CHAPTER 5

The Animal Apocalypse: The Timeless Symbols of History

1 Time and History in the Animal Apocalypse

The Animal Apocalypse (AA), chs. 85–90 in 1 Enoch, is the second vision in the so-called “Book of Dreams,” 1 Enoch 83–90. It purports to be a vision of history revealed to Enoch, who, in turn, transmitted its details to his son, Methuselah. This historical survey begins with the creation of Adam, continues through the time of Judas Maccabeus, and closes with a description of the end-time. Most scholars date the majority of AA to sometime in the second half of the 160s BCE.1

The Animal Apocalypse acquired its name because it symbolically depicts humanity as various types of animals. Adam and the Sethite line are all white bulls, apparently symbolizing their power and purity.2 During this period, other animals appear; Cain is a black bull, Abel a red bull, and the progeny of the Watchers various wild animals. History begins anew following the Flood, when, once again, the three children of a white bull (Noah) are white, red, and black, respectively. The white bull (Shem) begets another (Abraham), while the red (Ham) and black (Japhet) bulls produce wild animals.

As the nations proliferate after the Flood, Jacob, born from a line of white bulls, becomes a white ram, and his children become sheep. Led by their God, lord of the sheep, the Israelites leave Egypt and enter the land of Israel. The preexilic period is marked by alternating periods of obedience and disobedience and conflicts with various species of wild animals. Eventually, the lord

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1 See Nickelsburg, 1 Enoch, 360–66; Patrick A. Tiller, A Commentary on the Animal Apocalypse of 1 Enoch (SBLEJ 4; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 61–79. The dating of the passage in 90:9–18 has been an especially thorny problem; for a survey of different views on the dating of this text, see Tiller, ibid., 63–79. In any case, that passage was likely in final form by 160, only a few years later than the composition of the remainder of AA. Contrast the view of Daniel Assefa, L’Apocalypse des animaux (1 Hen 85–90): une propagande militaire? Approches narrative, historico-critique, perspectives théologiques (JSSup 120; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 214–15, who takes the majority of AA, with the exception of the Maccabean doublet/interpolation in 90:13–15, 19, as having been written before the persecutions of 168/167 BCE. For critical comments on Assefa’s view, see Portier-Young, Apocalypse Against Empire, 350–52.

2 Nickelsburg, 1 Enoch, 371.
of the sheep delivers the sheep into the hands of seventy angelic shepherds, whom he instructs to destroy the sheep in moderation. At the same time, God commissions a heavenly scribe to record the actions of the shepherds, who he knows will exceed their mandate.

Israel remains under the care of the shepherds for four periods, which, in the present form of the text, likely concludes sometime between 166 and 161 BCE. At that point, the most destructive set of shepherds induce the lord of the sheep to avenge the wrongs perpetrated upon his flock. That divine intervention marks the onset of the eschaton, when the lord of the sheep first sits in judgment and then erects a heavenly temple in Jerusalem in place of its impure earthly counterpart. The wild animals then come to worship the sheep, whose exiled members now return to their land. A white bull, apparently the Messiah, appears, and all of the animals, both sheep and wild, are now transformed into white cattle.

The relationship between time and history is of great importance in AA. As we will see, ample evidence suggests that its author (and, for a section of ch. 90, its interpolator) worried about the state of political and religious affairs in the second-century BCE Judahite temple-state and what it implied about the relationship between past and present.

As we have seen throughout this study, surveys of Israel's history could function as a way of linking the present to the past when the depressing reality of the Second Temple period suggested that a temporal break had occurred. The Animal Apocalypse illustrates well this approach to the writing of history. Unsettled by his contemporary predicament, the author of AA rewrote Israel's past in order to restore continuity with his present. As in Ben Sira and Jubilees, this history began with creation in order to accomplish this goal.

Historical experience and the shape of historical time, I have observed in previous chapters, are intimately linked. In this case, the author of AA interpreted his own historical experience as reflecting a rupture in time. In order

4 Nickelsburg, 1 Enoch, 396. The general consensus is that the second, third, and fourth periods correspond to the Persian, Ptolemaic, and Seleucid dynasties, respectively. By contrast, the beginning of the first period is the subject of dispute. According to Nickelsburg, 1 Enoch, 392–93, the first period begins with the reign of Manasseh. By contrast, Tiller, Commentary on the Animal Apocalypse, 330, dates it to the beginning of the exile, and Devorah Dimant, "Jerusalem and the Temple in the Animal Apocalypse (1 Enoch 85–90) in the Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls," Shnaton: An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies 5 (1982): 180 (Hebrew), dates it to the reign of Jehoiakim.
5 Nickelsburg, 1 Enoch, 396–98.