

# The “Great Earthquake” Judgment in the Apocalypse: Is There an *Urzeit* for this *Endzeit*?

Ralph J. Korner, *McMaster University*

## 1. Introduction

The interpretive principle that *Endzeit* reflects *Urzeit* is well attested within biblical as well as in apocalyptic literature.<sup>1</sup> A clear example of this principle is found in the book of Revelation. The depiction of the *Endzeit*, that is, the re-creation of a new heaven, a new earth and a New Jerusalem (Rev 21:1–22:5) finds its *Urzeit* within original creation—the paradisiacal Garden of Eden (Gen 3:23).<sup>2</sup> Imagery that occurs both in the Garden of Eden and in the New Jerusalem includes God dwelling face to face with human beings (Gen 3:8, 9 and Rev 21:3, 4), gold of the highest quality (Gen 2:11, 12 and Rev 21:18), a flowing river (Gen 3:10 and Rev 22:1 cf. Ezek 47:1–12), the Tree of Life (Gen 3:9, 22 and Rev 22:2 cf. Ezek 47:11, 12), and the removal of the “curse” (Gen 3:17 and Rev 22:3).

The New Jerusalem of the *eschaton*, however, does not just contain transformational elements (e.g., the Garden), but is itself transformed into what one might call an eschatological “un-city.”<sup>3</sup> Even further to this point,

---

1. Hermann Gunkel pioneered this insight in his *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895). Richard Bauckham affirms this principle in apocalyptic literature: “the apocalyptists’ understanding of salvation-history... [is such that] God’s redemptive acts in the future are portrayed on the model of his past acts” (“The Eschatological Earthquake in the Apocalypse of John,” *NovT* 19 [1977]: 224–233, esp. 225; idem, *The Climax of Prophecy* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993], 201).

2. An association of the heavenly city with imagery reminiscent of the Garden of Eden or Paradise was already common stock imagery in Jewish writings of John’s day (cf. 2 Bar. 4:1–7 with the use of parallelism in *T. Dan.* 5:12).

3. There are four anomalous architectural features which point towards the “un-citylike” nature of Revelation’s eschatological city: (1) it appears to contain only a single street (21:21); (2) explicit mention is made of the fact that John did not see a temple in the city (21:22);

this “un-city” appears even to be characterized as a “non-city” by virtue of its implicit identification as “the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (21:2, 9, 10). In a brilliant twist of plot, one could say that the “people of God” have now become the “place of God.”<sup>4</sup> This transformation permanently reverses the expulsion of humanity from the original Garden. In their guise as the New Jerusalem, the eschatological “people of God” are forever in the presence of God.<sup>5</sup>

This re-creative finale to the book of Revelation, however, is achieved only through a very cataclysmic process, one that is initiated by “the wrath of the Lamb” (6:12–17; sixth Seal). This *Endzeit* appears to be concisely depicted in the sixth Seal (6:12–17) and then progressively expanded upon in the first six Trumpets (8:2–9:21; cf. also 11:1–14) and the seven Bowls (15:5–16:21).<sup>6</sup> The Lamb is thus presented not just as the Savior of repentant

---

(3) it is built in the shape of a gargantuan cube (12,000 stadia high, wide, and long; 21:16); (4) Unlike the temple-city of the DNJ, but like Ezekiel’s temple-city (chs. 40–48), there are no human residences described in John’s vision of the New Jerusalem (see J. T. Milik with respect to 1Q32 in “Description de la Jérusalem Nouvelle [?],” in *Qumran Cave I* [DJD 1; ed. D Barthélemy and J.T. Milik; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955], 134–5 + pl. xxxi]). See Michael Chyutin for a reconstruction of the seven manuscripts that are collectively referred to as the “Description of the New Jerusalem” (1Q32, 2Q24, 4Q554–555a, 5Q15 and 11Q18) (*The New Jerusalem Scroll from Qumran: A Comprehensive Reconstruction* [JSPSup 25; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997]).

4. Robert H. Gundry claims that “John wanted his Christian readers... to see in the New Jerusalem, not their future dwelling place, but—what was even more heartening—their future selves and state” (“The New Jerusalem: People as Place, not Place for People,” *NovT* 29 [1987]: 254–64, esp. 264).

5. Gundry suggests that the New Jerusalem becomes “God’s dwelling place in the saints rather than their dwelling place on earth” (“The New Jerusalem,” 256). This conception of God’s people as fictive architecture finds precedent in sectarian literature of the *yachad*, the community at Qumran. In 1QS and CD the sect refers to themselves as “a holy house” (1QS 5.6; 8.5, 9; 9.6; 22.8; CD 3.19; 20.10, 13). A clear identification of the community with the Temple is found in 1QS 8.5–6 where the “council of the Community” is called “a holy house for Israel and the foundation of the holy of holies of Aaron” (קודש קודשים לאהרון). David E. Aune claims that their self-identification as a temple of God was “an intermediate situation in which they rejected the existing temple cult and lived in expectation of the rebuilding of the true and unpolluted eschatological temple” (“Qumran and the Book of Revelation,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years* [ed. P. Flint and J. C. VanderKam.; Leiden: Brill, 1999], 2.622–48, esp. 2.641).

6. G. K. Beale, in support of Bauckham, contends the “the scene depicts figuratively the inauguration of the last judgment, not trials preceding that judgment.” (*The Book of Revelation*

humanity (5:9) but also as the Judge of the unrepentant (e.g., 6:12–17). If the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:8–3:25) is the *Urzeit* for the “paradise regained,” which is described in the final chapters of the Apocalypse (21:9–22:21), might there not also be an overarching *Urzeit* for universal divine judgment in the *Endzeit*? If so, this *Urzeit* would have to account, at the very least, for a central symbol of cataclysmic judgment in the Apocalypse: the recurring earthly “great earthquake” (6:12; 11:13; 16:18, 19; 18:10, 16–21[?]).<sup>7</sup>

## 2. The “Great Earthquake” of the Apocalypse: A Central Symbol of Final Judgment?

The recurrence of the eschatological earthquake throughout Revelation not only suggests its centrality as a symbol of actualized final judgment, but also as a structural organizer around which the three judgment septets (i.e., the seven Seals, Trumpets and Bowls) can be arranged so as to account for their reiteratively progressive, rather than linearly progressive, content.

The eschatological earthquake in the Apocalypse is described from both heavenly (8:5; 11:19; 16:18) and earthly perspectives (6:12; 11:13; 16:18, 19; 18:10, 16–21[?]). Since final judgment is not in view in the first heavenly theophany (4:5), an “earthquake” is fittingly absent in its storm elements (“flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder”; *ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ*). The two subsequent heavenly theophanies, however, both of which introduce eschatological judgments (8:5, six Trumpets; 11:19, seventh Trumpet), add the unmodified noun *σεισμός* (“earthquake”) to their stock formula. *Earthly* depictions of catastrophic destruction in the *eschaton* also highlight a *σεισμός* (“earthquake”) but all

---

[NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 396–97).

7. Two phrases appear to indicate that the “great earthquake” may also be implied in Rev 18:10: “in one hour” and “Woe, Woe.” First, the destruction of the city called “Babylon the Great” (18:2, 21) within the space of “one hour” (18:2, 10) suggests an earthquake. Second, if the doubled “Woe” (18:10, 16) is not just mentioned for literary effect but also as a technical reference to the “second Woe”/sixth Trumpet (11:14/9:12, 13), it would then literarily connect the fall of Babylon (ch. 18) with the fall of the “great city” (11:8) during the “second Woe” (11:14), the city which is also “prophetically called Sodom and Egypt” (11:8). This being the case, then the fall of Babylon (18:2–24) is presented not just as a reiteration of the urban destruction found in the “second Woe” (11:1–14) but also as being concurrent with elements of the sixth Trumpet judgment (8:13–9:21), one example being the release of the 200 million member army from east of the Euphrates (9:13–19).

three times with the addition of an adjectival modifier—*μέγας* (“great”) (6:12, sixth Seal; 11:1–14, sixth Trumpet/second Woe; 16:18, seventh Bowl). By the seventh and final Bowl, (16:17–21) the heavenly theophany also calls the earthquake “great” (*μέγας*; 16:18). This is appropriate for the heavenly theophany only at this final stage since in 16:18 and 19, for the first time, the earthly and heavenly descriptions of the eschatological earthquake converge into one coordinated scene.

The descriptions of actualized judgment in the final Bowl (16:17–21), though, seem to point the reader back to the sixth Seal (6:12–17) in that similar events, including the “great earthquake,” appear to be described in both judgment scenes.<sup>8</sup> This coordinated imagery forms one of the bases upon which Bauckham claims that the “great earthquake” in the sixth Seal (6:12–17) is “the same final earthquake to which 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18 also refer.”<sup>9</sup>

The recurrent nature of the eschatological earthquake in the Apocalypse leads Bauckham to claim that it plays “a distinctive role in the structure of the book.”<sup>10</sup> What he does not do, though, is to explain the precise role that multiple occurrences of the singular “great earthquake” play in the structural organization of the Apocalypse’s entire visionary episode (1:9–22:20). In a previous article, I establish a hermeneutical foundation for doing just

---

8. Similar imagery that occurs both in the seventh Bowl (16:17–21) and in the sixth Seal (6:12–17) includes the mountains and islands being removed and the “great earthquake.” Robert H. Mounce states that this imagery “has no parallel in apocalyptic writing” (*The Book of Revelation* [Rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 151). Without any other literary precedent that would otherwise come to mind, Revelation’s audience may then have even more readily connected the seventh Bowl back to the sixth Seal.

9. Bauckham, “Eschatological Earthquake,” 232.

10. *Ibid.*, 224. Bauckham identifies two implicit references (4:5—thunder and lightning only; 20:11—the earth and sky flee) and five explicit references (6:12; 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18) to the eschatological earthquake in the Apocalypse. Bauckham’s two implicit references (4:5; 20:11) are questionable though. G. K. Beale suggests that the absence of an earthquake in the Heavenly Throne Room theophany is very appropriate since “4:5 is not a description of the Last Judgment on earth, but only an expectation” (*The Book of Revelation*, 458). Bauckham’s contention that Rev 20:11 (“the earth and the heaven fled”) refers to the eschatological earthquake is found wanting too. It seems unlikely that 20:11 refers to the eschatological earthquake, since the events of 20:11 occur on the other side of the millennial divide; they are not only post-*parousia* but also post-millennial. If there is any implicit reference to the pre-millennial eschatological earthquake, it appears that 18:10 is a better candidate (see n. 7).

that. I explore the structural implications of using three Jewish apocalyptic literary devices for the purpose of organizing the Apocalypse’s visionary content.<sup>11</sup> The resultant six-fold structure can be used to account for the recurring nature of the “great earthquake,” and specifically to demonstrate that it is descriptively reiterated, with progression, in the earthly judgments of the sixth Seal (6:12–17), the sixth Trumpet/second Woe (11:1–13; 18:10, 16–21 [?]; cf. 9:12), and the seventh Bowl (16:17–21).

Aside from the centrality of the “great earthquake” in the individual judgment scenes of the sixth Seal, the sixth Trumpet and the seventh Bowl, it also appears to play an organizational role in the literary arrangement of the rest of the visionary elements that occur from 6:12 (the sixth Seal) to 16:21 (the seventh Bowl). The recurring “great earthquake” can be used as *the* central global end-event around which one can demonstrate repetition with progression throughout the three septet judgment scenes (6:12–16:21).<sup>12</sup> I call this reiterative organizational principle “telescopic

---

11. The three Jewish visionary literary devices are the “space/time referent,” *μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον* (“After these things I saw”), and *καὶ εἶδον* (“And I saw”). See Korner, “‘And I Saw...’ An Apocalyptic Literary Convention for Structural Identification in the Apocalypse,” *NovT* 42/2 (2000): 160–183.

12. Six major blocks of text are demarcated in Rev 1:9–22:20 due to five placements of the clause *μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον* (“After these things I saw”), and its variations (“‘And I Saw...’,” 160–183, esp. 171–74). Of the six textual blocks within the visionary episode of Revelation (1:9–22:10), five include eschatological events (4:1–22:20). The centrality of the eschatological earthquake is reinforced, and its reiterative nature suggested, in the fact that it occurs within four of those five eschatological textual blocks/*vision blocks*. The eschatological earthquake is found in *vision block* #2 (4:1–6:17, see the sixth Seal [6:12–17]), *vision block* #4 (7:9–15:4, see the second Woe/sixth Trumpet [11:13]), *vision block* #5 (15:5–17:18, see the seventh Bowl [16:18, 19]), and *vision block* #6 (18:1–22:20, see the implied second Woe [18:2, 10; “Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon... for in one hour your judgment has come”]). Others who affirm recapitulation or reiteration in Revelation, yet without adherence to objective textual demarcators, include W. Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967); Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (HDR 9; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976); idem, *Crisis and Catharsis: the Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984); and J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992). Michaels prefers “reiteration” in lieu of “recapitulation,” due to “its rather different use by Irenaeus, in the sense of going over the same ground again with opposite results” (p. 54, n. 5).

reiteration.”<sup>13</sup> I suggest that eschatological judgment only begins with the sixth Seal, the events of which are then expansively re-described, or as I call it, “telescopically reiterated,” in the ensuing description of worldwide cataclysmic judgment found in the judgments of the seven Trumpets and seven Bowls.

If one accepts that the “great earthquake” is the central figure of cataclysmic, worldwide judgment in the Apocalypse, then this positions it as the central element that must be accounted for in any consideration of an overarching *Urzeit* for the reiterated judgments that begin with the sixth Seal.

### 3. The *Urzeit* of the Eschatological “Great Earthquake”: Two Questions

There are numerous precedents for earthquake imagery in HB and Jewish Second Temple writings. Bauckham distinguishes four differing roles for the earthquake: (1) as a herald of God’s coming (e.g., Mount Sinai; Exod 19:8; Ezek 38:19–23); (2) as a part of God’s judgment of the wicked (*Sib. Or.* 3:675–693); (3) as simply one among many natural disasters which befall humanity as signs, or preliminary judgments, of the End (Mark 13:8; *2 Bar.* 27:7; *4 Ezra* 9:3); or (4) as the great earthquake whose purpose is to

---

13. “‘And I Saw... ’,” 176–183. I use the phrase “telescopic reiteration” to describe how one can organize the visionary episode (1:9–22:20) within the Apocalypse to account for the fact that the cataclysmic events of the eschatological sixth Seal appear to be expansively re-described in the ensuing six Trumpets/seventh Trumpet/six Bowls/seventh Bowl. I agree with Thomas’ concept of a telescopic narrative, but I disagree with him that the seventh Seal, the first “joint” in that telescopic narrative, occurs subsequent to the sixth Seal (*Revelation 1–7, Revelation 8–22* [Chicago: Moody, 1992/1995], esp. 1.43 and 2.534). Rather, I argue that the “empty” seventh Seal (8:1), which is heavenly, occurs concurrently with the sixth Seal (6:12–17), whose events are earthly. Thus, the seventh Seal, while being telescopically inclusive of the seven Trumpet and seven Bowl judgments, serves at the same time to expansively reiterate the very condensed descriptions of the sixth Seal events (“‘And I Saw... ’,” 176–183). Thus, if the sixth Seal (6:12–17) is the only Seal out of the first six that is telescopically reiterated by the rest of Revelation’s eschatological content (7:1–22:20), then this implies that, of the first six Seals, only the sixth is eschatological in nature. The first five Seals, then do not reflect eschatological events, but rather historical events which were known to John at the time when he wrote the Apocalypse (e.g., war, famine, disease).

destroy the old cosmos to make way for the new (*4 Ezra* 6:11–16; *1 Enoch* 83:3–5; cf. Heb 12:27).<sup>14</sup>

Bauckham focuses only on the earthquake of the Sinai theophany (Exod 19:8) as the model, or *Urzeit*, for the “great earthquake” of the Apocalypse. While possible, it is not the only, or, I would suggest, necessarily even the best, model available. First, unlike the Sinai earthquake which was only of a regional nature, and which simply announced the coming of the LORD, Revelation’s earthquake is worldwide in scope and functions as an instrument of divine judgment, both elements of which are absent at Sinai. Second, in contrast to the non-eschatological Sinai earthquake, the “great earthquake” of the Apocalypse is wholly eschatological in nature. There is another candidate, however, for the *Urzeit* of the “great earthquake” that Bauckham does not address—the Noachic flood narrative (Genesis 6–9), with its implied earthquake (7:11).

It is my purpose in this essay to explore whether the Noachic flood could be considered as a biblical antecedent, or *Urzeit*, for the *Endzeit* of worldwide judgment that is brought on by the wrath of the Lamb, a wrath that is enacted, among other things, through the “great earthquake” of the sixth Seal (Rev 6:12–17). But how best does one proceed in light of the fact that the Apocalypse is rife with “echoes,” parallels, and allusions, particularly to the Hebrew Bible?<sup>15</sup>

Beale offers a helpful paradigm by which to assess the level of intentionality with which an author(s) may be said to allude to an earlier base text. He proffers three categories: ‘clear,’ ‘probable,’ and ‘possible.’<sup>16</sup> Since there is no explicit mention of the Noachic flood in Revelation, the “great earthquake” cannot be considered as a ‘clear’ allusion. There are

---

14. Bauckham, “Eschatological Earthquake,” 225.

15. For example, the 10 plagues of Egypt form the basis for descriptions of divine judgment in the seven Trumpets and Bowls. There are no explicit quotations of HB texts in the Apocalypse, however. The number of allusions cited vary from 1000 (C. van der Waal, *Openbaring van Jezus Christus. Inleiding en Vertaling*. [Groningen: de Vuurbaak, 1971], 174–241) to 195 (W. D. Dittmar, *Vetus Testamentum in Novo*. [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht], 263–79).

16. G. K. Beale explains his three allusional categories as follows: (1) Clear: the HB source is cited almost verbatim, “shares some common core meaning, and could not likely have come from anywhere else”; (2) Probable: an idea or wording, or “a structure of ideas,” are “uniquely traceable” to an HB source; (3) Possible: “the language is only generally similar to the purported source, echoing either its wording or concepts” (*The Book of Revelation*, 78).

three descriptive elements in the “great earthquake,” however, which I would suggest constitute key criteria by which to determine whether an allusion is ‘probable’ or ‘possible.’ In concord with Rev 6:12–17, these three elements are: (1) a context of worldwide divine judgment (e.g., earthly cataclysms); (2) an eschatological context (“the great day of their [i.e., God’s and the Lamb’s] wrath”), and (3) an absence of water and perhaps even the presence of fire in worldwide judgments (e.g., first Trumpet, 8:7; sixth Trumpet/second Woe, 9:18/11:5; post-millennial, 20:9).

Thus, the first question to ask is an exegetical one: Which biblical or Second Temple text contains not only an earthquake, and not only an earthquake that is an instrument of worldwide divine judgment, but specifically an earthquake *in the eschaton* that reflects worldwide divine judgment by fire?

The second question to ask is a socio-cultural one: How relevant would an allusion to a sizeable earthquake, especially to the implied earthquake of the Noachic flood, have been not only to the seven *ekklēsiai* (“assemblies/churches”) of the Roman province of Asia, but even to the Greco-Roman society around them?

#### 4. Question One:

#### Literary Precedents For Revelation’s “Great Earthquake”?

An allusion to the flood is not a deciding factor, of course, in ascertaining the *traditum* to which John’s “great earthquake” may allude. The key criteria, rather, is whether there are other Hebrew, Jewish, or Christian literary texts that also include not just a worldwide earthquake, but one that is paired with divine judgment, and which judgment is both eschatological in nature and is effected by fire, not by water.

##### *4.1 Possible Hebrew Bible Precedents*

The chart below highlights which of the three key elements of Revelation’s “great earthquake” are found in HB earthquake references. Additionally, I note which HB earthquake references include an allusion to the Noachic flood.



Four Thematic Variations	Hebrew Bible Earthquake References
<p><b>Earthquake references with:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <i>Divine Judgment</i> <b>but</b></li> <li>2) <u>No</u> eschatological purview</li> <li>3) <u>No</u> destruction by fire</li> <li>4) <u>No</u> allusion to the Flood</li> </ol>	<p><i>Habakkuk 3:6</i>—A prayer set within the Mt. Sinai motif asking God to again come in power and plague and pestilence.  <i>Isaiah 5:25–30</i>—A shaking/roaring in the land of Israel due to God’s judgment through foreign invaders.</p>
<p><b>Earthquake references with:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <i>Divine Judgment</i> <b>and</b></li> <li>2) Allusion to the <i>Flood</i> <b>but</b></li> <li>3) <u>No</u> eschatological purview</li> <li>4) <u>No</u> destruction by fire</li> </ol>	<p><i>Judges 5:4–5</i>—After the defeat and death of Sisera, Deborah celebrates in song and recounts how God’s presence at Mt. Sinai was accompanied by an earthquake and watery deluge</p>
<p><b>Earthquake references with:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <i>Divine Judgment</i> <b>and</b></li> <li>2) <i>Eschatological</i> purview <b>but</b></li> <li>3) <u>No</u> destruction by fire</li> <li>4) <u>No</u> allusion to the Flood</li> </ol>	<p><i>Joel 2:10 and 3:16 [4:16]</i>—Set within the context of the “Day of the Lord,” the earth is said to quake, the heavens to tremble, the sun and the moon to be darkened, and the stars to withdraw their shining.  <i>Ezek 38:18–23</i>—God’s day of wrath against Gog will result in a great shaking in the land of Israel.  <i>Zech 14:4</i>—God is depicted as splitting the Mount of Olives in two when He stands upon it at His appearing in judgment. This “earthquake,” however, is analogized to the one experienced during the days of Uzziah, not to the one during the Flood.</p>
<p><b>Earthquake references with:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <i>Divine Judgment</i> <b>and</b></li> <li>2) <i>Eschatological</i> purview <b>and</b></li> <li>3) Destruction by <i>fire</i> <b>and</b></li> <li>4) Allusion to the <i>Flood</i></li> </ol>	<p><i>Isaiah 24:18b–20; cf. 24:5</i>—An “earth-rending” quake is part of God’s judgment upon ארץ (‘‘the Earth/Land’’) when He comes to reign on Mt. Zion. This earthshaking judgment is said to derive from the inhabitants of the earth having broken God’s “eternal covenant” with Noah (cf. Gen 9:16).</p>

The above chart demonstrates that eschatological elements of the sixth Seal judgment scene are found in Isaiah, Joel, and Ezekiel. However, only

Isaiah 24 includes all three key elements associated with Revelation’s “great earthquake.” Additionally, Isaiah 24 is the only HB passage to include explicit allusions to the Noachic flood.

#### 4.2 Possible Jewish Apocalyptic Literary Precedents

Aside from HB texts, is there any Jewish Second Temple literature that might qualify as an allusional base text for Revelation’s “great earthquake”? The chart below demonstrates that the juxtaposition of God’s judgment with an earthquake is a standard apocalyptic motif. Of the five passages below, only *1 Enoch* 1:3–9 fulfills all three criteria required of a *traditum* for Revelation’s “great earthquake.” It is worth noting, though, that while *1 Enoch* 1:3–9 could be considered a literary precedent, unlike Isaiah 24, it does not presume any *Urzeit* in its depiction of *Endzeit*.

Earthquake References in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature	
<p><b>Earthquake references with:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <i>Divine Judgment</i> and</li> <li>2) <i>Eschatological</i> purview and</li> <li>3) Destruction by fire <b>but</b></li> <li>4) <u>No</u> Allusion to the Flood</li> </ol>	<p><i>1 Enoch</i> 1:3–9—The Lord’s coming is attended with fire, mountains falling, the earth being rent and universal judgment.</p>
<p><b>Earthquake references with:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <i>Divine Judgment</i> and</li> <li>2) <i>Eschatological</i> purview <b>but</b></li> <li>3) <u>No</u> destruction by fire</li> <li>4) <u>No</u> Allusion to the Flood</li> </ol>	<p><i>1 Enoch</i> 102:1, 2—The Lord’s judgment results in the luminaries failing and the earth trembling.</p> <p><i>2 Baruch</i> 27:8—The sixth part of the tribulation in the “end of days” involves earthquakes.</p> <p><i>Testament of Moses</i> 10:3–5—God’s wrath is attended with the ends of the earth being shaken, the sun and moon being darkened and the stars in disarray.</p> <p><i>Apocalypse of Zephaniah</i> 12:1–8—The uprooting of trees in the time of God’s wrath implies an earthquake.</p>

If the author of Revelation was the apostle John, then his time in Judea might have apprised him of the Book of Watchers (*1 Enoch* 1–36). But irrespective of the identity of the “John” of Revelation, it is even less likely that his Asia Minor audience would have been familiar with *1 Enoch*

1–36. As such, alluding to *1 Enoch* 1 would have been less effective than referencing Isaiah 24, particularly if John and his Jewish-Christian audience knew the LXX version of Isaiah 24, which tends towards a theological *tendenz*. This *tendenz* expands upon the eschatological focus of the Hebrew text<sup>17</sup> and adds a remnant theme (LXX 24:14a) to the content preserved in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> and the MT.<sup>18</sup> Given the Noachic context of final judgment in Isaiah 24, it is not inconceivable that its eschatological remnant (LXX 24:14a) may even allude to the faithful remnant who survived the original flood.<sup>19</sup>

---

17. At least six eschatological motifs are much more predominant in the text of LXX Isaiah 24 than in the MT. These six motifs, in and of themselves, do not necessarily substantiate an eschatological agenda. However, when viewed together an intentional eschatological agenda for LXX Isaiah 24 seems inescapable. The six eschatological motifs are: (1) a universal scope and eschatological timeframe for divine judgment (LXX 24:1, 16); (2) transgression against Yahweh himself as the rationale for the universal scope of divine judgment (LXX 24:5, 16); (3) a more specifically future focus to the judgment of God (use of the future indicative tense); (4) a righteous remnant theme (LXX 24:6, 13b, 14a, 23); (5) the eschatological hope/joy of the righteous remnant (LXX 24:14b–16); and (6) the godly as participants with God in final eschatological judgment and glory (LXX 24:16, 21, 23).

18. The LXX makes the “remnant theme” more explicit than do 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> and the MT. In verse 6 the LXX, 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>, and the MT highlight that a curse consumes the earth because its inhabitants have sinned. As a result, judgment descends “and few people/men are left.” This “remnant” does not resurface again in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> or the MT. As such, one is left wondering if the few who are left in v. 6 are simply finished off once the earthquake unleashes its fury upon the whole earth. However, the LXX (vv. 13b and 14a) “resurrects” the righteous remnant from its uncertain state as described in v. 6. Beginning with v. 14, the eschatological joy of the godly over the divine judgment of the ungodly is described (“these shall cry aloud and they that are left on the land shall rejoice together in the glory of the Lord”). But this joy is not limited to those who are only outside the Land. The insertion of “the remnant” back into the text at LXX 24:14a (“and they that are left on the land”) makes explicit, what was missing in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>/MT 24:14–16: God’s judgment of the Earth/Land (פְּגַזָּה; vv. 1–13) also involves his eschatological salvation of a remnant (LXX 24:14).

19. Does the tendentious reading in LXX Isa 24:14 hint at flood elements? LXX variations from the Hebrew text of v. 14 (1QIsa<sup>a</sup> and the MT) are highlighted in bold: “These **shall** cry aloud; [LXX adds: “**and they that are left on the land**”] **shall** rejoice together [LXX does not include “**from the west (lit. “sea”)**”] in the glory of the LORD; [LXX adds: “**the water of the sea shall be troubled**”].

### 4.3 *The New Testament and the “Great Earthquake” of the Sixth Seal*

Aside from HB and Jewish Second Temple writings, could the author of Revelation also have found inspiration for his worldwide eschatological earthquake from early Christian sources? While a worldwide, eschatological earthquake is not mentioned in other NT writings, Noah and the flood are.<sup>20</sup> Within the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus’ words link the suddenness of divine judgment in Noah’s days with the suddenness of Christ’s return in the *eschaton* (Matt 24:29). Both Hebrews (11:7) and 1 Peter (3:20–21) focus on the Noachic flood as a positive and negative example of salvation accomplished. Like Revelation, 1 Peter addresses Christ-followers in the Roman province of Asia (and even beyond, in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, and Bithynia). 2 Peter takes the Noachic flood motif one step further than does 1 Peter. 2 Peter accords most closely with Isaiah 24:6, 18b–20 in contrasting the fiery destruction in the *Endzeit* with the watery *Urzeit* of worldwide destruction through the Noachic flood (2 Pet 3:6–7). Even if 2 Peter is pseudonymous and dated into the second century, it is not implausible to concede that this hermeneutical tradition would have been extant during John’s time.

Given the application of Noachic flood motifs within early Christian sources, and assuming John’s awareness of, and access to, at least some of those sources (whether written or oral), his interest in incorporating Noachic allusions into his ἀποκάλυψις may have been piqued. Even if this was the case, though, the content found in NT sources would not have informed either his use of, nor the centrality with which John accords, the “great earthquake.”

---

20. The Synoptic Gospels do not refer to a worldwide, eschatological earthquake, only to “earthquakes in various places” (Mark 13:8/Matt 24:8/Luke 21:11). These differ from the “great earthquake” of Revelation in two respects: (1) they are not concurrent with the cosmic signs of final judgment, as in Revelation’s sixth Seal (6:12–17), but occur well before the disturbances in the sun, moon, and stars (Mark 13:24–25/Matt 24:29/Luke 21:25), and (2) they are not worldwide in scope, but only occur “in various places.”

#### *4.4 Isaiah 24 as Traditum for the “Great Earthquake” of the Apocalypse*

It is to be noted, of course, that the Genesis account of the Noachic flood only meets one of the three elements which constitute the “great earthquake” of Revelation (i.e., worldwide divine judgment). Thus, if the Genesis flood account can, in any way, be considered the *traditum* upon which Revelation’s “great earthquake” is styled, then it can only be so in the guise of a later *tradio* in which the Genesis account has been eschatologically transformed through the process of, what Fishbane calls, inner-biblical aggadic exegesis.<sup>21</sup> One HB text appears to do just that—Isaiah 24.

Of all the texts considered so far, only Isaiah 24 contextualizes its worldwide earthquake within an *Urzeit*. This chapter, which forms part of the so-called “early apocalyptic” section of the book of Isaiah (chs. 24–27),<sup>22</sup> metaphorically depicts its cataclysm along the lines of the worldwide Noachic flood, yet expands that allusion by setting that cataclysm within the *eschaton* and by avoiding the use of water as the means of its enactment. It is this eschatologized *tradio* in Isaiah 24 that Jan Fekkes III, in his seminal

---

21. M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 429–31, esp. 408. *Traditum* refers to the original text. *Tradio* is the new text which, to use Fishbane’s terminology, is created through aggadic exegesis. Aggadic exegesis refers to “the exegetical transformation of specific texts or traditions” (Ibid., 380). In the case of the reappropriation of Genesis’ Noachic flood account (*traditum*) in a subsequent *tradio*, Fishbane would term this taxemic aggadic exegesis, that is, the “creative combination or recombination of elements from the tradition [i.e., *traditum*].” Isaiah 24 is an example of a new *tradio* which uses taxemic aggadic exegesis to re-apply the Noachic flood not only to a new historical setting but, in so doing, also to transform elements of the Genesis *traditum* into a new literary mode—an “early apocalypse” (see n. 22 for P. D. Hanson’s rationale for identifying Isaiah 24–27 as “early apocalyptic” literature).

22. P. D. Hanson generically categorizes Isaiah 24–27 as “early apocalyptic” not “proto-apocalyptic” since “early apocalyptic” merely indicates generic similarity and not necessarily generic determinacy (“Old Testament Apocalyptic Reexamined,” in *Visionaries and Their Apocalypses* [Issues in Religion and Theology 4; ed. P. D. Hanson; London: SPCK, 1983], 51). Regarding William R. Millar’s argument for a “proto-apocalyptic” designation see his *Isaiah 24–27 and the Origin of Apocalyptic* (Harvard Semitic Monograph Series 11; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 114.

study of Isaianic allusions in the book of Revelation, anomalously neglects to consider as an allusional basis for the “great earthquake” of Revelation.<sup>23</sup>

Others (e.g., Bauckham, Aune, and Beale), though, have noted the connection between the earthquakes of Isaiah 24 and Revelation.<sup>24</sup> Their assessments would place the earth rending quake of Isa 24:19–20 within Fekkes’ category of “Probable/Possible” allusion. What Bauckham and others fail to note, though, is the explicit placement of the Isaianic earthquake within the context of a Noachic flood motif (Isa 24:18a, “the windows of heaven were opened”).

The Isaianic *traditio* (ch. 24), which eschatologizes, and “dries out,” the Noachic flood *traditum* (Gen 6–9), would have formed a fitting *traditum* for Revelation’s own “great earthquake” judgment *traditio* (6:12–18:24). The prominence of the earth-rending quake in Isaiah 24 (vv 1, 18b–20) may very well have inspired the centrality that John gives his “great earthquake,” a centrality that is evident in its repetitive occurrences within climactic judgment scenes in the Apocalypse (i.e., the sixth Seal, the sixth Trumpet, and the seventh Bowl). It remains to explore more precisely the Isaianic transformation of the implied earthquake in the Genesis flood account into a symbol of worldwide cataclysmic judgment in the *eschaton*.

#### **4.5 Isaiah 24 and the Genesis Flood Traditum**

The Genesis *traditum* of the flood mentions both waters falling from above (7:12) and also rising from subterranean chambers below (7:11).

---

23. Jan Fekkes III, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and their Development* (JSNTSup 93; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), esp. 280–81 and p. 306 of the Index of References. Fekkes’ non-consideration of Isaiah 24’s earthquake as an allusion in Revelation is not due to skepticism on his part, but rather appears to be due simply to oversight on his part. Isaiah’s earthquake does not receive mention in any of Fekkes’ three categories that assess the level of verifiability in relation to Revelation’s use of Isaianic material (see pp. 280–81). Fekkes’ three categories are: Certain/Virtually Certain, Probable/Possible, and Unlikely/Doubtful. However, neither Isa 24:18–20 nor the four mentions in Revelation of the “great earthquake” (6:12; 8:5; 11:13; 18:10[?]) are included in Fekkes’ three categories (see pp. 280–81). Although Rev 6:12, 8:5 and some verses in ch. 11 are cited, content other than the “great earthquake” is analyzed.

24. See, for example, Bauckham (“Eschatological Earthquake,” 224), David Aune (*Revelation 6–16* [WBC 52B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998], 413), and Beale (*Book of Revelation*, 396).

An earthquake of worldwide proportions is implied in Gen 7:11—“the fountains of the great deep burst open [or ‘were broken up’]” (Gen 7:11).<sup>25</sup> After the floodwaters receded, YHWH made an “everlasting covenant” (בְּרִית עוֹלָם; Gen 9:16) with Noah and his descendents never again to judge cataclysmically the earth through the medium of water (Gen 9:12).

How does the Isaianic account compare with the Genesis account? There are at least three substantive allusions to the Noachic flood in Isaiah 24—the waters from above, an earthquake, and an everlasting covenant (בְּרִית עוֹלָם). First, in Isaiah 24 we only find mention made of waters from above, not from below, with these waters being metaphorical, not literal (24:18b).<sup>26</sup> Actual judgment upon the inhabitants of הָאָרֶץ (“the Earth” or “the Land”) is said, instead, to proceed through the heat of drought (24:4, 7) and even by fire (24:6).<sup>27</sup> Second, unlike the Genesis account, but like Revelation’s “great earthquake,” the earthquake motif in Isaiah 24 is given great prominence, so much so that poetic license presents the whole earth as being rent and shaken (24:18b–20).

Aside from the rain from heaven and the earth-rending quake, there is one other allusion to the Noachic flood that is found in Isaiah 24—“the everlasting covenant” (בְּרִית עוֹלָם; 24:5). Watts argues that Isa 24:5 has “obvious reference to the everlasting covenant of Gen 9:12[–17].”<sup>28</sup> The phrase בְּרִית עוֹלָם is repeated a further fifteen times in the HB, but none of these other occurrences have either the Noachic flood nor the worldwide judgment of humanity as their backdrop.<sup>29</sup> Rather, they all only have the

25. The Hebrew of Gen 7:11 reads, נִבְקְעוּ כָּל-מַעְיֵנֹת תְּהוֹם רַבָּה.

26. The reference in 24:18 to the windows of heaven being opened is also found in Gen 7:11. The Hebrew phraseology is very similar in both (Isa 24:18, כִּי-אֲרָבוֹת מְרוֹם נִפְתָּחוּ; Gen 7:11, וְאֲרָבֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם נִפְתָּחוּ). Even though, in Isa 24:18 מְרוֹם is used instead of הַשָּׁמַיִם two factors favour its consideration as an intentional allusion to the Genesis account: (1) the same lexical substitution is made in Isa 24:21; (2) BHS comments that at v. 18 “frt ins (perhaps insert) הַשָּׁמַיִם” for מְרוֹם.

27. Isa 24:6: “...the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few people are left.” Although the NRSV translates עַל-כֵּן חָרוּ יְשֵׁבֵי אֶרֶץ (Isa 24:6) as “therefore the inhabitants of the earth dwindled,” *BDB* (359.1) favours translating חָרוּ as “burned” (חָרַר Qal, sec. 2).

28. John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33* (WBC24; Waco, TX: Word, 1985), 318. So also Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39* (FOTL16; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 322–23.

29. The exact phrase בְּרִית עוֹלָם occurs eleven times: Exod 31:16; Lev 24:8; 2 Sam 23:5; 1 Chr 16:15–18 (also Ps 105:10); Isa 24:5; Isa 55:3; Jer 32:37–40; Jer 50:4, 5; Ezek 16:59, 60; and Ezek 37:24–26. The phrase בְּרִית עוֹלָם with intervening words occurs four times: Num

Israelites as their referent. In these fifteen contexts, any breaking of the *בְּרִית עוֹלָם* is limited to Jewish institutions such as the Sabbath, the Davidic/Messianic dynasty, YHWH's covenant with Abraham or the promise of the land of Israel to Abraham and Jacob.

Thus, Isaiah's use of *בְּרִית עוֹלָם* in 24:5 within the context of a cataclysmic worldwide judgment, one that is set within a Noachic flood motif (24:18b–20), suggests that the Noachic covenant is specifically in view.<sup>30</sup> Narratologically, then, the occurrence of the phrase *בְּרִית עוֹלָם* in Isaiah 24 could be said implicitly to indict its audience as being just as deserving of divine retribution as Noah's generation, and perhaps even more so since the breaking of the unconditional, unilateral Noachic covenant technically should have been possible only by God, and not by human beings.

#### 4.6 Revelation's "Great City" and Isaiah's "City of Chaos"

Isaiah's eschatologization of the Genesis earthquake opens up the possibility, then, of an allusional connection with the eschatological earthquake of Revelation. The suggestion that Isaiah 24 forms the allusional basis for Revelation's "great earthquake" finds additional support in the possibility that Isaiah's "city of chaos" (24:10; *קְרִית־תְּהוֹ*)<sup>31</sup> may be alluded to in Revelation's "great city/Babylon" (11:8; 16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 16–21).<sup>32</sup> Both cities are divinely judged through fire (Isa 24:6; Rev 17:16, 18) and a worldwide earthquake (Isa 24:1, 18a–20; Rev 11:13; 16:18–19; 18:2, 10, 17, 21[?]).

A number of cities have been suggested as historical referents for Isaiah's "city of chaos/emptiness," assuming, of course, that the primordial

---

18:19; Num 25:12, 13; Job 41:4 [40:28 MT]; Josh 4:7 is an implicit reference (*בְּרִית־יְהוָה*; "covenant of the LORD").

30. The phrase *בְּרִית עוֹלָם* also occurs in Gen 17:7 in relation to God's "eternal covenant" with Abraham. However, since Isa 24:18 specifically alludes to the Noachic flood, the *בְּרִית עוֹלָם* of 24:5 has most probable reference to the Noachic rather than to the Abrahamic covenant.

31. The morpheme *תְּהוֹ* ("formlessness, emptiness"; *BDB* 1062b) may also suggest primordial "chaos" since it is also found in Genesis 1:2 where *הַאֲרָץ* is described as "a formless void" (*תְּהוֹ וְבִהוּ*; Gen 1:2).

32. Previous commentators do not appear to have explored the possibility of an allusional connection between Revelation's "great city" and Isaiah's "city of chaos" (e.g., Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 619–21; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 591–92; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 220–21).



allusion (תהוה) even presupposes a single historical referent. There are three primary historical candidates: eighth century Nineveh,<sup>33</sup> sixth century Jerusalem prior to its Babylonian exile,<sup>34</sup> and Babylon.<sup>35</sup> Johnson sees a clear allusion to Jerusalem through the phrase בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ (“in the midst/belly of the earth”; Isa 24:13).<sup>36</sup> The referential ambiguity inherent in the Isaianic “city of chaos” is also evident in John’s “great city” in Revelation. The “great city” of ch. 11 appears to be Jerusalem (11:8), while the “great city” in chs. 16, 17, and 18 is identified as “Babylon the great,” which nomenclature is symbolic of ancient Rome (17:17, the city which sits among seven hills).<sup>37</sup> Historical referents notwithstanding, the “great city” of chs. 11, 16, 17, 18 suffers a singular fate—destruction through the “great earthquake” (11:13; 16:18–19; 18:2, 10, 17, 21[?]).

#### ***4.7 Summary: Isaiah 24 as Traditum for the “Great Earthquake” of Revelation***

I suggested earlier that a *traditum* which may plausibly be considered as a ‘possible’ or even a ‘probable’ *Urzeit* for the “great earthquake” is one that contains not only an earthquake, and not only an earthquake that is an instrument of worldwide divine judgment, but specifically an earthquake *in the eschaton* that reflects worldwide divine judgment by fire. Two literary precedents emerged—Isaiah 24 and *1 Enoch* 1:3–9. Isaiah 24, however, can also be said to contextualize its worldwide eschatological earthquake within an *Urzeit*—Genesis’ Noachic flood *traditum* (Isa 24:5; 18b–20). A comparison of the Isaianic account with the Genesis account demonstrates at least three substantive allusions to the Noachic flood —waters falling from above, an earthquake, and an everlasting covenant. A comparison of Revelation’s “great earthquake” with the earth rending quake in Isaiah 24

33. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, 320.

34. Dan G. Johnson, *From Chaos to Restoration: An Integrative Reading of Isaiah 24–27* (JSOTSup 61; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 32.

35. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*, 317.

36. A not dissimilar phrase is used to refer to Jerusalem in Ezek 38:12 (“the center of the earth”; טְבוּר הָאָרֶץ).

37. See, for example, Aune’s discussion of the “great city” of chs. 11, 16, 17, and 18 (*Revelation 6–16*, 619–21). Rev 11:8 reads, “the great city that is prophetically called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.”

suggests two primary correlations: (1) The prominence given Isaiah’s earth-rending quake (24:1, 18b–20) may very well have inspired the centrality that John gives his “great earthquake,” a centrality that is evident in its repetitive occurrences within cataclysmic judgment scenes (i.e., the sixth Seal, the sixth Trumpet, and the seventh Bowl); and (2) not only is the ambiguity of historical referents for the Isaianic “city of chaos” (24:10) also evident in John’s “great city” in Revelation, but both “cities” suffer the same fate—destruction by a worldwide, eschatological earthquake.

In light of the foregoing, one could reasonably conclude that if Isaiah 24 alludes to the earthquake of the Noachic flood, and if Revelation alludes to the eschatological earthquake in Isaiah 24, then, by implication, the “great earthquake” of the sixth Seal can be said to have as its *Urzeit* the earthquake of the Noachic flood.

## 5. Question Two:

### **Asia Minor and Noachic Allusion in the “Great Earthquake”?**

The preceding discussion leads me to the second question that is necessary to ask relative to the determination of an *Urzeit* for the cataclysmic judgment effected through Revelation’s “great earthquake”: Would a perceived allusion to the Noachic flood have held any relevance for the Greco-Roman, and not just for the Jewish, populace of Asia Minor? Two corollary questions provide direction to my investigation. First, did residents in Asia Minor have first-hand experience of earthquakes? Second, if the Noachic account presumes an earthquake, would the story of Noah’s flood even have been known among the Greco-Roman, and not just the Jewish, populace of first century CE Asia Minor? Both questions can be given affirmative answers, the first in the geological makeup of Asia Minor, and the second in explorations of early Christian preaching, Greek flood traditions, and numismatic discoveries.

#### ***5.1 Earthquakes: Geological Evidence***

With respect to the Apocalypse’s intended audience, the “great earthquake” would have held particular relevance for the Asia Minor *ekklēsiai*, especially for the communities of Christ-followers in Sardis and Philadelphia. Tacitus (*Ann.* 2.47.3–4) notes that the great earthquake of 17

CE was particularly devastating for both cities such that Philadelphia was even granted imperial exemption from paying taxes for a five year period.<sup>38</sup> Devastating earthquakes were also known east of the Roman province of Asia in other parts of Asia Minor, specifically in Apamea (88 BCE), a key city in Phrygia. Beyond Asia Minor, “great” earthquakes occurred in Cyprus in 76, and in Pompeii in 79. Bauckham suggests that the eruption of Vesuvius which destroyed Pompeii “would have included both an earthquake and a hail of stones quite adequate to the description in Rev. xvi 21.”<sup>39</sup> *Sib. Or.* 4. 107–113, 129f., written about a decade before Revelation, includes *ex-eventu* prophecies of the earthquakes in Cyprus and Asia Minor.

### 5.2 Noah’s Flood: Early Christian Evidence

During the persecution of Christ-followers by the emperor Decius in 250 CE a presbyter of the *ekklēsia* in Smyrna, Pionius by name, was arrested and led to the marketplace where he was publicly commanded to sacrifice to the gods. He preached, instead, of the coming divine judgment upon the whole world. He reminded his listeners of what they already knew: “Consider the partial conflagrations and floods, such as you know of, for example, in the case of Deucalion, and we in the case of Noah. They are partial and occur in this way that we may comprehend the nature of the whole from the part.”<sup>40</sup>

Thus, already in the third century CE the *ekklēsia* in Smyrna recognized that the *Endzeit* (“the whole”) was reflective of the *Urzeit* (“the part”). For this Smyrnian presbyter, the *Urzeit* for God’s final judgment was specifically identified with God’s judgment through the flood. Is there any earlier evidence, though, for the relevance of the Noachic flood narrative, and its concomitant message of divine judgment, for the peoples of Asia Minor?

---

38. Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986/89), 156.

39. “Eschatological Earthquake,” 230.

40. A. Hillhorst, “The Noah Story: Was It Known to the Greeks?” in *Interpretations of the Flood* (ed. F. Martínez García and Gerard P. Luttikhuisen; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 56–65, esp. 57.

### 5.3 Noah's Flood: Greek Flood Legends

There are many ancient Near Eastern flood traditions. Deucalion, who is mentioned in Pionius' speech above, is the Greek counterpart to Ziusudra (Sumerian), Atrahasis and Utnapishtim (Babylonian) and Noah (Hebrew). The Greek flood tradition regarding Deucalion, which is well attested in the Greco-Roman world during the first century CE, describes how two people survived a worldwide flood instituted by the god Jupiter. Deucalion and his wife Pyrrha survived the flood by climbing into an ark. Afterwards, Deucalion is said to have built the temple of Hierapolis on the Euphrates over the flood waters.<sup>41</sup>

It is instructive to note, though, that some Greek authors conflate various details of the Noachic flood into their retelling of the Deucalion flood myth.<sup>42</sup> This implies Greco-Roman knowledge of the biblical flood during, and possibly even prior to, the time of the Apocalypse's composition. Plutarch (c. 46–126 CE), in *De sollertia animalium* 13, describes Deucalion releasing a dove from his ark even though classical literature is silent on this point. Lucian of Samosata (120–180 CE), a Greek author of Syrian heritage retells the Deucalion legend in his *Syrian Goddess*. He picks up on four salient features of the Noachic story in Genesis 6–9.

First, while Deucalion is never given any reason for the flood, Lucian adds that it is because the previous race from which current humanity is descended “were extremely violent and committed lawless deeds...”<sup>43</sup> Second, no details are given in the classical literature as to how the flood came about. Lucian's description, however, is very reminiscent of the Genesis 7 account. He writes, “Suddenly the earth poured forth a flood of water. Heavy rains fell...”<sup>44</sup> A third salient feature of Lucian's use of the Noachic flood is evident in the rest of that sentence: “Heavy rains fell... until everything became water and all the people perished.”<sup>45</sup> This directly contradicts the Deucalion flood tradition in which some managed to survive

---

41. Steven W. Holloway, “What Ship Goes There: The Flood Narratives in the Gilgamesh Epic and Genesis Considered in Light of Ancient Near Eastern Temple Ideology,” *ZAW* 103/3 (1991): 328–355, esp. 332.

42. Hillhorst, “The Noah Story,” 60–61.

43. *Ibid.*, 61.

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*

by climbing to the tops of the mountains. The fourth feature of the Noachic flood which Lucian adds is that Deucalion “embarked his children... [and] he boarded pigs and horses... and every kind of creature that grazes on earth... all of them in pairs.”<sup>46</sup> In the original Greek story Deucalion did not bring any children or animals onto his ark. The foregoing demonstrates that the Noachic flood may very well have been a profitable motif by which Christians could have relevantly communicated a coming worldwide divine judgment to not just a Jewish audience, but also to a Greco-Roman one.

Aside from the widely disseminated legend of Deucalion and a universal flood, there are also four localized flood stories that hail from the region of Phrygia in Asia Minor. Unlike the Deucalion legend, none of the Phrygian stories, however, evidence obvious dependence on the Noachic flood. Trebilco notes that each of the four Phrygian flood legends are missing an ark, along with some other important biblical features.<sup>47</sup>

The Iconium tradition in Lycaonia (late third century BCE) adds, to the existing Deucalion flood tradition, the story of an ancient king of Phrygia named Nannokos who is informed by an oracle that after his death a flood would come by which all life would perish.<sup>48</sup>

The second flood story is found in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 8.618–724. It involves a Phrygian couple by the name of Philemon and his wife Baucis. Due to their piety the gods warn them of the ensuing flood and instruct them to climb to the top of a mountain to ensure their safety. Independence from the Noachic story is seen both in the lack of an ark and in flood waters that are not the result of rainfall. The fact that Ovid cites subterranean waters as the cause of the Phrygian flood finds parallel in the Noachic flood, wherein earthquake activity is also implied (Gen 7:11).<sup>49</sup>

A third flood tradition is found in the writings of Nonnos. Although he writes around 500 CE he incorporates earlier mythology. His story’s hero is Priasos, later described as “the proud son of Phrygia.” Because of his piety he was forewarned by Zeus of an ensuing flood and escaped to the Aonian

---

46. Ibid.

47. Paul R. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (SNTS Monograph Series; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 87–89, 91.

48. Iconium is derived from the Greek εἰκόνες (“images”) which refers to the images of mud that people were fashioned from by Prometheus and Athena in order to repopulate the post-flood earth (Ibid., 88–90).

49. Ibid., 88–90.

land to avoid the “fatal showers.” The cause of the flood cited by Nonnos is almost a reverse image of Ovid’s. Nonnos attributes the flood waters to showers of rain, while Ovid to water from burst subterranean chambers.<sup>50</sup>

A fourth story, as told by Plutarch, involves King Midas and his son Anchouros, and it is set in the city of Celaenae, which, in the third century BCE, was relocated by the Seleucids and renamed Apamea. Since it sat astride a major east-west trading route, Apamea became a city of significant economic importance, second only to Ephesus, until the turn of the second century CE. In Midas’ day, a chasm in the earth was said to have opened up, out of which flowed water which engulfed many people and their homes. Complete disaster was averted only when Midas’ son Anchouros leapt into the chasm at which point it closed and the flood waters receded. Apamean geological history accords with this legend in that new lakes did actually form from underground water released by earthquake activity.<sup>51</sup>

The picture of underground water being released through seismic activity also accords with the Noachic account. Might this have factored into the rise of a Noachic flood tradition within the same city of Apamea many centuries later? Second century CE numismatic evidence from Apamea demonstrates the extent to which its populace had already adopted (and adapted) the Noachic flood tradition.

#### *5.4 Noah’s Flood: Numismatic Evidence in Apamea*

Beginning in the second century CE, the city of Apamea minted a series of coins which bear the scene of Noah and the Ark.<sup>52</sup> This conjoining of biblical images with imperial coinage is unique in antiquity. Depicted on one side of the coin are two people who are situated both inside, and to the left of, an ark. Above the ark are two birds, a raven and a dove. The dove is holding an olive branch in its claws.

An inscription on the coin clearly indicates that Deucalion and Pyrrha are not being commemorated. The inscription on the inside of the ark reads ΝΩΕ (Noah). The ark by which Noah and his wife are standing is a rectangular box-like structure. They are depicted to the left of the ark standing on dry

---

50. Ibid., 88–90.

51. Ibid., 88–90.

52. Ibid., 86–88.

ground with their right arms raised in an “orans” gesture as an expression of gratitude for salvation. This merging of Jewish tradition with Greek coinage reflects the significance of the Jewish community in Apamea, a presence which dates back to the transplantation of large numbers of Jews when the populace of Celaenae moved to their new location of Apamea.

The coin implies that the Ark’s resting place was Apamea. This assumption is given further reinforcement in the apparently indigenous Jewish *Sibylline Oracles*. In book III, which dates to the second century BCE,<sup>53</sup> Sibylla describes her journey with Noah as his daughter-in-law.<sup>54</sup> Rather than locating Mt. Ararat in Armenia, as was commonly assumed, she identifies the Ark’s landing place as “a certain tall lofty mountain on the dark mainland of Phrygia. It is called Ararat.”<sup>55</sup> This “Mt. Ararat” is said to be a hill located near the “the great river Marsyos” (also Marsyas). This associates the Ark’s landing place with the hill of Celaenae (3660 ft. high), which is near the river Marsyas in the immediate vicinity of Apamea.

### **5.5 Noah’s Flood: Apamea as κιβωτός (“Ark”)**

Paired with numismatic evidence is a linguistic connection, whether intentional or not, that also connects Apamea with the Noachic flood account. Strabo (19 CE) recounts that Apamea was given the nickname κιβωτός (“ark,” “chest,” “box,” or “coffer”). At this stage in the city’s life, however κιβωτός would simply have meant “chest” in honour of Apamea’s economic importance.<sup>56</sup> A coin issued during the reign of Hadrian (117–138 CE) corroborates Strabo’s claim. Hadrian’s coin contains the word Κιβωτόι imprinted along with five chests that sit above the river Marsyas. Apamea (κιβωτός) is thus clearly implied since the river Marsyas runs beside the city.

It is clear that Apamea’s nickname arose due to its economic history rather than to any history of Jewish religious influence. Nonetheless, the fact that the LXX uses κιβωτός for Noah’s ark makes more understandable why the Jewish *Sybilline Oracles*, and even the Jewish populace of Apamea, associated the Ark’s resting place with the hill of Celaenae near κιβωτός,

53. E. Isaac, “*I Enoch*,” *OTP*, 1:354.

54. *Sib. Or.* 3.823–7.

55. *Sib. Or.* 1.261–2.

56. Goods meant for transport from Apamea to ports on the coast, such as Ephesus, which was 300 km away, were packed in chests for the trip.

that is, Apamea.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, a Greco-Roman readership more than likely would not have associated Deucalion's ark with Apamea, the city nicknamed *κιβωτός* ("ark"), since in the Deucalion flood legend his ark is only referred to by the word *λάρανξ*.<sup>58</sup> Neither would Asia Minor residents have associated any other ark with Apamea since local Phrygian flood traditions were devoid of ark traditions.

Hilhorst concludes from all this that it "seems warranted that Noah was known to the Greek world of the early Empire to a serious extent."<sup>59</sup> Thus, if the Jewish and/or Greco-Roman audience of Revelation would have perceived an allusion to the Noachic earthquake in John's crafting of the final, eschatological "great earthquake," then the Apocalypse's message of inescapable divine judgment would have had even greater relevance for a first century CE Asia Minor audience.

### 5.6 *κιβωτός as the "Ark of the Covenant" in Rev 11:19*

The word *κιβωτός* is also found in the book of Revelation. It is mentioned in the third Storm Theophany, which occurs within the context of the seventh Trumpet/third Woe (11:15–19/8:13; 11:14). The blowing of the seventh Trumpet (11:15a) is described in terms of *already* accomplished eschatological finality.<sup>60</sup> Within this trumpeted note of finality we see, for the first and only time, the word *κιβωτός* in the Apocalypse. It is not Noah's *κιβωτός*, though, that is here in view; it is the Ark of the Covenant (11:19: *κιβωτὸς τῆς διαθήκης αὐτοῦ*).

57. The LXX uses *κιβωτός* ("ark") to translate both *הַתְּבִיחַ* (the "ark" of Noah) and *אֲרוֹן* (the "Ark" of the Covenant). See explanatory comments by Hague (*TWOT*, "תְּבִיחַ," 2.271).

58. Trebilco (*Jewish Communities*, 224 n. 35) notes that "it is possible that the translators of the Septuagint used the unusual word for the Ark—*κιβωτός*—precisely to distinguish the story from the Greek myth of Deucalion."

59. Hillhorst, "The Noah Story," 65.

60. "The kingdom of the world *has become* the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah... the nations *raged*, but your wrath *has come*..." (11:15b–18; NRSV). Irrespective of whether this note of eschatological finality is due to a prolepsis or an instance of Pauline "already/not yet" eschatology (Sydney H.T. Page, "Revelation 20 and Pauline Eschatology," *JETS* 23/1 [1980]: 31–43), it supports the view of some (e.g., Loenertz, Bauckham, Thomas; see nn. 13 and 61) that the seventh Trumpet is telescopically representative of, and thus inclusive of, the finalized judgment envisioned in the seven Bowls (15:5–16:21).



With the revelation of the *κιβωτὸς τῆς διαθήκης* at the seventh Trumpet comes the addition of a fifth element to the Storm Theophany—“great hail” (11:19). If, as Bauckham claims, the “great hail” of the seventh Trumpet (11:19) is the heavenly representation of the earthly “great hail” that falls (16:21) in the seventh Bowl judgment (16:17–21), then the earthquakes in the seventh Trumpet theophany (11:19) and in the seventh Bowl (16:18, 19) represent the same event too.<sup>61</sup>

### ***5.7 Noah’s Flood: Summary***

The preceding discussion suggests that an affirmative answer is possible to the question of the socio-cultural relevance of Revelation’s “great earthquake” imagery: the motif of an earthquake of great magnitude, and especially one that could be perceived as being an allusion to the implied earthquake of the Noachic flood, would have been particularly relevant not just for Revelation’s seven *ekklēsiai* (“assemblies/churches”), but also for the general populace of Asia Minor.

## **6. An Intertextual Re-reading of the Sixth Seal in Light of a Noachic Flood Motif**

Given the ‘possible,’ and perhaps even ‘probable,’ status of the “great earthquake” as an allusion to the world-wide Noachic cataclysm, what might some of the rhetorical payoffs have been for Revelation’s author? In a nutshell, one could say that the intensity of the divine judgment, as portrayed in Revelation, receives greater validation when cast in the mold of an *Urzeit* that presumes such rampant wickedness among humanity that worldwide, cataclysmic divine judgment was the only available option. If John’s audience perceived an Isaianic reinterpretation of the Noachic *Urzeit*

---

61. “Eschatological Earthquake,” 227–28. Bauckham’s interlocking principle appears to follow R. J. Loenertz’s concept of “dovetailing” (*The Apocalypse of Saint John* [London: Sheed and Ward, 1947], esp. xv). R. L. Thomas refines Loenertz’s approach with his concept of “telescoping” (*Revelation 1–7, Revelation 8–22* [Chicago: Moody, 1992/1995], esp. 1.43 and 2.534). Thomas uses “telescopic” terminology to describe a perceived interlocking pattern such that the seventh of each septenary is like the joints of a telescope which when extended reveal more and more detail. My article affirms Thomas’ “telescopic” principle but challenges his linear chronology via a reiterative organization of his telescopic content (“‘And I Saw...’” 176–83).

in John's depiction of the *Endzeit*, then the Apocalypse implicitly indicts Greco-Roman society as also being just as, or even more so, deserving of divine retribution as was Noah's generation.

To achieve that rhetorical goal John does not just call his eschatological earthquake "great" (6:12) but he even describes it in such superlative language that it trumps even the Noachic earthquake—"No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake" (16:18).<sup>62</sup> This implicitly brings the reader to expect that the destructive force of the eschatological earthquake will exceed many times over not just that of those experienced in and around Asia Minor, but even of the universal flood-initiating Noachic quake itself.

Could part of John's technique for fashioning a Noachic connection in the minds of his audience entail, first, a literary interlocking of the earthquakes in the seventh Trumpet and the seventh Bowl by virtue of their shared "great hail" imagery, and, second, through his singular use of the word *κιβωτός* ("ark") in the seventh Trumpet theophany (11:19)? If so, then elements of the Noachic flood, such as the disappearance of mountains and islands under the watery deluge from the sky, might have come to mind not just through the seventh Bowl (16:20), but also through the sixth Seal (6:14), since both judgment scenes recount the removal of mountains and islands after a cataclysmic earthquake. Might even the "great hail" too reflect back to the Noachic flood? If so, it would constitute an ironic re-visioning of the watery deluge of the Noachic flood, such that an allusion to the Noachic flood is maintained even while at the same time not having compromised God's promise never to judge the world by liquid water.

It may be, however, that those specific elements did not interrelate in the minds of Revelation's audience. Nonetheless, if, even in an overall manner, they still viewed the events of the sixth Seal (and their subsequent expansive reiteration in the six Trumpets and seven Bowls) through the lens of the Noachic flood narrative, the horror implicit in the day of the wrath of

---

62. John's hyperbole accords with Greco-Roman usage. Josephus, in referencing the earthquake in Judaea (31 BCE), described it as "such as had not happened at any other time" (*Ant.* 15.121), and Pliny called the earthquake in Asia (17 CE) the greatest in human memory (*Nat. Hist.* 2.86). Even if John's hyperbole is informed by Greco-Roman practice, it does not exclude the possibility that his use of such superlative language may also refer back to the implied Noachic earthquake.

the Lamb would have been even more forcibly demonstrated in at least three ways: (1) The earthquake of the Apocalypse is greater by far than the one which rent asunder the fountains of the great deep during Noah’s time; (2) The frozen deluge of massive hailstones (“about one hundred pounds each”; 16:21) is so terrifying as to cause the Noachic deluge to pale in comparison; and (3) the sense of hopelessness is so inestimably greater for the peoples under God’s second worldwide judgment that they ask to be killed by the very mountains which previously were their last prospect of salvation (6:15, 16). Alluding to the Noachic flood motif in the eschatological events of the sixth Seal presents an informed first century CE Jewish-Christian reader, especially one living in Asia Minor, with a vision of final, eschatological judgment that is inestimably greater than anything ever experienced by humanity to that point.

## 7. Conclusion

The *Endzeit* of divine eschatological judgment in the Apocalypse’s sixth Seal appears to reflect the *Urzeit* of the first worldwide cataclysm, the Noachic flood. Literary as well as socio-cultural factors support this view. Literary evidence has demonstrated that it is possible to affirm the centrality of the eschatological earthquake in at least three ways: (1) as a structural focal-point around which to organize the expansive reiteration of the sixth Seal’s content (6:12–17) through the six Trumpets (8:2–9:21; 11:1–14; 18:1–24[?]) and the seventh Trumpet/seven Bowls (11:15–19/15:5–16:21); (2) as a rhetorical focal-point for the presentation of worldwide divine judgment in the *eschaton*; and (3) as an intertextual device by which to connect that worldwide, eschatological judgment to a Noachic *Urzeit*, as it was eschatologically re-visioned in Isaiah 24. The rhetorical relevance of the image of a “great earthquake” within Asia Minor, particularly if it was tied to a Noachic flood motif, is affirmed through geological, sociological and numismatic evidence.

It would appear, then, that not only does the *Endzeit* of the New Jerusalem, which is a vision of “salvation accomplished,” have an *Urzeit* (the Garden of Eden) but so too does the vision of “judgment accomplished” through the “great earthquake” (Noah’s flood). One might even say that, together, the *Urzeit* of the paradisiacal Garden of Eden and of the cataclysmic Noachic flood produce a union in Revelation’s eschatological *Endzeit* that

results in a *Hochzeit*, that is, the “marriage of the Lamb... and his bride” (Rev 19:7).