the fact that apocalyptic writings recognise the presence of the angels in the heavenly realm, one can conclude that the scripture is apocalyptic in context.

Luke 17:24 - “*For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other.*” In this statement, Jesus looks to the future, and talks about the way in which God will suddenly intervene in history. He emphasised that His coming will be obvious ‘*like the lightning*’. In effect, no man can foresee it, and all men will see it. This tells about the unmistakability and cosmic scale of the coming eschatological events. Here, the important point lies in the futurity of the day. Therefore, it can be concluded that this is an ‘*imminent eschatological statement*’ and it is apocalyptic.

Luke 17:26-28 - This is Jesus talking about the timing of God's future intervention in the world. The main point here is that *'the coming of the Son of Man could be at any moment, and when the moment comes there will be no mistaking it, though it will come upon many unawares.'* God's sudden interruption of human affairs is part of the apocalyptic perspective on the divine ordering of history. By this, Jesus could be considered a Prophet of the *'imminent apocalyptic kingdom'*.

Mark 3:22-26 - The underlying idea is that of God's sovereign power becoming manifestly effective in the world of human experience, victory over all powers of evil of the world (*i.e., demons were being cast out*) and for those who have accepted His sovereignty, deliverance and a blessed life in communion with Him. Here we observe that Jesus intended to proclaim the Kingdom of God not as something to come in the near future, but as a matter of present experience. By this, the text seems to me as a *'realised eschatological statement'*, whereby the central emphasis of Jesus' ministry was not that the kingdom would soon appear, but that it had already fully arrived in His own ministry and teaching, hence it is not an apocalyptic in context.

Mark 12:25 - Here Jesus deals with the fact of the *'resurrection'* which is a particular feature in the apocalyptic writings. He lies it down that when the resurrection comes and a person rises again, the old laws of physical life no longer obtain that the risen are like the angels. In Enoch the promise is *"Ye shall have great joy as the angels of heaven."* In the Apocalypse of Baruch it is said that the righteous shall be made *"like unto the angels."* The mention of *'angels'* here tells us that the text is apocalyptic statement. We also observe here that Jesus was

clarifying issues concerning the resurrection of body, by making it clear to the Sadducees that marriage is not a part of the future state. By this, we can see in the text, a predestinarian element as found in the apocalyptic writings.

CONCLUSION

Nonetheless, we can also observe especially the following apocalyptic features in Jesus' teaching, an evidence that justify the fact that Jesus' expectation of the future kingdom was apocalyptic in character. (a) Jesus probably used the language of the two ages (*e.g.*, *Mark 3:29; 10:30*). His more characteristic phrase '*the kingdom of God*' is not a regular apocalyptic phrase, but is in fact a variation on the two-ages motif - His way of speaking about the age to come (*e.g.*, *Matthew 6:10; 8:11*). The discontinuity between the two ages is marked in various ways, particularly by the fact that the final judgement will mark the beginning of the age of the kingdom (*Matthew 19:28*). (b) He anticipated the time of eschatological trial prior to the end (*e.g.*, *Matthew 5:11f, 6:13*). (c) He seems to have thought of the end as imminent (*e.g.*, *Mark 1:15; 9:1, 13:30*). (d) He probably saw the climax of the end events as the coming from heaven of (Himself as) the Son of man, deliberately echoing the apocalyptic language of Daniel 7 (*Mark 8:38*). (e) His technical term '*the kingdom of God*' underlines his belief both in its transcendent character, and in God's sovereign control of events leading to its full establishment.

It is obvious that the atmosphere of the New Testament is very different from that of the Jewish apocalyptic writing. Jesus did not simply take over Jewish apocalyptic unchanged. He modified it, by rejecting the practice of drawing up a calendar of the end-time, and particularly

by claiming that the eschatological kingdom was already present through His ministry. Thus the expectation of the apocalyptists have begun to find their fulfilment in Jesus.