



How Barisat Bellowed: Folklore, Humor, and Iconography in the Jewish Apocalypses and the Apocalypse of John (The Dead Sea Scrolls & Christian Origins Library, Vol. 3)

James H. Charlesworth

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Do you think that a funny story is more important than shelter or sex? Many experts do. Humor and storytelling are so important to the human psyche that they even penetrate literary works dealing with serious subjects. This book examines the origin of Jewish apocalyptic literature—the literature of groups who were convinced that the End was near. As we approach a new millennium, interest in apocalyptic literature is on the increase. For Christians, this should not be a temporary fad. Since Christianity began as an apocalyptic movement within Judaism, the understanding of ancient apocalypses is important to the understanding of Early Christianity.

Prof. Charlesworth points out that many stories in Jewish apocalyptic literature evolved from conversations around the campfire, the hearth, or anywhere people would customarily gather to relax and talk. Folklore and humor—and the physical relaxation and psychological release from laughing—served as a catharsis from physical labors and political oppression. Another influence on these stories was the prevalence in that ancient culture of images of winged beasts and demons, which became models for the beasts and demons in the stories.

The only way to understand early Jewish and Christian apocalypticism is to base our reflections on the content and setting of the texts, rather than on preconceived notions of what they might have to say about the beginning of the third millennium. We should listen to what the ancients had to say to their own contemporaries. When we do, we may hear a voice from above.

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