

TALES OF THE APOCALYPSE

Dr. Andrei Orlov, associate professor of theology, was born in the former Soviet Union in 1960 — the height of the Cold War. During the next 30 years, Orlov watched the country crumble from a military and scientific juggernaut that launched Sputnik to a country with a shattered economy and political structure.

“Growing up in the Soviet Union as a child you thought everything was great,” Orlov recalls. “Then you watch as the ideological framework of your world collapses into darkness.” Whether things were good or bad, Orlov says, beliefs were destroyed. “Both the spiritual and physical world we knew completely changed.”

Orlov thinks that experience might have inspired his fascination with apocalyptic stories, the focus of his scholarly work. He is now a world-renowned expert on pseudepigrapha — ancient Jewish religious writings with disputed authorship written between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D. that are not included in the Hebrew or Catholic Bibles.

The apocalyptic stories he studies include the Second Book of Enoch (2 Enoch) and the Apocalypse of Abraham. Both books

expand on characters and stories found in the Hebrew and Catholic Bibles. Enoch, for instance, is referenced in the Book of Genesis. The story Orlov studies depicts visions of heaven and hell revealed to Enoch, who was taken to heaven and then sent back to earth to share with his sons ethical laws God wishes men to live by. These revelations alter reality for Enoch, his sons and their followers, causing them to rethink their morals and question their past beliefs.

Found among writings like the Dead Sea Scrolls, these supplemental stories provide additional context and understanding to Biblical texts, along with the culture and religious environment they were written in, Orlov says.

This spring and summer, Orlov will hold a prestigious fellowship at the Institute for Advanced Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He will work with other leading scholars from Russia, Israel, Sweden and the United States on how the traditions and beliefs of Jewish and Slavic cultures influenced and interacted with the one other. — AB