Introduction
"Clueless about Apocalypticism"?

In the popular mind, "apocalypticism" is about the end of the world. Biblical interpreters have often reinforced this understanding. Albert Schweitzer and Rudolf Bultmann, the most influential New Testament interpreters of the twentieth century, claimed that Jesus believed that "cosmic catastrophe" was imminent. Expectation of "the end" supposedly pervaded Jewish society at the time. While interpreters have developed a more complicated and critical view in the past generation, even specialists still find "the end of the world" in a "cosmic dissolution" to be central to the message of "apocalyptic" texts.[1]

The textual passages usually cited to prove the point, however, cannot be taken literally. On the contrary, they are full of grand metaphor and hyperbole. They portray how awesome will be the appearance of God in judgment upon the foreign rulers who have been oppressing the people of Judea (*1 Enoch* 1:3-7; *T. Mos.* 10:3-7). The earthshaking pyrotechnics of God's appearance in judgment, moreover, are nothing new or distinctive to "apocalyptic" literature. Rather, they adapt earlier portrayals of God's coming by the prophets, to defeat oppressive domestic or foreign kings (Deut 33:1-2, 27, 29; Judg 5:4-5; Isa 13; 24:17-23; Jer 25:30-38; Mic 1:3-4). As exemplified in the vision and interpretation of Daniel 7, "apocalyptic" texts are not about the end of the world but the end of empires.

The discrepancies between standard interpretations and the texts themselves are many. Interpreters suggest, for example, that the texts are struggling with "the problem of evil." The texts, however, lack such abstract concepts but, instead, tell of rebel heavenly forces generating a race of giants who make war on the peoples of the earth and devour their livelihood. In the

quintessential "apocalyptic" dream-vision in Daniel 7 interpreters see the ancient Canaanite "combat myth" of the battle between the Lord and the Chaos-monster Sea. The dream itself, however, focuses on increasingly violent and fearsome beasts, whose dominion is finally ended by "the ancient one" in a heavenly court of judgment. The application of the dream to ancient Near Eastern history that follows in the text explains that the beasts represent the sequence of imperial kings, the last of whom would attempt to "change the seasons and the law" but whose dominion would be terminated in divine judgment. Interpreters write of the conflict between "Jews" and "Gentiles." But the texts focus on "the kings and the mighty" or on the "shepherds" that supervise the beastly emperors who rule over Judeans. Interpreters find references to "resurrection." But the texts speak of God's restoration of the people and vindication of those martyred in their steadfast resistance to imperial domination.

Most of the standard generalizations about "apocalyptic" literature became well established in the field of biblical studies before the recent revival of literary criticism. In the past two or three decades, however, innovative interpreters began approaching biblical texts as if they were in an introductory course on prose fiction, starting with the characters, setting, and plot and then focusing particularly on the main conflict in the story. This approach, simple as it sounds, may help us discern the principal concerns of the texts from late Second Temple Judea that have been classified as "apocalyptic." A brief overview shows that the main conflict in each text focuses on imperial oppression and its control or termination by God's judgment, which usually includes restoration of the people.

The tales in Daniel 1–6 focus on Daniel and other learned Judean scribes who are working at the court of foreign empires. They interpret the dreams of the king and often come into conflict with arrogant rulers, over whom God asserts ultimate sovereignty. The Book of Watchers in *1 Enoch* 1–36 tells of how rebel heavenly "watchers" generated a race of giants who created violent warfare and exploitation on the earth, and the steps taken in the heavenly governance of the universe to control the rebel watchers and mitigate the damage they had done. Several of these texts are surveys of history, whether history in the Second Temple period or history since the beginning of the world. These surveys climax in an extreme crisis for the people under oppressive imperial rule. The Animal Vision in *1 Enoch* 85–90 tells of seventy heavenly "shepherds" set over the "wild beasts" (kings) who rule over the "sheep" (the people of Judea), until God sits in judgment on both the shepherds and beasts. The *Testament of Moses* focuses on the powerful kings who rule over the Judeans, especially the extremely violent last emperor, until God comes

in judgment. The visions and historical surveys in Daniel 7–12 tell of the sequence of imperial kings, particularly the violent invasion by the last king and God's final restoration of the people. Similarly, the later Parables of Enoch, in *1 Enoch* 37–70, climax with the judgment of "the kings and mighty."

If the focal characters and plot of each of these texts are any indication, then their principal concerns would appear to be the desperate situation of the people of Judea under the domination of foreign rulers and the resulting question of God's sovereignty over history. These concerns are unmistakable in all of the texts. As the plot of the texts that survey history comes to a climax, moreover, additional characters play a crucial role that leads to God's action in resolving the historical crisis. The "lambs who have their eyes opened" or a certain "Taxo and his sons" or "the wise among the people" (in the Animal Vision, the *Testament of Moses,* and Daniel 10–12, respectively) engage in resistance to imperial oppression, for which they are martyred. In the overall sequence of events, their resistance leads finally to God's judgment against the empire, restoration of the people, and, in some cases, vindication of the martyrs. Resistance by people who are enlightened, or "instructors," is the turning point of the stories. It has long since been suspected that the attention given to these stalwart resisters constitutes the footprints of those who composed these texts.

That the plots of Judean "apocalyptic" texts in late Second Temple times focus on oppressive imperial rule and also, in many cases, on resistance to the point of martyrdom has led me to explore the texts as expressions and explanations of that resistance. Unless it is simply a historical accident, it is surely significant that no Second Temple Judean text classified as "apocalyptic" has survived that does *not* focus on imperial rule and the opposition to it. There were other forms of Judean opposition to imperial rule as well, which we will also explore. But the fact that all of these Second Temple Judean texts classified as "apocalyptic" focus on imperial rule and opposition to it suggest that their composition is closely related to the experience of that rule.

In anticipation of the examination of particular texts in the chapters below, my argument can be summarized briefly. The professional role of Judean intellectuals was to use their knowledge of Judean sacred traditions as advisers to the priestly aristocracy who headed the Temple. When imperial rulers and the priestly aristocracy's collaboration with that rule threatened the traditional Judean way of life, however, these intellectuals were caught in a conflict between loyalty to their patrons, who were in turn dependent on their imperial overlords and their loyalty to the traditions of which they were the guardians. At least some circles of dissident Judean intellectuals were led into resisting imperial rule. The Second Temple Judean texts that have been

classified as apocalyptic are the expressions of their struggles to affirm that God was still in control of history and to resist Hellenistic or Roman rule that had become overly oppressive.

Exploration of these texts as resistance to imperial rule, however, will require a more comprehensive and often different approach than has been followed in standard interpretations of "apocalyptic" literature.

Devising a More Historical Approach

Standard scholarly interpretation does not necessarily deny that the texts are concerned with oppressive rule and the resistance to it among teachers or the enlightened. But its conceptual apparatus tends to block the recognition that these are the focal concerns of the texts. Standard interpretation of "apocalyptic" texts was shaped in the field(s) of biblical studies, where Christian or Jewish theological agendas and concepts have long been predominant. "Apocalyptic" texts, along with other Judean texts, are understood as expressions of and sources for "Judaism," a generalizing conception of the ancient Jewish *religion*. Just as the books of the Hebrew Bible are used as authoritative sources for constructing general theological doctrines or ideas, so Judean "apocalyptic" texts are treated as sources for the scholarly construction of a distinctive theology or worldview in ancient Judaism called "apocalypticism."

Of course, important aspects of modern Judaism do derive from scriptural texts, and biblical studies plays an important role in the interpretation of scripture. To impose the synthetic scholarly construct of "(early) Judaism" onto ancient Judean texts, however, obscures particular concerns of the texts and the complex realities of the society and the historical circumstances that they addressed. Religious expressions, ranging from collective prayers in local village assemblies to priestly sacrifices at the altar of the Temple, were important in Second Temple Judean society. But they were inseparable from the political economic structure, the dynamics of that society, and the political conflicts that flared into scribal resistance, widespread popular revolt, and the subsequent violent repressive measures by high-priestly rulers through the last three centuries of Second Temple Judea. The subjection of Judean society to imperial rule was often the most determinative factor in those persistent conflicts. To mention only the most obvious examples: the invasion of Jerusalem by the emperor Antiochus Epiphanes to enforce a Hellenizing "reform" led to the Maccabean Revolt; Herod was appointed "king of the Judeans" by the Roman Senate, which also loaned him Roman troops to conquer his subjects; and after Herod's death, the Roman governors appointed the high priests, who collaborated with the Romans to suppress popular protests. To discern

the concerns of those texts standardly classified as "apocalyptic" requires consideration of the historical circumstances that they addressed, which are often obscured by the standard discourse of a synthetic "Judaism."

The modern scholarly construct of "apocalypticism" is similarly problematic for historical understanding. In the nineteenth century, discoveries of previously unknown manuscripts brought to light texts that seemed different from the well-known books of Torah, Prophets, and Writings in the Hebrew Bible. Partly because of their resemblances to images and motifs in the book of Revelation, which was the first book designated an *apokalypsis* ("revelation") in antiquity (see Rev 1:1), these texts were classified as "apocalyptic." Given their theological habits of mind, biblical scholars constructed a synthetic concept of "apocalypticism" from motifs, themes, and images found in texts from widely different times and historical contexts. Images, metaphors, and hyperboles were often taken somewhat literally and out of context as components of an "apocalyptic" scenario or worldview. The abstract construct of "apocalypticism," like that of "Judaism," tends to draw our attention away from the distinctive features of particular texts and their relationship with the historical contexts that they address.*

Intensive investigation of books such as Daniel and *1 Enoch* during the past generation has resulted in a wealth of valuable information about these texts.[2] Incorporating research on recently discovered manuscripts, scholarly studies provide a critical knowledge of the different translations and versions of the text, which is foundational for any inquiry. They also provide essential information on the background, meaning, and usage of key terms, phrases, motifs, and cultural forms. These critical investigations offer the necessary building blocks for further exploration of "apocalyptic" literature. Yet simply because of the way academic fields work, some aspects of these groundbreaking studies are also often embedded in the standard conceptual apparatus that, while serviceable for more traditional theological purposes, is problematic for investigation of these texts *in historical context*.

Specialists made an obvious but important distinction between the texts themselves and the theology or worldview they supposedly articulated and the cultural or social movement of which they were supposedly an expression as well. Taking a cue from one of the current interests in literary criticism, some specialists came up with a definition of a new macro-genre in Jewish literature that was supposedly followed by all "apocalypses."[3] This

* Because these texts are usually referred to as apocalyptic, I will continue to use the term, but in "scare quotes" because of the problematic connotations of the modern scholarly construct of apocalyptic/apocalypticism.

macro-genre, however, was a highly abstract definition intended to apply to texts from widely different times and circumstances. It was not at all clear how this macro-genre illuminated particular texts that are admittedly composites of other, smaller forms (other "genres"). More appropriate to the texts themselves was the distinction between "historical apocalypses" and "otherworldly journeys." Yet the latter label only serves to obscure the striking differences between the mystical texts of late antiquity, such as *2 Enoch* and *3 Baruch,* and the Book of Watchers, three to four centuries earlier. Defining the macro-genre was deemed important, however, because it supposedly involved "a new and distinctive worldview"—a phrase that brings us back to the theological interests of biblical scholars.[4]

The worldview that the more probing interpreters of the last few decades find expressed in the genre of "apocalypse" is no longer focused on the end of the world or a "cosmic catastrophe,"[5] but is still described in rather vague terms. Its key features are the belief in "supernatural beings" and in a heavenly world opposed to the earthly, and expectation of the final "eschatological" judgment. In perpetuation of the standard older construct of "apocalypticism," interpreters still characterize the relation of the heavenly or "supernatural" world to earthly life as a "fundamental antithesis" or "cosmic dualism."[6] The Second Temple texts, however, speak of a *correlation* between the heavens and the earth in a divinely created universe. Historical events in earthly life are influenced, and partly or largely explained, by what is happening among the "messengers," "holy ones," and "watchers," the heavenly forces involved in the divine governance of the universe. This, of course, is the point of the composers of these texts seeking and receiving heavenly "wisdom." The Second Temple texts portray God's judgment, moreover, not as an eschatological cosmic dissolution, leading to a state beyond historical earthly life, but as a resolution to a historical crisis that results in a renewal of Israel, on a renewed earth, under a restored heavenly governance (as we will see in the chapters below).

It is not clear how these two key elements constitute a "new and distinctive" worldview, since both are not only articulated in other kinds of texts but also stand in continuity with the Israelite prophetic tradition. The prophets understood historical events as the implementation of deliberations in God's heavenly council, and judgment as God's action against oppressive rulers and the restoration of the people on their land.

Scholars have generally agreed that these Judean texts are to be understood in social and historical context. Most of the attention to historical context has focused on the history of ideas, especially the impact of "Hellenism" (yet another abstract concept) on "Judaism."[7] Of course, a clash between the new Hellenistic political culture and the traditional Judean covenantal culture

was clearly involved. And comparison with how texts from other ancient Near Eastern societies used the same or similar images or themes can surely lead to fuller appreciation of the distinctive message of particular Judean texts. But the Judean "apocalyptic" texts speak explicitly of imperial violence and exploitation as the historical circumstances they address. They give repeated indications that the imperial rulers were using violence to suppress the Judean way of life and replace it with Hellenistic forms that were inseparably political cultural. The texts themselves indicate that they are responding to particular historical circumstances of imperial domination. And that invites an investigation of imperial power relations, not just of a conflict of cultures.

In fact, this suggests a serious refocusing of investigation of particular texts, in two respects. First, instead of lumping Second Temple texts with all other texts that have previously been classified as "apocalyptic," we should more appropriately concentrate on the texts that are responding to the same definable historical circumstances. For the visions and interpretations in Daniel 7–12 and some of the early texts included in *1 Enoch,* for example, this happens to be the crisis of the Hellenizing reform and the violent invasion of Jerusalem by Antiochus Epiphanes in the early second century B.C.E. Second, instead of applying generic definitions and concepts derived from a synthesis of motifs and terms from an extremely wide range of literature, it would be more appropriate to investigate how the images and statements in each particular text may be related to *particular* historical circumstances.

In the last decade or so, interest has grown in the social origins and social context of these texts.[8] Discussion of social origins has focused on identifying a group that produced a given text or a movement that produced several texts. This discussion of texts and the supposed groups behind them, however, has not involved investigation into the political-economic-religious structure of Judean society, so shows little sense of the social location or contours of such "groups." The texts themselves speak of conflicts between the "righteous" and the "sinners," those who adhere to the covenant and those who abandon it, as well as between Judeans and their imperial rulers. Texts are not composed by a people collectively, but by particular persons with particular social locations, roles, and interests. In order to understand the conflicts indicated in the texts, it is necessary to investigate the conflicts inherent in the political-economic-religious structure of Judean society as well as the historical dynamics of imperial rule. The chapters below will focus on three interrelated lines of investigation.

The first step will be an elementary literary analysis of each text in its integrity (insofar as this is discernible from ancient versions and translations). Rather than looking for or applying the characteristic motifs, images, and

themes of the standard concept of "apocalypticism," we will attend to each text's main plot, characters, climactic conflict, and the fundamental concerns and basic message of the text as a whole. With the integrity of each text in mind, we will also note how these texts are deeply rooted in Israelite and Judean traditions and build on and adapt them.

Second, understanding texts that are focused on imperial rule, resistance, and God's sovereignty over history requires at least an elementary sense of the historical situations they were addressing. This will further require moving past the previous reduction of the historical situation to a vague conflict between "Hellenism" and "Judaism," and moving beyond "religious persecution" to the concrete political-economic-religious conflicts between Judeans and their imperial overlords that, at points, escalated to periodic protest and resistance, military repression, and even to widespread revolt. Review of the historical situations addressed by the texts will be concentrated in chapters 2 and 6.

Third, understanding texts focused on imperial rule and resistance to it will also require critical attention to the political-economic-religious structure and dynamics within Judean society in the broader context of conflict with the dominant empires. Only in this way can we discern the social location and political conflicts that may have led the people who produced these texts into active resistance.

Who Produced These Texts?

The texts themselves indicate that they are the products of "sages," that is, wise scribes, the professional intellectuals and government advisers in the Judean temple-state. In the tales of Daniel 1–6, the legendary Daniel is characterized as "versed in every branch of wisdom, endowed with knowledge and insight, and competent to serve in the king's palace" (Dan 1:4). Those responsible for the visions and interpretations in Daniel 7–12 leave their footprints in the account of "the wise among the people" who instruct many, that is, sages and teachers (Dan 11:33; 12:10). The legendary figure to whom the various texts in the book of *1 Enoch* are attributed is "the scribe," "the righteous scribe," and "the scribe of truth" (*1 Enoch* 12:3-4). Like Daniel, he knows how to function in a royal court (13:4-7). He can read what is written on heavenly tablets, and he writes letters to communicate to his sons the wisdom he has acquired (81:1-6; 82:1-2; 92:1; 100:6). The recipients of his wisdom, moreover, are, like Enoch himself, wise scribes who have received wisdom and can read what he has written (5:8; 100:6; 104:11-13).

Even without these indications, it would be evident that scribes produced these "apocalyptic" texts. Although general literacy and the availability of

books has been assumed in the fields of biblical studies and Jewish history, recent research has shown that in Judea, as in antiquity generally, literacy was limited largely to those specially trained to read and write, that is, the professional scribes.[9] Some scribes, of course, were involved in little more than copying documents or taking dictation (see the description of Baruch in Jer 36). At a higher level, scribes *(sopherim)* mastered the texts and lore of the society, hence were also "the wise" or "sages" *(hakhamim),* that is, ancient "intellectuals." Insofar as the older generation of scribes trained the next generation of scribes, they were also teachers. With their mastery of legal, historical, prophetic, and other materials, professional scribes served as advisers to ancient rulers, administrators, and representatives in their regimes. As elsewhere in the ancient Near East, so in Judea, scribes were the only people who would have been capable of composing these texts and of making copies of them—so that they have survived, Daniel in the Bible and *1 Enoch* and the *Testament of Moses* outside it, to be (re)discovered in modern times.[10]

Recent studies have sketched out a far more complete and precise picture of scribal training, roles, and practices than previously available.[11] It is clearer, for example, that in composing new texts scribes drew heavily on and adapted the traditional forms that they cultivated as the professional guardians of the cultural repertoire. Barely begun, however, is investigation of the political-economic location and role of the intellectuals who produced all of the texts that professional intellectuals today are trained to analyze and interpret.

Caught in the Middle: The Social Location and Role of Scribes in Judea

The most familiar portrayal of scribes in the Second Temple period is found in the Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. There the scribes work in tandem with the chief priests in command of the Temple, who in turn collaborate with the Roman governor (for example, Mark 14–15). The Gospels' picture of the scribes' close association with the priestly aristocracy at the end of the Second Temple period parallels Jesus Ben Sira's portrayal of the scribes' social location and role more than two centuries earlier. Ben Sira, moreover, offers a much fuller picture of the attitudes and orientation of scribes as well as their function in the political-economic-religious structure of the Judean temple-state.[12]

Ben Sira represents scribes as serving the priestly aristocracy, yet also as "caught in the middle" between those heads of the temple-state and the Judean people. "In the middle" does not mean that they were comparable to a "middle class" in modern Western society. Influential constructions by the last generation of scholars projected onto Second Temple Judea a rising

middle class of merchants and entrepreneurs, analogous to those in early modern Europe. These scholars claimed that "Ben Sira frequently mentions merchants and their pursuit of profits, . . . reflect[ing] the new period which began in Judaea under Greek rule."[13] But Ben Sira mentions traders only at three points (26:29—27:2; 37:11; 42:5), where he articulates the negative view of merchants that was standard in traditional agrarian societies. His criticism of the stockpiling of "goods" *(chremata)* and wealth, and the use of other people's goods (11:10-19; 13:24-25; 21:8; 31:3-8) pertains not to merchants, but to the wealthy and powerful aristocracy. One key passage ("Whoever builds his house with other people's goods . . . ," 21:8) indicates more precisely how the wealthy and powerful in traditional agrarian society exploited the poor. That is, they took the produce of the peasants as tithes, taxes, or tribute, and when the poor were forced to borrow in order to survive, they charged interest on loans (which was prohibited by Israelite covenantal law; Exod 22:25). In Judea, those who took tithes, taxes, and tribute were not traders but the heads of the temple-state (and their imperial patrons, whom Ben Sira never mentions). The scribes, in Ben Sira's portrayal, stand in the middle between the aristocratic rulers of Judea and the rest of Judean society, the artisans and others who lived in Jerusalem and the peasants who lived in scores of villages.

Ben Sira uses a set of overlapping and synonymous Hebrew terms (which are translated by a similar set of overlapping and synonymous terms in the Greek translation known to us as the book of Sirach) in reference to the "chiefs, rulers, judges" who operate collectively at the head of the society. These "chiefs of the people" or "rulers of the assembly" (parallel in 30:27 [33:19] and 39:4) are the aristocracy among whom the wise scribes stand and speak (6:34; 7:14). In a more ceremonial passage, Ben Sira portrays what are evidently the same rulers and chiefs of the people presiding over sacrifices in the Temple. The high priest stands with "a garland of brothers around him . . . the sons of Aaron in their splendor holding out the Lord's offerings" (50:5-13). The Judean people are to serve "the Most High," who is understood as "the King of all." Since the high priests are their representatives to God, the people bring their offerings to the priests. And since, correspondingly, the high priests are God's representatives to the people, established by everlasting covenant, and given "authority and statutes and judgments" over the people, the people are to "honor the priest" with their tithes and offerings as the way of "fearing the Lord" (see esp. Sir 7:29-31; 35:1-12; 45:30-33; 50). From these statements by Ben Sira, it is clear that economics and politics are inseparable from and closely articulated with religion in the relationship between the priestly rulers and the people.

The scribes' principal role was to serve the "chiefs" (8:8), and it was for this responsibility that they acquired wisdom. In a lengthy, often-quoted reflection, Ben Sira focuses on the scribes' position and responsibilities in the larger political-economic-religious structure of society.

> The wisdom of the scribe depends on the opportunity of leisure;
> only the one who is [not preoccupied with labor] can become wise.
> How can one who handles the plow become wise, . . .
> who drives oxen . . . and whose talk is about bulls?
> He sets his heart on plowing furrows,
> and he is careful about fodder for the heifers.
> So too is every artisan and . . . smith and . . . potter . . . .
> All these rely on their hands, . . .
> Without them no city can be inhabited,
> and wherever they live they will not go hungry.
> Yet they are not sought out for the council of the people,
> nor do any of them attain eminence in the public assembly.
> They do not sit on the seat of a court,
> nor do they understand the decisions of courts;
> They cannot expound discipline or judgment,
> and they are not found among the rulers.[13]
> How different the one who devotes himself
> to the study of the law [Heb. *Torah*] of the Most High.
> He seeks out the wisdom of all the ancients, . . .
> and is concerned with prophecies.
> He serves among the great ones [Gk. *megistanōn*]
> and appears before the rulers [Gk. *hegoumenōn*];
> he travels in foreign lands
> and learns what is good and evil in the human heart.
>
> (Sir 38:25-35; 39:1, 4 abridged)

Free of the burdensome labors that preoccupy farmers in the countryside and artisans in the city, scribes acquired learning so that, "understanding decisions" and able to "expound judgments," they could serve as advisers to the ruling councils and courts and as members of embassies to foreign lands (38:24—39:11; cf. 4:9; 6:34; 7:14; 11:7-9; 15:5; 21:17; 34:12; 42:2).

In preparation for their responsibilities, they devoted themselves to intensive learning of the spectrum of Judean cultural traditions, including Torah, prophecies, and wisdom of various kinds. The cultivation of Torah, which had originated with Moses and was vested in the Aaronide priesthood (45:5, 17), had been delegated (perhaps gradually over the generations) to the learned scribes. Thus the scribes played a key role, as the ones who possessed knowledge of Judean laws and traditions, in advising and

assisting the aristocracy in governing the society (8:8; 9:17—10:5; 38:32-33; 38:34—39:4).

In addition to the acquisition of knowledge of the Judean cultural tradition, scribal training entailed the formation of a certain kind of character and induction into a certain scribal ethos. The character requisite for service in the temple-state included rigorous personal discipline, obedience to higher authority, and patience with superiors reluctant to listen to legal traditions recalled and advice given. Scribes would thus have been conservative, both insofar as their role was to conserve traditional customs, laws, and cultural lore, and in the sense of obedience to authority.

Insofar as they served among the "great ones" and, for that purpose, were freed from physical labor, scribes must have been economically as well as politically dependent on patrons among the aristocracy. Not surprisingly, Ben Sira advises aspiring sages to bow low to their superiors (4:7). He also offers extensive advice on the proper deferential behavior for scribes when invited to dine with their patrons (13:9-11; 31:12-24). He warns about the potential dangers involved in dealing with the powerful (13:9). Particularly problematic would be "contending with the powerful" or "quarreling with the rich," lest the scribe "fall into their hands" (8:1-2, 14).

While their role was to serve the temple-state, however, learned scribes had a clear sense of their own authority independent of the authority derived from the priestly aristocracy. Their authority, certainly in their own minds, came from their wisdom and their faithful adherence to the Torah. Ben Sira repeatedly mentions the scribes' obedience to the covenantal laws. Ultimately their authority came directly from the Most High, the giver of the Torah and source of all wisdom. They also understood themselves as the successors of the prophets, as well as their interpreters, speaking by divine inspiration (39:1-3, 6). They thus had their own sense about how the temple-state should operate—that is, according to the sacred traditions of the people, of which they were the proper interpreters.

Ben Sira's instructional speeches to aspiring scribes show that at least some scribes, despite their vulnerability to their patrons, both criticized the aristocracy and saw it as part of their responsibility to mitigate the oppressions of the poor by the powerful. As evident in Ben Sira's reflection quoted just above, learned scribes saw themselves as a significant cut above farmers and artisans, both politically and culturally. People who worked with their hands did not enjoy the leisure necessary to acquire wisdom and counsel rulers (38:24-34). Yet Ben Sira inculcates in his scribal protégés a sympathy for the poor and a concern for their plight. He urges them to allay the exploitation of the poor by the wealthy and powerful. "Stretch out your hand

to the poor" with almsgiving, and do not "cheat the poor" or "reject the supplicant" (29:1-2, 8-12, 14-15). For one who advises scribes to "watch their back" when around their patrons, Ben Sira has some cutting criticism of those who take advantage of the desperate situation of the poor to enhance their own wealth.

> A rich person will exploit you if you can be of use to him,
> but if you are in need he will abandon you . . .
> What peace is there between a hyena and a dog?
> And what peace between the rich and the poor?
> Wild asses in the wilderness are the prey of lions;
> Likewise the poor are feeding grounds for the rich. (13:3-4, 18-19)

Couched in the style of wise observations about life, these lines are an indictment of the perpetual economic exploitation inherent in a system in which the peasant producers were the "prey" of the powerful.

The scribes' role with regard to tithes and offerings are a telling illustration of their position in the middle between priestly aristocracy and people. Tithes and offerings were the revenues that supported the Temple and priesthood and, indirectly, the scribes, as well as expressions of gratitude to God. One of the scribes' responsibilities as representatives of the temple-state was to exhort the people to render up tithes and offerings. In a lengthy discussion of sacrifices and offerings (35:1-26), however, Ben Sira includes a declaration that the Most High will heed the supplication and appeal of the oppressed and "break the scepters of the unrighteous." From the learned scribe's viewpoint, in commitment to covenantal Torah, commandment-keeping and almsgiving are the equivalents of temple sacrifices. In another exhortation to make sacrifices and offerings, Ben Sira includes an ominous warning to the "rulers" about exploiting the poor and humble.

> If one sacrifices ill-gotten goods, the offering is blemished . . .
> Like one who kills a son before his fathers' eyes
> is the person who offers a sacrifice from the property of the poor . . .
> To take away a neighbor's living is to commit murder;
> to deprive an employee of wages is to shed blood. (34:21-27)

The sharpness of this criticism is all the more striking since it comes from a well-established Jerusalem scribe who composed the elaborate praise of the ancestral officeholders that provides a legitimating ideology for the high priesthood, and in particular the incumbent Oniad high-priestly dynasty (Sir 44–50).

The book of Ben Sira's wisdom, one of the only other books contemporary with the first "apocalyptic" literature such as Daniel and *1 Enoch*, thus

portrays scribes as "in the middle" in two interrelated senses. As advisers and representatives in the service of the temple-state, they stood in between the priestly aristocracy and the people whose tithes and offerings supported it. As professional guardians of the sacred Judean cultural tradition, they developed a personal commitment to covenantal commandments and a sense of their own authority under the Most High, independent of the high priesthood. This left them "caught in the middle," in conflict between their loyalty to the aristocracy on whom they were economically dependent and their commitment to the covenant commandments.

The Conflicts Inherent in Imperial Rule

Ben Sira's portrayal of Judean society and the role of the scribes conveniently leaves unmentioned the most important factor of all. In his long hymn of praise of the glorious Israelite-Judean line of officeholders from Moses to Simon (Sir 44–50), he grounds the current Oniad high priesthood that he himself served. The Judean temple-state, however, was not autonomous, not sovereign over its own affairs. Indeed, the original establishment of the temple-state had been sponsored by the Persian Empire. The Temple and the high priesthood were, in effect, imperial instruments to maintain order and collect revenues in Judea. After Alexander the Great's conquest of the Persian Empire, Judea and other territories came under the Hellenistic empires that brought new Greek political and cultural forms to the ancient Near East. Yet they retained the temple-state as the local institution by which they controlled and gathered revenues from Judea.

The subordination of the Judean temple-state to imperial rule set up several major conflicts that involved Judean scribes directly or indirectly. First was the fundamental conflict between the ideal of God as the ruler of the Judean people, and the reality of imperial rule. As professional custodians of Israelite cultural tradition, scribes were steeped in the conviction that God was Lord not only of Israel but of all peoples. The prophets had interpreted major international events in terms of God using imperial kings for divine purposes, such as punishing Judean kings for violation of covenantal principles or other kings for their inhumane violence against conquered peoples. The "second" Isaiah (chs. 40–55) welcomed the Persian king Cyrus's defeat of the Babylonian Empire, anticipating that it would mean the restoration of the previously exiled Jerusalem elite to their positions of power in Jerusalem. Later, however, the restored Judeans, who had adopted a Deuteronomic understanding that the previous kings, officers, and priests had broken the covenant, lamented that they were "slaves in the land" that God had given to

their ancestors, as its "rich yield" of "fruit and good gifts" were going "to the kings who have power over [their] bodies and livestock" (Neh 9:36-37). There was an inherent contradiction and conflict between God's being sovereign over history and the claims to sovereignty by imperial kings. And there was always at least the possibility that imperial violence and exploitation could no longer be explained as God's just punishment, when the people were suffering in spite of their rigorous adherence to the covenant commandments.

Second, given the conflict just discussed, the subjugation of the temple-state to imperial rule compounded the conflict between the scribes and the priestly aristocracy whom they served and on whom they were dependent. The heads of the temple-state were vulnerable to influence and pressures from the imperial rulers on whose approval their positions depended. The aristocracy's collaboration with imperial policies and practices could and did move in directions that compromised or violated the covenantal Torah of which Judean scribes were the committed guardians. Although accommodated to Persian rule, the legal collections and historical traditions later incorporated into what we now know as the books of the Pentateuch became the basis of the traditional Judean way of life to which scribes were personally as well as professionally committed.[14] A change of empire, imperial policy, and/or dominant imperial culture, however, could set up serious potential conflict with what had become the sacred traditions of Judean life to which the scribes were personally committed, which is exactly what happened under the Hellenistic empires.

Third, subjection of the temple-state to imperial rule set up potential conflicts between rival factions within the aristocracy. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah attest to conflicts between priestly and other factions under Persian rule, some of which Nehemiah mediated as the governor, with troops to bolster his authority. As we shall see in chapter 1, the Ptolemaic practice of collecting the imperial tribute led to power struggles between aristocratic factions in Jerusalem. The struggle between the Ptolemaic and Seleucid Empires over control of Syria-Palestine set up a situation in which rival factions in the Jerusalem aristocracy could make alliances with one or another imperial regime. Scribes who had no independent economic base would be tempted to associate with one or another rival faction among the aristocracy, leading to rival scribal circles that paralleled the aristocratic factions. Thus, while the most fundamental divide in Second Temple Judea was between the rulers and ruled, more complex conflicts developed in the relations between imperial rulers, rival factions in the priestly aristocracy, and various circles of scribes.

The Cultural Repertoire of Judean Scribes

Insofar as Judean scribes were the professional intellectuals who cultivated Judean cultural tradition, they had a rich repertoire from which to draw in the articulation of their opposition to imperial rule.[15] The standard correlation of literature with social roles in biblical studies may have prevented us from recognizing the breadth of the cultural repertoire that Judean scribes cultivated. The books of the Hebrew Bible have traditionally been grouped into Torah (Law), the Prophets, and the Writings. Also traditional has been the division of "offices" in the Bible into priest, prophet, and king. With recent recognition of the importance of learned scribes, they have been added to the list. This division of offices is then matched up with the division of literature: priests cultivated law codes, prophets composed prophetic oracles, and wise scribes produced the collections of wisdom that comprise most of the Writings. This scheme, however, does not correspond with the "division of labor" in Second Temple Judea, as evident in Sirach and other sources. Prophetic oracles had indeed been composed and delivered by prophets. But scribes, as the professionals trained in writing and reading, were the ones who compiled collections of prophecies as well as books of Torah, and continued to develop them.

Ben Sira is clear that scribes devoted their leisure to learning not only the "wisdom of all the ancients," but also "the torah of the Most High" and "prophecies" (38:33—39:4). They could then, on the basis of their knowledge of legal traditions and prophecies, "expound discipline and judgment" in public assembly before the rulers. The wisdom that scribes cultivated, moreover, had several traditional forms, as Ben Sira indicates in other passages. What is usually understood by "wisdom" in biblical studies is proverbial wisdom (mentioned in 39:1-3), which takes the form of speeches of *instructional wisdom* in Proverbs 1–9 and most of Sirach. But scribes such as Ben Sira also cultivated *cosmological wisdom* and *reflection on wisdom* (several psalms of which are included in Sirach), and *mantic wisdom* (predictive, often hidden wisdom, about which Ben Sira himself was uneasy).[16] Scribes commanded the full spectrum of this cultural repertoire, ready for use in their political-religious role in the temple-state. They could thus draw upon the forms and themes of all segments of this repertoire in their opposition to imperial domination and struggles to understand the wisdom of God in a history that seemed to have run amok. We should not imagine, moreover, that the cultural repertoire they had mastered consisted solely of texts written on scrolls. Recent studies of scribal practice in Judea and other societies of the ancient Near East have shown that scribes learned texts by recitation, so that they were "written on the tablets of their hearts." They cultivated authoritative texts in

their memory. In addition the Judean cultural repertoire also included oral-traditional legal, legendary, historical, and prophetic materials that were not included in texts (also) written on scrolls.

It should be evident by now, finally, that much of the Judean cultural repertoire consisted of material that was political as well as religious, just as the role of scribes in the temple-state was political as well as religious. The prophetic oracles of Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah condemned political-economic exploitation by rulers and their officers. Oracles by Malachi and Haggai supported the rebuilding of the Temple and the priestly faction in charge. Scrolls of Torah were written and recited publicly in support of the consolidation of power by Josiah and, later, by Ezra. Scribes such as Ben Sira thus stood in a long tradition of texts that were fully political in their purposes.

Outline of the Book

This book focuses mainly on the texts classified as "apocalyptic" that were composed in Judea in the second half of the Second Temple period, between the third century B.C.E. and the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 C.E. The chapters in part 1 deal with the texts that addressed the escalating crisis under Hellenistic imperial rule, climaxing with resistance to the invasion of Jerusalem by Antiochus Epiphanes. Chapter 1 reviews the historical conflicts and events to which these texts respond. Chapter 2 focuses on the tales in Daniel 1–6 that, while not "apocalypses," portray Judean scribes resisting the arrogant pretentions of ancient emperors. Chapter 3 examines the Book of Watchers, one of the earliest texts subsequently included in *1 Enoch* (chs. 1–36) and usually considered the first "apocalyptic" text. Chapters 4 and 5 investigate the surveys of history leading up to the crisis of the Hellenizing reform and the invasion of Antiochus Epiphanes, the classic cases of "historical apocalypses": the Animal Vision (*1 Enoch* 85–90) and the ten-week summary of history (*1 Enoch* 93:1-10 with 91:11-17), along with the *Testament of Moses* (chapter 4 below), and the visions and interpretations in Daniel 7–12 (ch. 5 below).

The chapters in part 2 discuss "apocalyptic" texts that oppose Roman imperial rule but also, for comparative purposes, other forms of opposition to Roman rule, in other kinds of literature (psalms) and in organized protests by scribal circles. Chapter 6 provides a summary of key events in the historical context, especially the Maccabean Revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes, the Roman conquest of Judea, the rule of the Roman client-king Herod, and direct Roman rule in Judea. The examination of the Qumran community that left the Dead Sea Scrolls and its key texts in chapter 7 is included because, while the Qumranites produced no "apocalypse," they are

often considered an "apocalyptic" community and they anticipated fighting against the Romans. Chapter 8 on the *Psalms of Solomon* (often thought of as "apocalyptic") is another form of literature used to express opposition to Roman rule. Chapter 9 focuses on the two known late Second Temple Judean "apocalyptic" texts: the Parables of Enoch (*1 Enoch* 37–71), announcing God's judgment of the (Roman) "kings and mighty," and an updating of the *Testament of Moses,* recasting it as resistance to Roman rule. Chapter 10, on the scribes and teachers who carried out protests against Herod, the Roman tribute, and the high-priestly collaborators with Roman rule, shows how common scribal resistance to Roman rule became in late Second Temple times, and offers a comparison to textual resistance. The conclusion pulls together some of the implications of the exploration of "apocalyptic" texts as statements of opposition to imperial rule.