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THE INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY  
IN  
JEREMIAH AND THE REVELATION  
COMPARED

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
INTRODUCTION. . . . .	
A. The Problem. . . . .	1
B. The Significance of the Problem. . . . .	iv
C. The Subject Delimited. . . . .	vii
D. The Method and Procedure to be Used. . . . .	vii
E. The Source of Data . . . . .	viii
I. THE GENERAL BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH. . . . .	1
A. Introduction . . . . .	1
B. The International Scene. . . . .	1
1. Egypt. . . . .	1
2. Assyria. . . . .	3
3. Babylonia. . . . .	5
4. The Strategic Geographical Location of Palestine. . . . .	7
C. The Scene Within Judah . . . . .	7
1. The Political Condition. . . . .	8
2. The Social and Economic Conditions . . . . .	10
3. The Moral and Religious Conditions . . . . .	11
D. The Prophet's Background and Call. . . . .	13
E. Summary. . . . .	17
II. JEREMIAH'S INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY. . . . .	18
A. Introduction . . . . .	18
B. God as the Lord of History . . . . .	19
1. His Relation to the Natural World. . . . .	19
2. His Relation to Israel . . . . .	21
3. His Relation to Other Nations. . . . .	23
C. The Crisis in History. . . . .	25
1. The Crisis Nationally. . . . .	25
2. The Crisis Individually. . . . .	27
D. Judgment in History. . . . .	29
1. The Nature of Judgment . . . . .	30
2. The Purpose of Judgment. . . . .	32
E. The Final Goal of History. . . . .	36
F. Summary and Conclusion . . . . .	38
III. THE GENERAL BACKGROUND OF THE REVELATION. . . . .	40
A. Introduction . . . . .	40

Chapter	Page
B. The Nature of Apocalyptic Literature . . . .	40
1. Its Historical Setting . . . . .	41
2. Its Purpose and Function . . . . .	44
3. Its Characteristics . . . . .	45
4. Prophecy and Apocalyptic Literature . .	46
C. The Historical Setting of The Revelation .	50
1. The Date . . . . .	51
2. The Times . . . . .	52
3. The Condition of the Readers . . . . .	54
4. The Purpose of the Book . . . . .	56
D. The Author of The Revelation . . . . .	56
E. Its Characteristics and Plan . . . . .	58
1. General Characteristics . . . . .	58
2. Its Comparison to Other Apocalypses .	61
3. Its Structure and Plan . . . . .	62
F. Summary . . . . .	64
IV. THE INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY IN THE REVELATION	67
A. Introduction . . . . .	67
B. God in History . . . . .	67
1. The Sovereignty of God . . . . .	68
2. God the Creator . . . . .	69
3. God the Controller of Destiny . . . .	70
4. His Relation to Man . . . . .	70
C. Christ in History . . . . .	72
1. His Relation to God . . . . .	72
2. His Relation to the Churches . . . .	73
3. His Relation to the World . . . . .	74
4. Christ the Center of All History . .	74
D. The Crisis in History . . . . .	76
E. Judgment in History . . . . .	77
1. The Character of Judgment . . . . .	78
2. The Purpose of Judgment . . . . .	78
3. The Final Judgment . . . . .	79
F. The Final Goal of History . . . . .	81
G. Summary and Conclusion . . . . .	83
V. SUMMARY, COMPARISON AND CONCLUSION . . . . .	85
A. Restatement of the Problem . . . . .	85
B. Summary . . . . .	85
C. Comparison . . . . .	88
1. Similarities . . . . .	88
2. Differences . . . . .	88
D. Conclusion . . . . .	89
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	90

## INTRODUCTION

THE INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY  
IN  
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COMPARED

INTRODUCTION

A. The Problem

Words are slippery like eels. For this reason it is necessary to determine exactly what is meant by "An Interpretation of History." Webster's Dictionary suggests these three possible meanings for interpret: (1) to explain or tell the meaning of; (2) to understand or appreciate in the light of individual belief, judgment or interest; (3) to apprehend and represent by means of art.<sup>1</sup> In this study we shall use the second as our basis. We are trying to study two individual's understanding and appreciation of history in the light of their beliefs and judgments.

But what is history? The word comes from the Greek word, *ἱστορία*, which means "a learning by inquiry" or "a written account of one's inquiries."<sup>2</sup> That was the original meaning of the word. It changed some under Roman

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1. Neilson, W. A. (ed.): Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language, 2nd ed., Unabridged, p. 1299.
2. Lidell, Herney G. and Robert Scott: A Greek-English Lexicon, 8th ed. revised, p. 713.

use as Flint suggests.

"Among the Romans, historia, although often used to denote any narrative or account, any tale or story, acquired also the more definite meaning of a narrative of the past events, a record of some course of human action."<sup>1</sup>

Today the word, history, is used in two senses. It may mean "either the record of events or events themselves."<sup>2</sup> Thus we might say that President Truman makes history and that a scholar or journalist records it.

Let us approach the problem from another angle.

"History is the totality of remembered events, which are determined by free human activity and are important for the life of human groups."<sup>3</sup> Here we have both the subjective and the objective elements. History is events, recorded or unrecorded, but these events "are determined by free human activity"--by man's decisions and actions.

Now we ask the question, is there any pattern to man's activity, i. e., is there a single thread running through all events which ties them together in a single purpose? Though man has freedom of choice is there a purpose which transcends that freedom so that ultimately that purpose will be realized even though man at times may make the wrong decision? This is basically the question which

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1. Flint, Robert:: History of the Philosophy of History, p. 5.
2. Shotwell, J. T.: History, an article in the Encyclopedia Britannica, 14th ed., Vol. 11, p. 594.
3. Tillich, Paul: The Kingdom of God and History, p. 108.

must be answered in "An Interpretation of History."

Castell sharpens the issue by a rather unique approach in suggesting that history does have pattern.

"The idea which it [the word, pattern] is intended to convey is illustrated in the familiar newspaper drawing containing scattered numbers which the reader is invited to connect up by means of lines. The result is a 'picture', perhaps of a horse or a man's head. The scattered numbers occur in a pattern. Gradually we fill in the lines from number to number, we begin to 'see' the pattern. It was 'there' all the time. "Now suppose we liken a history to the pattern which is implicit or latent in the scattered numbers in the cartoon. The scattered numbers would be the events. Drawing lines between them would be tracing connections between the events. Seeing the picture which gradually emerges would be grasping history within which the events occur."1

Accepting this pattern metaphor as legitimate the problem which the interpreter of history faces is this: What is the pattern which holds the events of history together, which gradually emerges as we fill in the events but which was there latent all the time.

It should be added here that a person need not be a historian to have an interpretation of history, just as one need not be a philosopher to have a philosophy of life. The historian gathers together the facts; the interpreter accepts them as they are and tries to understand them in terms of his own beliefs. His purpose is "to seek out their underlying causes, and if possible, construct a causal master key which not only will unlock the 'whys' of the

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1. Castell, Alburey: An Introduction to Modern Philosophy, p. 472.



past but which also may turn the locks of both 'whats' and 'whys' of tomorrow."<sup>1</sup>

A quick glance at both books we are using in this study, the book of Jeremiah and the book of The Revelation, will immediately show us that they are not historical books. To be sure, there are references to historical events, but the purpose of these writers was not to gather historical material. Whether or not their specific purposes were to interpret the events about them will be seen as the study progresses. Suffice it to say here that each of these books does have an interpretation of history. Jeremiah's view is a prophetic interpretation of history<sup>1</sup> while that of John's is the apocalyptic interpretation. It is the purpose of this study to find out how each man understands the "totality of remembered events" of his day in the light of his own beliefs and judgments and then compare their views.

#### B. The Significance of the Problem

Why do all these things happen? If God is a God of love and justice why is there so much sin and suffering in the world? The guns have barely silenced from the most devastating war the world has ever known and already there is talk of another war. Where is it going to lead

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1. These two views will be defined specifically as the paper progresses.

us? Has God forsaken the world to let man destroy himself?

No one living in these chaotic days can evade these heart-searching questions unless he refuses to face reality. The tense international scene, the economic and political crises, the labor problem, the race problem, and the spiritual and moral bankruptcy make us all anxious for the future.

This is not the first time, however, that the world has been in a crisis. The age of the prophets was likewise a day filled with turmoil, tragedy and confusion. The prophets were aware of their time.

"They were men who were absorbed in the issues of their time, analyzing them with acute awareness of a divine mission. Their intellectual and spiritual faculties were finely sharpened and keenly focused upon God, <sup>1</sup> his way in the past, and his demands for the present."

Out of these personal experiences with God they had a message from Him. It was a choice between good and evil, between life and death. Those principles of divine providence which they proclaimed are eternal and will always operate whenever there are similar conditions. Hence, these prophets are relevant to our own day and our own situation. And if we do not want to become sad pessimists about the future we must begin where they did:

"History is important because God is; he is its Ruler, the Determiner of its final issue, the One who gives it significance. He is to be found behind all the

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1. Wright, George Ernest: The Challenge of Israel's Faith, p. 24.

events of life, controlling them, revealing his will through them, and determined that he shall reign supreme in the hearts of men."<sup>1</sup>

Because Jeremiah is the greatest of Old Testament prophets,<sup>2</sup> because he is the most colorful figure to emerge from the pages of the Old Testament,<sup>3</sup> and because he lived during the most critical period of Jewish history,<sup>4</sup> we shall study his interpretation of history in this paper.

We live in great prophetic days. We also live in great apocalyptic days. Since the beginning of this study events have happened in the world to verify this. The turmoil of our world has increased. In the Holy Land there is preparation being made for war as plans are being put into effect in regard to its partition. At the same time "the Iron Curtain" has enclosed another nation, Czechoslovakia. And in China the peril for Christians is increasing as Red domination becomes stronger. The cry has become, "Stop Communism", because, as a minister said recently, Communism appears to be a real incarnation of evil. Thus, everywhere we look it seems that the evil forces of this world are in control of things.

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1. Ibid, p. 31.
2. Cf. Peake, A. S.: Century Bible on Jeremiah, Vol. I, p. 29.
3. Cf. Yates, Kyle: Preaching From the Prophets, p. 128.
4. J. D. Maynard says: "The Old Testament is the Epic of the Fall of Jerusalem. Round that disaster in war which destroyed the national state of Israel gathers all the history, prophecy and song that makes up the Old Testament." Quoted by Dr. H. T. Kuist in his class in Jeremiah in the Biblical Seminary.

In view of this situation Dr. John A. Mackay, President of Princeton Theological Seminary, has said, "The Church must keep alive the apocalyptic hope or succumb to contemporary despair." The apocalyptic hope which he speaks of is well expressed in the words of James Russell Lowell:

"Though the cause of evil prosper,  
Yet 'tis truth alone is strong;  
Though her portion be the scaffold,  
And upon the throne be wrong,  
Yet that scaffold sways the future,  
And behind the dim unknown,  
Standeth God within the shadow  
Keeping watch above His own."

The apocalyptic hope, then, is the assurance that even though in our day evil is on the rampage, when the smoke and haze of the final battle have cleared away, the risen Christ and His Church shall stand triumphant. The Revelation of John sets forth this hope with greater conviction than any other book of the Bible; hence, we turn to it in our study.

#### C. The Subject Delimited

This study is concerned with two interpretations of history, the prophetic and apocalyptic. As representative expressions of these two views we shall limit the study to the book of Jeremiah and the book of The Revelation. The reasons for this have been mentioned above.

#### D. The Method and Procedure to be Used

In order to understand fully the views of history

presented in these two books it is first necessary to understand the times in which they were written. Therefore, chapter I will deal with the general background of Jeremiah. This stated, we will turn to an inductive study of the book itself to determine Jeremiah's interpretation of history. Following the same procedure with The Revelation, chapter III will deal with its general background, and this will be followed by an inductive study of the book itself to determine its view of history. These two interpretations stated, we shall summarize them and make a comparison of them as to their similarities and differences. Also included in chapter V will be the final conclusion.

#### E. The Source of Data

The primary sources in this study will be the American Revised Version of the Holy Bible for Jeremiah, and the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament for the book of The Revelation. Fortunately we have some other very fine translations, such as Moffatt, Smith-Goodspeed, McFadyen on Jeremiah, and Weymouth on the New Testament. These will be referred to as will also the Hebrew and Greek texts. There is also an abundance of secondary material but it will be referred to only as it is apropos and as it contributes to the progression of the study.

Credit is given here to Dr. Helen Garber, who helped

The Revelation become a living book for the author, and to Dr. Howard T. Kuist, who has likewise made the book of Jeremiah a living book, and under whose direction this study was suggested and written.

CHAPTER I  
THE GENERAL BACKGROUND  
OF  
THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

## CHAPTER I

### THE GENERAL BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

#### A. Introduction

One cannot understand the literature of a people without understanding the background of their life. The literature is a record, the by-product of their life. The purpose of this chapter is to get a picture of the background of the day in which Jeremiah lived. The international scene, the local situation and the prophet's background and call are factors to be taken into consideration.

#### B. The International Scene

##### 1. Egypt.

Egypt played an important part in the life of Israel. It was there that the Hebrew people lived for four-hundred thirty years. Then came the Exodus and the birth of the Hebrew nation. But this did not mean the end of Egyptian influence on Hebrew life. For nearly eight-hundred years they invaded the little land of Palestine at various intervals. There was a time, however, following the death of Rameses III in 1167 B. C., when there was a lull in their activity. This gave the children of Israel a breathing spell long enough to establish a united kingdom under



David. After the death of Solomon in 926, however, Egypt again rose up to bring the king of Judah, Rehoboam, under subjection. In the fifth year of Rehoboam's reign (c. 922)<sup>1</sup> Shishak entered Jerusalem and carried off the treasures of the house of Jehovah.<sup>2</sup>

This dynasty founded by Shishak endured for some two centuries. But the country was rather poorly organized so that following this it was in a hopeless state of confusion. In such a condition it was ripe for attack. The Assyrians, under Sennacherib, took advantage of the precarious condition and did attack. They were temporarily halted in 701,<sup>3</sup> but in 670, Esarhaddon, successor to Sennacherib, invaded Egypt, defeated Tirhakah, and made all the Delta as far as Memphis an Assyrian province.<sup>4</sup> The next king, Tanutamun, revolted a few years later and succeeded in recovering Egypt for a brief period. Enraged at this, Ashurbanipal, then king of Assyria, marched up the Nile, took Thebes, and barbarously sacked it.<sup>5</sup> Thus Egypt passed into the possession of Assyria.

However, there was to be one brief period of restoration. Psammetick I (663-609), viceroy of Egypt under Ashurbanipal, took advantage of the pre-occupation of the

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1. Wright, G. Ernest and Floyd V. Filson: The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible, p. 15.
2. I Kings 14:25-28.
3. I Kings 19:35-37.
4. Barton, George A.: Archaeology and the Bible, p. 21.
5. Nahum 3:8-10.

Assyrians in their struggles with Babylon and Elam, re-  
volted, and set up a new independent government in 655.<sup>1</sup>  
His son, Pharaoh-Necho (609-597), followed in his steps  
to regain the lost empire. His first venture was success-  
ful as he invaded Palestine and defeated the inadequate  
forces of Josiah in 609. Since Josiah was slain in this  
battle Judah once more passed under the control of Egypt.<sup>2</sup>

But the dream of a new empire for Egypt was shattered  
quickly. Nebuchadnezzar, son of the king of Babylon, met  
Necho at Carchemish and administered a crushing defeat in  
605.<sup>3</sup> With this defeat Egypt went down never to rise  
again as a major world power. A feeble attempt was made  
by Hophra in 587 with Judah as his ally,<sup>4</sup> but the effort  
was cut off, Jerusalem destroyed,<sup>5</sup> and Egypt once more  
brought low. Henceforth she was to serve instead of be  
served.

## 2. Assyria.

Assyria became an independent kingdom about 1430  
B. C.<sup>6</sup> Under men like Shalmanezar I and Tukulti-Ninib I,  
it grew and emerged as the greatest power in the Middle  
East under Tiglath-pileser I (c. 1114- c. 1076).<sup>7</sup> After

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1. Finegan, Jack: Light from the Ancient Past, p. 114.
2. II Kings 23:31-35.
3. Jeremiah 46; II Kings 24:7.
4. Jeremiah 37:5.
5. Jeremiah 39; 52.
6. Barton, op. cit., p. 66.
7. Finegan, op. cit., p. 170.

his reign it declined rapidly and was decadent for over a century.<sup>1</sup> Slowly it began to rise then and became a ruthless fighting machine under Ashur-nasirpal II (883-859). His successor, Shalmaneser III (859-824), carried on the conquests begun, but was checked by a Syrian coalition of twelve kings at the battle of Karkar in 853.<sup>2</sup> It then remained for Tiglath-pileser III (744-727) to bring the dead Assyrian Empire back to life. In 739, when he entered Palestine, Menahem, King of Israel, paid tribute to him.<sup>3</sup> Four years later, Ahaz, King of Judah, likewise became his vassal.<sup>4</sup> A few years later, in 733 and 732, Tiglath again invaded the west to overrun Israel. At the same time he turned the Plain of Sharon, Galilee, Gilead, and Damascus into subject provinces, and deported the chief inhabitants of Galilee.<sup>5</sup>

Soon after the death of this tyrant, Hoshea, King of Israel, rebelled.<sup>6</sup> At this Shalmaneser V, Tiglath's successor (727-722), laid siege to Samaria. The city stubbornly resisted for three years but finally fell to Sargon (722-705) in 721.<sup>7</sup> After the fall he carried

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1. This decay was simultaneous with the lull in Egypt and gave David an opportunity to establish his kingdom.
2. According to Finegan, p. 172, Ahab of Israel was a member of this coalition.
3. II Kings 15:19.
4. II Kings 16:10 ff.
5. II Kings 15:29.
6. II Kings 17:4.
7. II Kings 17:5.

27,290 of the leading citizens into exile.<sup>1</sup> Thus the kingdom of Israel came to an end to be lost until this day.

Following this, Sennacherib (705-681) invaded Judah in 701 when Hezekiah revolted. But for divine intervention he would have captured Jerusalem at this time.<sup>2</sup> When he was assassinated in 681, he was succeeded by Esarhaddon who ruled until 669. Under his military leadership Egypt came under the sway of Assyria.<sup>3</sup> Likewise Manasseh, King of Judah was his vassal.<sup>4</sup>

Assyria had reached the zenith of its power. Slowly it began to decline. Ashurbanipal (669-626) was kept busy in defensive warfare against threatening powers on all sides. Then Nabopolassar, viceroy of Babylon, gained independence and established the Neo-Babylonian empire in 625. In 612 he made an alliance with the Median king, and together they overthrew Nineveh, and with it the Assyrian empire.

### 3. Babylonia.

Nabopolassar, who had established the Neo-Babylonian empire, reigned until 604. During his reign his power extended over a large area. But that power was to be

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1. From the Khorsabad annals, cf. Finegan, p. 175.
2. II Kings 19:35-37.
3. Ante., p. 2.
4. II Kings 19:37.

challenged by Necho of Egypt. As we previously noted, Necho had marched through Palestine, slain Josiah at Megiddo, taken the western provinces of Assyria, and had returned to Egypt with Jehoahaz after placing his brother, Jehoiakim, on the throne.<sup>1</sup> But he was not content. In 605 he marched to the Euphrates where he was decisively defeated at Carchemish by Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>2</sup> With this defeat Judah passed into the hands of the Babylonians.

Nebuchadnezzar ruled until 562. He built up Babylonia to the former glory it had attained under the great Hammurabi. When Jehoiakim rebelled against him, he besieged Jerusalem, carried away the vessels of the temple,<sup>3</sup> dethroned the newly crowned Jehoiachin,<sup>4</sup> and exiled 10,000 people.

This was in 597. Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, was made puppet king of Judah, his name being changed to Zedekiah.<sup>5</sup> He remained true to his word for a time but later rebelled also. Nebuchadnezzar again besieged Jerusalem which resisted for eighteen months but finally fell in 586.<sup>6</sup> The best people of the land were carried to Babylon and the Babylonian empire remained supreme until 539.

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1. II Kings 23:24.
2. Ante., p. 3.
3. II Chronicles 36:7.
4. Jehoiakim had been carried to Babylon, II Chron., 36:6.
5. II Kings 24:7.
6. II Kings 25:2, 8.

#### 4. The Strategic Geographical Location of Palestine.

Palestine has rightly been called an "international corridor".<sup>1</sup> It was situated on two of the most vital trade routes of the ancient world: "one between Egypt and Asia, and the other running west from Arabia to reach the coastal plain and there branch off to Egypt or Syria."<sup>2</sup> For this reason it could not help but be drawn into the international scene. It was of great concern to the kings of the mighty empires who held this corridor. Each one in turn tried to control the trade routes which passed through it and thereby control the world.

In view of this what were the kings of Israel and Judah to do? The politicians advised them to square off the great powers against each other and side in with the one which was strongest. The prophets had another solution: "Let us confess allegiance to God alone. If we seek to serve Him He will give us security." Had this advice been heeded, no doubt history would have been changed.

#### C. The Scene Within Judah

We have seen how important a knowledge of the international scene is to understand the life of the Jewish people. Equally important is an understanding of the life within the nation.

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1. Walton, D.: Jeremiah's Significance as a Teacher, p. 18.
2. Wright and Filson, op. cit., p. 5.

1. The Political Condition.

No estimate of the age of Jeremiah is complete without going back as far as the reign of Ahaz (742-725). His pledge of allegiance to Tiglath-pileser<sup>1</sup> was the first in a series of moves which he and his successors made that carried his country to ultimate defeat and ruin. It was a tragic move, not only from the stand point of becoming a vassal to Assyria but also for his religion.<sup>2</sup>

The immediate successor to Ahaz, Hezekiah (725-697), tried to pursue a different policy. Contrary to most of the kings, "he did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah."<sup>3</sup> His first step was the destruction of idolatry.<sup>4</sup> This meant a break with Assyria. When he revolted Sennacherib moved in to take the city. Hezekiah trusted in the Lord to fight the battle.<sup>5</sup> This trust was not in vain for Sennacherib met defeat and death.<sup>6</sup>

Following the good king Hezekiah was his son, Manasseh. He began his long reign of fifty-five years in 696. Almost immediately he fell under the spell of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. These two rulers exerted a powerful influence over him. He rebuilt the altars of the empire

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1. II Kings 16:7.
2. Post., p. 12.
3. II Kings 18:3.
4. II Kings 18:4.
5. II Chronicles 32:8.
6. Ante., p. 5.

which his father had torn down.<sup>1</sup> The customs and habits of the Assyrians were adopted in their religious practises. Much innocent blood was shed.<sup>2</sup> It was indeed a dark day in Judah.

After a short reign by Amon, Josiah came to the throne in 639. A new day was dawning. In 631, at 16, Josiah "began to seek after the God of David his father."<sup>3</sup> This was the whole tone of his reign and a direct contrast to the reign of Manasseh. No wonder then, that at his untimely death at Meggido in 609, Jeremiah lamented.<sup>4</sup>

Jehoahaz followed Josiah but his was only a short reign of three months. For some reason which we are not told Pharaoh-Necho dethroned him and took him bound to Egypt where he died.<sup>5</sup> In his stead Necho placed another of Josiah's sons, Eliakim, changing his name to Jehoiakim.<sup>6</sup> Naturally as Necho's vassal he taxed the people heavily and paid large sums of tribute money.

But before his term of office ended Jehoiakim passed over to another king. Pharaoh-Necho, it will be remembered suffered defeat at the hands of the Babylonians in 605 at Carchemish. With this turn of events Jehoiakim served

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1. II Kings 21:3.
2. II Kings 21:6.
3. II Chronicles 34:3.
4. II Chronicles 35:25.
5. II Kings 23:33-34.
6. II Kings 23:34.



Nebuchadnezzar. After three more years of servitude he rebelled.<sup>1</sup> For this reason Nebuchadnezzar came up "and bound him in fetters, to carry him to Babylon."<sup>2</sup>

Jehoiachin, like his uncle Jehoahaz, reigned only three months. During this time he, too, "did that which was evil". Not satisfied with him, Nebuchadnezzar deported him to Babylon and made Zedekiah king.

Zedekiah was the last king the Jewish people knew. With his end came the temporary end of Judah as a nation. When he rebelled<sup>3</sup> Nebuchadnezzar became enraged that these small kings should cause so much trouble and laid siege to the city. But for a short time when he had to deal with Pharaoh again,<sup>4</sup> he did not stop until the city lay in ruins eighteen months later. Zedekiah tried to flee but was captured, saw his sons slain before his eyes, then had his eyes put out and was carried off to Babylon.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. The Social and Economic Conditions.

As Jeremiah looked around he found the social and economic conditions deplorable. Pledges were broken.<sup>6</sup> Truth, justice and fidelity were woefully lacking.<sup>7</sup>

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1. II Kings 24:1.
2. II Chronicles 36:6.
3. II Kings 25:1; Jeremiah 52:3.
4. Jeremiah 37:5.
5. Jeremiah 39:6-7; 52:10-11; II Kings 25:7.
6. Jeremiah 34:8-22.
7. Jeremiah 5:1-3; 7-8.

Adultery and corrupt family life prevailed as the men of Judah "assembled themselves in troops at the harlot's house."<sup>1</sup> The rich were powerful, unscrupulous and oblivious to the needs of the poor.<sup>2</sup> The poor were driven to the soil as slaves, as tribute money was exacted from them.<sup>3</sup> Because they were oppressed and in misery, discontent, hatred and envy filled their minds. Robbery, murder, lying, and emphasis on a selfish heart for material things, characterized the life of the people.<sup>4</sup>

What did Jeremiah do when he saw the horror of such conduct? Did he fall in line with the practises or did he hold high the standard of God's righteousness and justice and see an end to these things? What was his interpretation of these events in the light of their oppression by surrounding nations? This is the problem we must answer.

### 3. The Moral and Religious Conditions..

The religious and moral life of a nation depends a great deal upon its leaders. A country whose leaders constantly "do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord" cannot expect to be pure morally and religiously. So it was with Judah.

When Ahaz became the vassal of Tiglath-pileser the

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1. Jeremiah 5:7.
2. Jeremiah 5:28.
3. Jeremiah 22:13.
4. Yates, op. cit., p. 131.

downfall began. For it was the policy of the Assyrians that all their vassal states worship their gods. Consequently Ahaz fell in line and set up a new altar in Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> When this happened the people fell into deeper immoral practises and sins than ever before.

Hezekiah tried to change this with a thorough religious reformation. He succeeded in destroying idolatry, cleansing the temple and keeping the Passover.<sup>2</sup> But under Manasseh the bottom dropped out again. This evil king rebuilt all his father had undone and in every way helped the people degenerate into corrupt heathen.

"But God"--Again we find these two words which play such a prominent place in Scripture. But God raised up the young king Josiah. He not only began "to seek after the God of David his father" but carried it out in practise as well. In 627 he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> A thorough clean up of the Temple took place which resulted in finding the Book of the Law in 621.<sup>4</sup> Further reforms followed and the Passover was again observed.<sup>5</sup>

Much good was accomplished by this enthusiasm but the movement really failed to bring the people to heart-

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1. II Kings 16:1-20.
2. II Kings 21:3.
3. II Chronicles 34:3.
4. II Kings 22:8.
5. II Kings 23:4 ff., 23.

searching repentance. The revival was superficial and weak and did not lift the people, priests and prophets out of their spiritual lethargy. It was during the reign of Josiah when these reforms were taking place that Jeremiah was called. We turn now to that call.

#### D. The Prophet's Background and Call

Jeremiah lived in a strategic center in relation to world history. Since he was a young man when he was called in 626 he must have been born around the middle of the century, 650 B. C. His father, Hilkiah, was a priest of Anathoth,<sup>1</sup> a small village about an hour's walk north of Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> In a priestly home and surroundings like this Jeremiah no doubt grew up with the highest traditions of his people. He learned to know their history and their background, their high points, their weaknesses and their sins. Since Jerusalem was nearby he was familiar with all its past history and splendor. On the trips that he must have taken to the Holy City he saw the conditions that prevailed. The priests, the rulers, the lawgivers

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1. This Hilkiah is not to be confused with the Hilkiah who found the Book of the Law. See II Kings 22:8.
2. Formerly it was believed that the present city of Anata was located on the old site of Anathoth. In recent years, however, archaeologists have made soundings which indicate that the old city was about a half mile north of Anata. Cf. Blair, E. P.: The Location of Anathoth, Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research, No. 62, April, 1936.

and the prophets all "walked after things that do not profit."<sup>1</sup> All this made a deep impression on the young lad's mind and was to give him a note of authority as he denounced the corruption years later.

Jeremiah's family and religious background served to train him for the work to which he was predestined. Likewise the natural surroundings in which he lived were a constant source of instruction. Lofthouse has given us a good picture of what these surroundings were.

"The traveller who looks at the country with a boy's eyes can see what the boy Jeremiah saw and loved; the sudden burst of vegetation with the spring rains and the returning warmth; the long hot dry days and rustic merrymakings of harvest; the break of a summer's heat with the 'early' showers of autumn; the flight of the migrating stork; the sheep straggling over the hills or gathering at some trodden pool at evening; the yelp of a jackal or the roar of a lion from a ravine down below; the breaking of the untilled ground, the threshing and winnowing and, later, the labour of the oil-press and the wine-vat."<sup>2</sup>

That this all had an effect on young Jeremiah is clearly shown by the language and imagery of his book. "He cannot keep away from the birds and animals, flowers and crops. To the end, his language is simple direct speech of one who has always been at home with nature."<sup>3</sup>

Then, too, Jeremiah was aware of the turmoil among the nations. He could not help but know of Ashurbanipal's defeat of Egypt, and the revolt of the Babylonian state.

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1. Jeremiah 2:8; 5:1-6.

2. Lofthouse, W. F.: Jeremiah and the New Covenant, p. 19.

3. Ibid., p. 28.

Who would finally become supreme and to whom would Judah finally pay its allegiance? Jeremiah was confused. Where was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who had given them the promise that their seed would inherit this land?

If Jeremiah was puzzled as to where God was in this world it was not for long. For this God confronted him with a personal challenge and did not leave him until he had yielded to Him..

Jeremiah's call was characterised by three things. First, it was personal; it was an objective reality. Five times in chapter 1 the prophet speaks of "the word of the Lord" coming to him. He did not sit down and reason the whole thing out. The call was a personal call from God. Secondly, it was God who took the initiative. Jeremiah did not come to the conclusion that he ought to do something about the situation in which he lived and then ask God what he could do. God told him what to do. And it was not "a spur-of-the-moment" call. It was in the plan of God. "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee."<sup>1</sup> Thirdly, the call had a definite purpose. "I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations."<sup>2</sup> This commission was universal--not nation but nations; it was a "to whomsoever" appointment. And his message

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1. Jeremiah 1:4.
2. Jeremiah 1:4.

was twofold; "to break down and to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."<sup>1</sup>

Two visions followed this experience of Jeremiah. First, he saw the rod of an almond tree, the tree to awake first, or blossom, in spring, It signified that God was awake and watchful. To put it in the force of the play on words it would be: "I see the rod of an early awake....I am early awake in respect to my word to perform it."<sup>2</sup>

The other vision was that of a boiling caldron, a pot to boil flesh. It signified the forces in the north which were to boil down over Judah and consume her. It was a vision of impending judgment. And this judgment was to come because of three major sins: "...they have forsaken me, burned incense to other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands."<sup>3</sup>

With such a message of doom Jeremiah, and any man for that matter, would have a right to shrink. But before Jeremiah has a chance to shrink back God goes on: "Behold, I have made thee this day a fortified city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls, against the whole land."<sup>4</sup> This will not be a bed of roses for "they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee, saith Jehovah, to deliver thee."<sup>5</sup>

1. Jeremiah 1:10.

2. White, W. W.: Studies in Old Testament Characters, p. 159.

3. Jeremiah 1:16.

4. Jeremiah 1:18.

5. Jeremiah 1:19.

Thus the call of Jeremiah. He is to stand up and preach his message of doom but he is not to shrink back, "for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee." Did this tender-hearted soul live up to this high calling? The following pages will tell.

#### D. Summary

The stage is now set for Jeremiah to speak his mind on what was taking place in his day. Egypt, Assyria, and Babylonia have all struggled for the supremacy of Western Asia with Babylonia rising to full sway. We have seen Judah, kicked about like a football by these larger nations, gambling to maintain her existence as a state by allying herself first with one and then another of the powerful nations, and in the end finally losing and being crushed. And we have watched Judah go down hill internally with Ahaz and Manasseh beginning that long road down, being aided by insincere priests and false prophets. Finally, we have heard God call the youth of Anathoth to speak forth His word. We turn now to study his utterances and see what interpretation of history they set forth.



CHAPTER II

JEREMIAH'S INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY

## CHAPTER II

### JEREMIAH'S INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY

#### A. Introduction

A person's outlook on life, and consequently his interpretation of history, will be greatly determined by his concept of God. A fatalist or a nihilist will not see much purpose in history. On the other hand, the theist will have a firm conviction that history has a purpose because of his belief in a personal God. It is not the purpose of this chapter to go into a detailed study of the attributes of God as we find them in Jeremiah. For in the words of Lofthouse,

"Jeremiah was no theologian. He did not set out to discover what God was. He did not examine His attributes or work out any creed as to His functions. Indeed, he can hardly be said to have thought about God at all..... Even when he is perplexed, and allows us far more clearly than most prophets to see his perplexity, he speaks to God instead of arguing about Him."<sup>1</sup>

But it was this firm conviction in God as a personal, objective reality, a "Wholly Other", to use Otto's phrase, that gave him an interpretation of history which might well be heeded today.

In this study we shall consider these elements as

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1. Lofthouse, op. cit., p. 187.

they enter into and form a vital part of Jeremiah's thought as he tries to interpret the historical events of his day: God as the Lord of History; the Crisis in History; Judgment in History; and finally the Final Goal of History.

### B. God as the Lord of History

Above it was pointed out that one's concept of God is important in determining his interpretation of history. Here we shall see how Jeremiah saw God in relation to the natural world, in relation to Israel, and in relation to other nations.

#### 1. His Relation to the Natural World.

Jeremiah had a high concept of God as Creator. To attain this he did not start with nature and by a scientific, inductive process arrive at the conclusion that there was a God, a Master-Mind who created this world. But he began where all Hebrew religion began, with God, and considered nature in the light of God.<sup>1</sup>

There was no question in Jeremiah's mind that God was the Creator of this universe. In a message to the nations he proclaims God's word, "I have made the earth, the men and the beasts that are upon the face of the

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1. H. W. Robinson in The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament, p. 71, says: "The advance of Hebrew religion from the spiritual to the natural realm stands in direct contrast with the advance of Greek thought from the natural to the spiritual."

earth, by my great power and by my outstretched arm."<sup>1</sup>  
This idea is further amplified when Jeremiah contrasts the gods of the nations with the true and living God and ascribes to Him the essential elements of creative ability. "He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding hath he stretched out the heavens."<sup>2</sup> And in one other place Jeremiah specifically acknowledges God as the Creator when he prays a prayer for enlightenment. "Oh Lord Jehovah! behold, thou hast made the heavens and the earth by thy great power and by thine outstretched arm."<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Jeremiah sees in God's creative acts a covenant, for he speaks of the "covenant of the day, and...of the night."<sup>4</sup>

The greatness of God as Creator permeates Jeremiah's thought. And not only did He create the universe, but He is also Controller of it and His creation is subject to Him. God "giveth rain...in its season" and "preserveth... the appointed weeks of the harvest";<sup>5</sup> "...the stork in the heavens knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle-dove and the swallow and the crane observe the time of their coming";<sup>6</sup> "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or

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1. Jeremiah 27:5. All references in this chapter are to
2. 10:12. Jeremiah.
3. 32:17.
4. 33:20.
5. 5:24.
6. 8:7.

the leopard his spots?"<sup>1</sup> Thus the prophet sets forth his doctrine of God as Creator. He made the world; it is subject to Him; He is Lord of it.

## 2. His Relation to Israel.

Jeremiah saw God as the One who had made "the men... that are upon the face of the earth." But he also saw more; he saw that some of these men had a special relation to God. Israel stood in that position and on this unique relation of God to Israel Jeremiah based his preaching. God had chosen this people and entered into covenant with them. He had brought them out of Egypt and led them through the wilderness. And through the work and preaching of the prophets He had continually educated them so that they might fulfill His purpose.

This intimate relation is expressed in a number of ways. Like Hosea, Jeremiah uses the figures of marriage and sonship to describe it. First, she is the bride of Jehovah.<sup>2</sup> As her Lover he brought her out of the Egyptian bondage and led her through the wilderness "into a plentiful land" where she had been blessed beyond measure.<sup>3</sup> Her blessing and well-being is His great concern.<sup>4</sup> His great desire is to lead her to Zion where He might help

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1. 13:23.
2. 2:2; 3:1, 14, 20.
3. 2:6-7.
4. 11:5.

them develop into a nation that He has intended.<sup>1</sup> Truly  
He loves her as a true husband loves his wife.<sup>2</sup>

As her Lover God has a purpose for Israel. We find  
Jeremiah emphasizing this continually by various figures  
of speech. He planted Israel "a noble vine" to bear fruit;<sup>3</sup>  
He called her "a green olive-tree, fair with goodly fruit";<sup>4</sup>  
she was made a vessel for service,<sup>5</sup> and designed a linen  
girdle to cling to Jehovah.<sup>6</sup>

These last two figures especially shed much light  
on the idea of Israel chosen to serve. As Jeremiah saw  
the potter at work he realized that it was more than just  
a hobby. The potter was making a vessel for some specific  
purpose. Instantly the thought came to him, Israel is  
the clay and out of it the Great Potter is trying to make  
something useful. Of this parable George Adam Smith quite  
rightly says, "The Predestination of men or nations,

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1. 3:14-16.
2. It is in order here to point out that God did not  
choose Israel because of what she was; that is, be-  
cause she was more righteous than any other people.  
God definitely declares "I have made the earth...and  
I give it unto whom it seemeth right unto me" (27:5).  
Piper states it well in his God in History (p. 74):  
"The Old Testament...emphasizes continually, that  
the only reason for their election was the love and  
mercy of God.... By the fact that he chose Israel  
rather than any other nation, as an instrument for  
the accomplishment of His purpose, God showed Himself  
the Lord of History."
3. 2:21.
4. 11:16.
5. 18:1-12.
6. 13:1-11.

which the Prophet sees figured in the work of the potter, is to Service."<sup>1</sup>

As the parable of the potter indicates the high service for which Israel had been chosen so also the parable of the linen girdle reveals the sacred purpose intended for her. This linen girdle was used by the priests in the performance of their sacred duties.<sup>2</sup> It had a specific purpose. In the same way Israel had a specific purpose:

"For as the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, saith Jehovah; that they may be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory."<sup>2</sup>

"For a name, and for a praise, and for a glory"--Israel then has a very noble task to perform; she is to glorify God and make His name known among all people.

Thus we see God revealing Himself as the Lord of History in His covenant relation with Israel.

### 3. His Relation to Other Nations.

According to Jeremiah, the children of Israel stood in a unique relation to God. God had chosen them to fulfill His purpose in history. This, however, did not mean that the other nations were out of His control and that He was not the Lord of them as well. On the contrary, we

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1. Smith, George Adam: Jeremiah, p. 186.
2. Davis, John D. and Henry S. Gehman, The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible, p. 360.
3. 13:11.

see that from the very beginning Jeremiah's message concerned not only Judah but the other nations as well. He was commissioned not to a particular nation but "unto the nations".<sup>1</sup> And as we read his book we note that several chapters contain prophecies about other nations.<sup>2</sup> Twice he speaks of Nebuchadnezzar as God's servant.<sup>3</sup> In still another place he expresses it very clearly, "Jehovah hath a controversy with the nations."<sup>4</sup>

These few examples must suffice here, but we shall see in the section on Judgment just how God does use nations to accomplish His purpose. No one has expressed it better than the theologian, Hodge:

"God uses the nations with the absolute control that a man uses a rod or a staff. They are in his hands, and He employs them to accomplish His purposes. He breaks them in pieces as a potter's vessel, or He exalts them to greatness according to His good pleasure."<sup>5</sup>

In summary then, nothing is out of the control of God. The universe and the natural world are subject to Him; in a unique way He was in covenant relation with Israel and consequently Lord over them; and because He has made "every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth,"<sup>6</sup> "He ruleth by his might forever."<sup>7</sup>

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1. 1:5.
2. 25; 46-51.
3. 25:8; 27:6.
4. 25:31.
5. Quoted by K. M. Monroe in The Biblical Philosophy of History, in Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. 91, No. 7, p. 324.
6. Acts 17:26.
7. Psalm 66:7.



## C. The Crisis in History

The Book of Jeremiah deals primarily with man's relation to God, both nationally and individually. Here we strike the very heart, the crisis in history. Jeremiah was set against kings, princes, priests, and the people of the land, not just so God could enjoy watching what one man could do against thousands. But he was set against them because they were set against God. As a moral God who created this world with wisdom, power and understanding He had a purpose for it. To achieve that purpose demands righteous moral action on the part of all men. Failure to measure up causes a crisis; it means judgment and purging until men are willing to follow His moral laws.

### 1. The Crisis Nationally.

Israel had failed to live up to God's requirements. He had planted her a "noble vine" but she had "turned into the degenerate branches of a foreign vine";<sup>1</sup> He had called her "a green olive-tree, fair with goodly fruit", but she had been broken down and burned;<sup>2</sup> the Great Potter had tried to make something useful with the clay but it was marred in His hand;<sup>3</sup> and likewise the linen girdle which had a specific purpose "was marred, it was profit-

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1. 2:21.
2. 11:16.
3. 18:4.

able for nothing."<sup>1</sup>

But Jeremiah did not stop in such general terms. He made the condemnation very personal and specific.

"For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."<sup>2</sup>

What were the cisterns? One was their false worship of idols;<sup>3</sup> the other was the entangling alliances they had gotten into with the foreign powers of Egypt and Assyria.<sup>4</sup>

The crisis indeed was great; but there was still hope. Repentance was still possible. "Amend your ways and your doing, and I will cause you to dwell in this place."<sup>5</sup> But soon the prophet was aware of the indelible character of Judah's sin. "For though thou wash thee with lye, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me."<sup>6</sup> "The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is graven upon the tablet of their heart, and upon the horns of your altars."<sup>7</sup> "Thy hurt is incurable, and thy wound grievous."<sup>8</sup> And the only reply the prophet received to his plea for repentance was, "It is in vain; for we will walk after our own devices, and we will do every one after the stubbornness of his evil heart."<sup>9</sup>

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1. 13:7.  
2. 2:13.  
3. 1:16.  
4. 2:18.

5. 7:3; also 3:12, 14; 4:1; 7:5.  
6. 2:22.  
7. 17:1.  
8. 30:12.  
9. 18:12.

In a crisis something must happen; something must break. In this case it is not the people who will decide but God. Even though the people are under the false impression that Jerusalem is indestructible,<sup>1</sup> God will contend with them. They must know that He is the true and living God. "Therefore, behold, I will cause them to know, this once will I cause them to know my hand and my might; and they shall know that my name is Jehovah."<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The Crisis Individually.

Jeremiah was quick to see that the crisis in Judah's history lay in her false trust and false worship. But he was just as quick to see that the crisis went deeper; it went to the individual human heart. Sin in the human heart was the object of his attack. It is this characteristic that makes him "the greatest of the prophets, and greatest on this very ground, that he was the prophet of the inner life."<sup>3</sup> It is here that he makes his greatest of contribution to religion and life. Smith says:

"After all, neither Nature nor the courses of Nations but the single human heart is the field which Jeremiah most originally explores for visions of Divine work, and from which he has brought his most distinctive contributions to our knowledge of God."<sup>4</sup>

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1. 26:9.
2. 16:21.
3. Rogers, R. W.: Great Characters of the Old Testament, p. 124.
4. Smith, op. cit., p. 366.

Perhaps Jeremiah's greatest utterance concerning the individual is his oft-quoted verse on the heart, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt: who can know it?"<sup>1</sup> To get the full implications of this verse it is well that we pause here to understand its meaning.

Today we usually think of the heart as the seat of the emotions, but the Hebrew meant the will also. Gesenius defines it not only as "the seat of the feelings, affections and emotions of various kinds," but also as the "seat of will, purpose, determination." He further says that "to the heart is also ascribed understanding, intelligence, wisdom."<sup>2</sup> Kuist has arrived at somewhat the same conclusion when he says, "...the Bible uses the word 'heart' to refer to man's inherent capacity for self-determination, as influenced by his thoughts, his affections, his imagination, or his will."<sup>3</sup> So when Jeremiah speaks of the heart he likely means more than a state of feeling. He is talking of a willful condition. "Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm and whose heart departeth from Jehovah."<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, "Blessed

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1. 17:9.
2. Gesenius, Wm.: Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament, pp. 5-8.
3. Kuist, H. T.: These Words Upon Thy Heart, p. 17.  
Cf. also Jefferson C. E.: Cardinal Ideas in Jeremiah, p. 50.
4. 17:5.

is the man that trusteth in Jehovah, and whose trust Jehovah is."<sup>1</sup>

Jeremiah expresses personal responsibility and character in another passage also. He is commanded to run through the streets of Jerusalem to see if he "can find a man, if there be any that doeth justly, that seeketh truth."<sup>2</sup>

Thus we see the crisis in human history. A just and righteous God demands just and righteous action from man; from the nation as a whole which He has chosen but also from individuals. Jeremiah expresses this very plainly:

"Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he hath understanding and knoweth, that I am Jehovah who exerciseth lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith Jehovah."<sup>2</sup>

When a man fails to live up to this standard; when he glories in his wisdom, might and riches, then a crisis is inevitable.

#### D. Judgment in History

A crisis demands action. The crisis Jeremiah faced demanded repentance or judgment. Since there was no repentance but even a scoffing at the idea, judgment was inevitable. We find this note from the very beginning of his ministry. In fact, it is the message God gives him to

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1. 17:7.
2. 5:1.
3. 9:23-24.

proclaim. He is set "over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, and to destroy and overthrow."<sup>1</sup> First there is the call to repentance, but when there is no response the prophet cries forth his warning of danger.<sup>2</sup>

1. The Nature of Judgment..

Jeremiah was not only given a message of judgment but he was also given some indication as to the source of the judgment. The vision of the boiling caldron<sup>3</sup> meant that judgment was coming from the north and that it was going to be boiling. He included it in his message as he began preaching.

Jeremiah began his picture of doom with the picture of a lion going out for his prey.<sup>4</sup> He emphasized the immediacy and the purpose of it. He saw its fierceness and completeness in the figure of the hot, full wind.<sup>5</sup> It was to be a complete devastating invasion and Judah

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1. 1:10..
2. I believe Calvin expressed the situation very well:  
"As Isaiah and the other Prophets spent their labour almost in vain, nothing remained for Jeremiah, but briefly to announce this sentence--'There is now no pardon, but it is the time of extreme vengeance for they have too long abused God's forbearance, who has borne with them, kindly and even sweetly exhorted them to repent, and even testified that he would be exorable and propitious, provided they return to the right way.'" --Commentary on the Prophecies of Jeremiah and the Lamentations, Vol. I, p. 29.
3. 1:13-19..
4. 4:7..
5. 4:12-13..

could be saved only if they would "wash their heart from wickedness."<sup>1</sup> Primping would do no good,<sup>2</sup> for no external measures can change the inward. It was an urgent situation for it was as "a woman in travail".<sup>3</sup> Death and destruction were inevitable and as Judah served other gods so she must serve strangers in a foreign land.<sup>4</sup> Captivity cannot be escaped. This destruction was not far off. The day was already declining and the shadows of evening were fall-<sup>5</sup>ing. Again Jeremiah emphasized the urgency of repentance with the figure of the woman in travail.<sup>6</sup>

These warnings of judgment were spoken early in Jeremiah's career. He probably was not too certain who the "mighty, ancient nation" was to be. But as political events shaped up he began to see it more clearly. When Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Egyptians in the decisive battle of Carchemish to settle the question of the supremacy of Western Asia, Jeremiah realized that Babylonia was an instrument of God. Nebuchadnezzar was to be the servant of God to chastize and punish Judah. It would be a physical chastisement, for Jerusalem "shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire."<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, "He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine and by the

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1. 4:14.  
2. 4:30.  
3. 4:31.  
4. 5:19.

5. 6:4.  
6. 6:24.  
7. 21:10.

pestilence."<sup>1</sup>

God was punishing and judging Judah. But it was not limited to them alone; it concerned all nations. God was entering into judgment with all flesh.<sup>2</sup> All of them must bow the knee to Nebuchadnezzar and serve him.<sup>3</sup> To fail to do this would mean utter annihilation.

"And it shall come to pass, that the nation and the kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I punish, saith Jehovah, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand."<sup>4</sup>

Here we see very plainly God as the Ruler of nations. It was not because Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians were more righteous than anyone else. Jeremiah warns them also, "And it shall come to pass...that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation...for their iniquity."<sup>5</sup> But for the present, it was God Himself who had set Nebuchadnezzar over the nations, and they must submit.

Jeremiah then, saw the judgment of God as physical judgment and punishment.

## 2. The Purpose of Judgment.

Judah was being judged for her sins and the sins of her leaders all through the years. There was no way out. The people could not understand or believe Jeremiah's

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| 1. 21:9   | 4. 27:8.  |
| 2. 25:31. | 5. 25:12. |
| 3. 27:6.  |           |



message of doom. They rose up against him for after all had not God given them a promise and would He not abide by it?<sup>1</sup> But Jeremiah remained firm even though his very life was threatened. He might well have uttered the words of Luther at Worms: "Here I stand. (I cannot do otherwise.) God help me! Amen."<sup>2</sup>

Why was Jeremiah so firm and convinced of what was going to happen? Because of his concept of the character of God.

"At bottom, Jeremiah knew that he was right and his opponents were wrong, because he knew that he was interpreting history ethically, and that it could be interpreted in no other way."<sup>3</sup>

Or as Smith has said:

"Jeremiah was compelled by his faith in the holiness and absolute justice of God to proclaim that, however close and dear His age-long relations to Israel had been and however high His designs for them, He was by His Nature bound to break from a generation which had spurned His love and His Law and proved unworthy of His designs, and to deliver them for the punishment of their sins into the hands of their enemies."<sup>4</sup>

Allen sees in the judgment of God the central point in the prophetic interpretation of history. He says:

"The question which was repeated by Jeremiah must have been on many lips, 'Wherefore hath the Lord our God done all these things unto us?....' Jeremiah himself answers this question, (5:19), 'then shalt thou say unto them, Like as ye have forsaken me, and served

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1. 26:8-11.
2. Schaff, Philip: History of the Christian Church, Vol. V, p. 205.
3. Lofthouse, op. cit., p. 200.
4. Smith, op. cit. p. 260.

foreign gods in your land, so shall ye serve strangers in a land that is not yours.' The main line of the answer in all the prophets is that war is a judgment from God. Because of the sins of the nation, therefore, God has called up the invader, in order that through the sufferings of war the sin may be exposed and purged. This is the central point in the prophetic interpretation of history, and the central point which we have largely lost in our interpretation. History is the manifestation and working out of the judgment of God. There is a sternness as well as a pity in the righteousness of God. If we serve Him, we receive His blessing; if we defy His laws, then by an inevitable destiny immanent in world history we receive the penalty of our disobedience."<sup>1</sup>

Judah was being judged for her sins. But Jeremiah saw more in this judgment than punishment. This was not to be the complete and final end of all. God had been temporarily thwarted but could not ultimately be defeated. So as judgment is pronounced there is always this note of hope: "I will not make a full end of you". This phrase is repeated five times in the midst of Jeremiah's denunciations.<sup>2</sup> There is to be punishment, yes, but it is also a remedial, corrective punishment. "I will not make a full end of thee, but I will correct thee."<sup>3</sup>

This note of hope is also sounded as Jeremiah writes<sup>4</sup> to those who have already been carried into captivity. And in the Book of Consolation the thought of the phrase, "I will turn again the captivity of my people Israel and

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1. Allen, G. F.: The Prophetic Interpretation of History, in the Expository Times, Vol. 51, No. 10, July, 1940, pp. 456-457.
2. 4:27; 5:10; 5:18; 30:11; 46:28.
3. 46:28; 30:11.
4. 29:10-14.

Judah....and I will cause them to return to this land"  
is repeated often.<sup>1</sup>

Again we ask, why was Jeremiah so sure of himself?  
And again we must answer, because of his high concept of  
God as the Lord of History who could be temporarily thwart-  
ed but who could not ultimately be defeated. This is  
the great idea expressed in the parable of the potter.  
In preaching on this Jefferson has said:

"As Jeremiah watched the potter at work sometimes the  
clay would not become what he wanted it to be. It  
seemed to be stubborn and refused to bend to the potter's  
will. It was stiff and obstinate, it had a lump in  
it or some foreign substance like a pebble had become  
imbedded in it, and the progress of the potter was  
checked. But what struck Jeremiah was the fact that  
the potter was never disgusted by the refractory at-  
titude of the clay. He did not utterly destroy it,  
nor did he throw it away. He went right on with his  
work. He simply crushed the clay into a shapeless  
mass and proceeded to make something else. He was not  
at all discouraged. He did not lock up the shop and  
go home. He kept on working. If he could not make the  
vessel he started out to make, he made another one,  
equally serviceable and equally beautiful. At the  
end of the day his work was satisfactory and complete.  
He had been thwarted, but he was not defeated.

"In that hour a new idea flashed upon the prophet.  
As he expressed it, 'God spoke to him'. The idea  
flashed on him that God was the Potter, the Supreme  
Potter of the universe, and that Israel was a lump  
of clay which God was molding into a vessel for his  
use. But Israel was stubborn, rebellious, perverse,  
refusing to do what it ought to do, and so God was  
going to crush it by suffering and exile. But he  
would not throw the clay away. The city would be  
destroyed, but another would rise from the ashes."

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1. 30:3, 10, 18; 31:23; 32:37, 44; 33:7, 11, 26.
2. Jefferson, op. cit., pp. 105-107.

### E. The Final Goal of History

Jeremiah's message was primarily a message of doom. All was not dark, however. Through it all Jeremiah saw a ray of light symbolizing hope. We have already seen it as he thought about the corrective purpose of God's judgment. But it is seen in all its glory in the Book of Consolation. This part was written or uttered during the siege of Jerusalem. From the gloomy and desperate present of impending doom, Jeremiah turned his gaze to the future. While his nation was in its death-throes he foretold its resurrection to a new life.

Jeremiah's hope lay in the future Messianic King and Kingdom. We see this nobly expressed in two short paragraphs.<sup>1</sup> They are short yet they say a great deal.

Jeremiah is sure that God will raise up a son of David, a "righteous Branch" who "shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land."<sup>2</sup> His name shall be 'Jehovah our Righteousness' for he will perfectly embody the characteristics of the ideal king. But Jeremiah goes a step further. For not only will the king be an ideal king but because his reign is ideal the community over which he reigns will embody the characteristics of the ideal community.

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1. 23:5-8; 33:14-18.
2. 23:5.

And not only the king but also the city, Jerusalem, shall be called, 'Jehovah our Righteousness'.<sup>1</sup>

But there is another aspect of this community and that is its spiritual life, its religion. There is to be a New Covenant, written not on tables of stone, but on the tables of the heart. The New Covenant is to be inward, personal and spiritual, based on the forgiveness of sins; it will be universal and enduring. In it God takes the initiative and there will be no need for a mediator; the people will have direct access to God.

No man is to be dependent upon any man, groups of men, or institution for his salvation. Each man will do his own repenting. Each man must cleanse his own heart and life. Each man must make his own decision and shoulder his own responsibility. Each man is to know God in his own heart.

"Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith Jehovah. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith Jehovah: I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people: and they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah; for they shall all know me, and from the least of them unto the greatest

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of them, saith Jehovah: for I will forgive their<sub>1</sub> iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more."<sub>1</sub>

"Thus in an age of change and convulsion and revolution Jeremiah with unhesitating faith proclaimed the certain progress of the eternal purpose of God. He affirmed that the destruction of the old order was but the prelude to the introduction of a new and nobler order. He declared that the final aim of the removal of the things that were shaken was that the things which cannot be shaken might remain."<sub>2</sub>

Thus we see Jeremiah firmly believing that under God's guidance men and nations are moving toward a day when evil shall be overthrown and universal peace and righteousness established.

#### F. Summary and Conclusion

1. God is the Lord of History. He is the Creator of the universe and as Creator He claims the sovereign right to control and govern nations "as it seemeth right" unto Him. Thus he chooses Israel to fulfill His purpose. When they fail to fulfill their obligations He uses another instrument to punish and chastize them. But even this does not excuse the nation that is His instrument from righteous moral action. The nation that is His instrument may likewise be punished if they fail to live up to His standards.

2. As a moral God who created the universe He demands righteous action from men. Failure to live up to this

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1. 31:31-34.

2. Kirkpatrick, A. F.: The Doctrine of the Prophets, p. 323.

means a crisis and from the crisis comes either repentance or judgment.

3. God's standard of judgment is righteousness, justice and truth. Judgment has two aspects. It is a punishment but it is also corrective. God does not 'make a full end' but always there is the remnant from which He can begin again.

4. The goal of history--we are moving toward 'the day of the Lord' when evil shall be overthrown and a universal reign of righteousness and peace shall be established.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE GENERAL BACKGROUND OF THE REVELATION



### CHAPTER III

#### THE GENERAL BACKGROUND OF THE REVELATION

##### A. Introduction

We turn now to another book in the Bible, The Revelation. In doing this we not only turn <sup>to</sup> a different book; we also turn to a different type of literature. In Jeremiah we were dealing with prophetic literature; in The Revelation we have apocalyptic literature. The differences between these two types of writing will be discussed after we have an understanding of apocalyptic literature. From there we shall then proceed to the historical setting of The Revelation, the author, and finally discuss the characteristics and plan of The Revelation.

##### B. The Nature of Apocalyptic Literature

To understand what we mean by apocalyptic literature it is necessary to understand what the word means. The word comes from the Greek word ἀποκαλύπτω . ἀπο is a preposition meaning from, or as Thayer points out, "in composition indicates separation".<sup>1</sup> Καλύπτω, on the other hand, means "to cover, cover up; to hide, veil,

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1. Thayer, J. H.: A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 59.

i. e., to hinder the knowledge of a thing."<sup>1</sup> Thus the two used together literally mean a separation from hidden things. So then ἀποκαλύψις means "(1) a laying bare, making naked, an uncovering; (2) a disclosure of truth, instruction, concerning divine things before unknown."<sup>2</sup> Beckwith makes these "divine things" more specific when he says that in the New Testament the word has "the special significance of a supernatural unveiling,...of the unknown and hidden things pertaining to the Kingdom of God and divine truth."<sup>3</sup> What the apocalyptic writers had to say about the Kingdom and divine truth will be seen as the chapter progresses.

#### 1. Its Historical Setting.

After the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B. C.,<sup>4</sup> and the return from the captivity beginning in 538 B. C.,<sup>5</sup> the Jewish people fell into hard times.<sup>6</sup> Following a century of Egyptian domination they came under the rule of the Seleucid Kings of Syria when Antiochus III defeated the Egyptians at Paneas in 198 B. C.<sup>7</sup> It was the policy of

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1. Ibid., p. 323.
2. Ibid., p. 62.
3. Beckwith, I. T.: The Apocalypse of John, p. 167. For additional discussion of the use of this word in the N. T. see pp 167-168; also Swete, H. B.: The Apocalypse of St. John, p. 1.
4. Ante., p. 6.
5. Ezra 1:2-4; 6:1-5.
6. Cf. The Works of Flavius Josephus, pp. 321-375.
7. Wright and Filson, op. cit., p. 73.

these Syrian rulers to promote the influence which would effect unity of culture in their own territory. Consequently they looked with forebodings upon the strangely different Jewish religion which was primarily concerned with maintaining itself. Little was done, however, to stamp it out until the intolerant Antiochus Epiphanes became king (175-163).

The days following were the darkest days the Jews had know since the days of the Exile, for this cruel tyrant sought to destroy their national life by uprooting their religious practises.<sup>1</sup> He desecrated the temple in Jerusalem by setting up a statue of Jupiter in the Holy of Holies; he pulled down the walls of the city; the priestly sacrifices were forbidden and in turn they were commanded to sacrifice swine; he forbade circumcision, and destroyed all the sacred books that could be found; possession of a copy of the Law and keeping of the Sabbath were crimes punishable by death. Not only were these things carried out in Jerusalem but also elsewhere. Representatives of the king erected heathen altars in various places and tested the loyalty of the Jews by requiring them to offer pagan sacrifices.

These persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes led to the revolt under the Maccabees. The Jews succeeded in

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1.. Cf. Josephus, op. cit., pp. 361-363; 607-608.

establishing a period of independence for some time,<sup>1</sup> but they soon had to give way to Roman domination. Under Rome the Jews also had a hard time, and because they constantly rebelled Roman rulers finally brought about the terrible siege of Jerusalem in 70 A. D. in which the city and temple were utterly destroyed. This marked the end of the Jewish nation as a political power.

It was such troublous times as these that gave birth to apocalyptic literature and during which apocalyptic literature developed among the Jews.<sup>2</sup> Trial and suffering were the soil in which this form of writing grew. Dana has quite rightly said, "apocalyptic is distinctly a literature of persecution."<sup>3</sup>

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1. According to Wright and Filson, p. 73, the Maccabean period was from 168-63 B. C.
2. Most scholars agree that the period from 200 B. C. to 100 A. D. is the apocalyptic period. Cf. Burnett: *The Lord Reigneth*, p. 21 and Scott, E. F.: *The Book of Revelation*, p. 10. However, apocalyptic literature must not be limited to this period alone. Beckwith, p. 1-29, traces it back much further from the view point of the eschatological hope. That goes outside the realm of this study, though, for apocalyptic is a kind of eschatology. But Swete gives some specific examples, p. xxiv: "Within the canon of the Old Testament apocalyptic passages occur even in the Pentateuch (Gen. xv, xlix; Num. xxiii, xxiv) and historical books (I Kgs. xxii); in the prophets they form a considerable element, especially in Isaiah (Isa. xiii ff., xxiv ff., lxv ff.) Ezekiel, Joel, and Zechariah; Ezekiel's prophecy in particular is almost wholly of an apocalyptic character. But it is in the Book of Daniel that the later conception of the Literary apocalypse is first realized."
3. Dana, H. E.: *The Epistles and Apocalypse of John*, p. 88.

## 2. Its Purpose and Function.

Having had a glimpse of the times in which apocalyptic literature flourished we turn to its purpose and function. These are not difficult to discern.

The people had many questions during these trying times. Was not God the Righteous Ruler of the world? Had He not promised deliverance and blessing to His children? Had He not at the same time promised judgment and destruction on His enemies? Had He not promised a glorious Kingdom where justice and righteousness prevailed? Yet here they were, persecuted and oppressed. Their religion was at stake. The future was dark and unknown and they were far from the Kingdom. In anguish the people were asking when God would visit and redeem His people.

These questions had to be answered if the people were not to lose their faith. This is where the apocalyptic writers came in.<sup>1</sup> To a suffering people who were in the furnace of affliction they said, "Yes, your trial is great and it may become even more severe; but do not give up. God is still on His throne and will soon vindicate your sufferings. Evil will be annihilated in catastrophic judgment and those who have remained faithful to God will

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1. For a fuller discussion of the origin and development of apocalyptic see Charles, R. H.: *Apocalyptic Literature*, an article in *Hastings's Dictionary of the Bible*, pp. 109-110; Andrews, H. T.: *Apocalyptic Literature*, an article in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, pp. 431-435; and Swete, p. xxvii.

share in His glorious triumph." This was the clear message of all the writings.

Thus, in the midst of trial and conflict the apocalyptic rings out his message.

"...chiefly he seeks to comfort and encourage the suffering and despairing. In the midst of bitter trials and in face of those more bitter about to come, he appears with his vision of sure deliverance and final glory to revive hope, to stay up faith, to fortify endurance."<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Its Characteristics.

Apocalyptic literature is a unique literature and as such has some distinct characteristics. In the first place, the standard device of revelation is visions. Of this Beckwith says: "The highly elaborated vision or similar mode of revelation, is the most distinctive form of apocalyptic literature."<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, it is generally pseudonymous. Most of the authors are men of days gone by, such as Moses, Enoch, Isaiah, Baruch, Ezra and the like. The reason for this was probably that the apocalyptists were conscious that they could not speak to their generation in their own name with the authority and power of these great men of old.

Thirdly, the apocalyptic writers made a great use of symbols and symbolic language. Beasts are pictured

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1. Beckwith, op. cit, p. 176.
2. Ibid., p. 169.

as unimaginable creatures with heads and horns;<sup>1</sup> inanimate objects are represented with attributes of men and animals;<sup>2</sup> the extraordinary and unnatural are preferred to the ordinary and natural.<sup>3</sup> The clue to the use of this symbolic language is found in the purpose of these writings. As we noted, the writers encouraged and comforted the people by telling them God would intervene on their behalf, destroy their enemies and elevate his faithful followers to a place of honor in the coming Kingdom. If such a message was written in ordinary language, the enemy, reading such a document would have all the more reason to persecute. Consequently, veiled language was absolutely necessary.

In the fourth place, the apocalyptic writers were prevaillingly pessimistic as far as the present world view is concerned. They believed that Satan was temporarily in control of affairs and as a result this world is unfit to be man's eternal abode. Hence they looked forward to the day when it would be destroyed by a catastrophie judgment of God and its place a heavenly Kingdom set up.

#### 4. Prophecy and Apocalyptic Literature.

From what has been said concerning apocalyptic literature it can readily be seen that there is a difference

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1. Daniel 7; II Esdras 11; Revelation 13; 17.
2. Daniel 7:8; Revelation 9:1.
3. II Esdras 5:4-9; Revelation 5:6-8; 8:7-12; 9:3-11.

between it and prophecy. However, we first note some similarities.

Prophecy and apocalyptic both claim to be a revelation of God's will and purposes concerning the laws and nature of His Kingdom. Not only this, there is also a similarity of materials and method, especially in the later prophets. Thus we find the eschatological element quite strong in Isaiah 24-27 and Joel, and the use of visions as a vehicle of revelation in Zechariah. Outside of this there is little similarity between the two types of literature.

As to differences, we note first the differences that J. E. H. Thomson points out as to content and literary form.<sup>1</sup> Under content he says that prophecy has a predictive element to a certain extent but in apocalypses it is more prominent, relates to longer periods, and involves a wider grasp of the state of the world at large. Both speak of the coming Messiah and His Kingdom, but apocalyptists more fully defined the Messianic hope and gave it a wider reference. The prophet was nationalistic in his outlook and primarily concerned with Israel; the apocalyptist was universal in his concern. The prophet was primarily a teacher of righteousness and used prediction only as a guarantee, by its fulfillment, of his Divine mission, or as an exhibition of the natural result of rebellion against

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1. Thomson, J. E. H.: Apocalyptic Literature, an article in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. I, p. 162-163.



God's moral laws. The apocalyptic writers, on the other hand, gave little moral exhortation but looked on prediction as a thing of utmost importance.

As to literary form, the prophets used visions in a more restricted sense, implying rather than describing them in full detail. For the apocalyp<sup>t</sup>ist the vision was of utmost significance for it was the vehicle by which his revelation was conveyed. And in style the prophets wrote in a style of prose so elevated that it hovered on the border of poetry. The apocalyp<sup>t</sup>ist, on the other hand, "used pure prose without the elaborate p<sup>a</sup>rellelism or cadenced diction of Hebrew poetry."<sup>1</sup>

We further note a difference in the historical situation out of which they came. Israel was a free nation when the prophets spoke and they were advisers to the political leaders. A state of emergency existed and hence they could not afford to speak lightly. But when apocalyptic literature flourished, Israel was subject to foreign powers. The writers had no political connections and so could offer speculations as to the outcome, knowing that they stood apart from the actual direction of events.

Right in line with this was their attitude toward repentance and reformation. The prophets believed that this was still God's world and that in time His purposes

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1. Ibid., p. 163.

would be worked out. Hence, they could deliver a call to repentance and reform on the assumption that, through the moral regeneration of men, the world was capable of being a world where universal peace and righteousness reigned. If there was no regeneration of men, then punishment was necessary. However, even in that God was still trying to redeem His people. The apocalyptic writers, on the contrary, had little hope in the present world, but waited for God's purposes to be worked out through catastrophic judgments. As far as they were concerned, the present world is incapable of renovation because evil has the upper hand temporarily. They might deliver a call to repentance, but the object of repentance was preparation for the coming judgment of God, not a reformation of the existing social order as a means of averting the day of wrath.

Perhaps there will be a repetition with what has already been said, but C. Anderson Scott gives a very concrete comparison of prophecy and apocalyptic which we quote in summary:

"Apocalyptic is the successor of prophecy..... It is, therefore, at once, the continuation of prophecy, and sharply distinguished from it. The prophet speaks directly to the people; the apocalyptic writer records in solitude what men may read in public. The prophet speaks what God the Lord has spoken; what he speaks in public is afterwards committed to writing. The apocalyptist writes, describing what God the Lord has given him to see. The prophet is a speaker, an orator, a preacher. The apocalyptist is a seer, a ponderer of what he has seen, a student of what those before

him have written.

"... Prophecy looks for the manifestation of Jehovah's righteousness and power in the near future, but on the stage of Jewish history, and through the action of forces already operative in human affairs. Apocalyptic, on the other hand, predicts a like manifestation indeed, but thrusts it back behind a great crisis, transposes it into the key of universal history, and anticipates the intrusion of new forces, demonic and Divine. The drama of prophecy is transacted on the plane of this world; the drama of apocalyptic on the double plane of 'this world' and 'the world to come'. Isaiah, for example, looks forward to the establishment of the Messianic kingdom upon earth.... The apocalyptists, on the other hand, look through and beyond any such 'tentative' realization of the Divine kingdom here to 'a new heaven and a new earth'. The centre of the prophet's hopes is a restored and glorified Zion upon the earth; the apocalyptist fixes his gaze upon 'a new Jerusalem coming down from heaven.'<sup>1</sup>

### C. The Historical Setting of The Revelation

We now have an understanding of apocalyptic literature and have seen how it is similar to and how it is different from prophetic literature. Our next step is to understand the historical situation out of which The Revelation arose. This is precisely the point where many interpreters have 'missed the mark'. In so doing they have been led to a wide range of ideas about the meaning of the book. In pointing to this situation Dana says:

"The chief difficulty has been that the book has been taken out of the living relations of its historical origin and treated as an isolated group of prophetic oracles."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Scott, C. A.: The Book of Revelation (Camb. Bible), pp. 25-27.
2. Dana, op. cit, p. 85.

We turn now to study those living relations and conditions which existed at the time when The Revelation was written.

1. The Date.

The Revelation came out of a period of severe persecution.<sup>1</sup> From Church History we know that there were two such periods during the first century; the one under Nero in 64, and another under Domitian during his reign from 81-96.<sup>2</sup> Nearly all scholars are agreed that The Revelation was written during one of these two periods and prominent scholars argue for both dates.<sup>3</sup> However, scholars in more recent years feel that the evidence seems to weigh more heavily for assigning The Revelation to the latter date, about 96. Allen very well sums up the facts that point to this conclusion:

"1) The early Christians writers almost without exception assign the Apocalypse to the reign of Domitian. 2) The condition of the churches in the province of Asia, as pictured in the second and third chapters, is such as to have required rather a long time to develop. Moreover, one of these at least--the church of Smyrna--was not founded till after the year 60. 3) The whole book presupposes a time of severe persecution for Christians by the Roman authorities based upon the requirement of emperor worship.... It was in the later part of the reign of Domitian that emperor worship was first made a crucial test of loyalty to the state and pressed with rigor upon the Christians."<sup>4</sup>

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1. Note Revelation 1:9; 2:9-10; 3:8-10.
2. Cf. Ramsay, W. M.: The Church in the Roman Empire, p. 226 ff.; 259 ff.; and Schaff, Vol. I, p. 376 ff.
3. See footnote 2, Schaff, Vol. I, p. 834, for a list of older scholars views.
4. Allen, C. H.: The Message of the Book of Revelation, p. 24-25. Cf. Swete, pp. xcix-xvi, and Scott, pp. 48-56.

Therefore, for these and other minor reasons we shall accept the later date for the composition of The Revelation.

2. The Times.

We have seen above<sup>1</sup> that it was the conditions of the times that caused apocalyptic literature to be written and which determined its message. This is equally true of The Revelation.

During the closing years of the first century when this book was written, Rome was nearly at the height of her greatness. "Her boundaries were Scotland on the north, the African desert on the south, the Atlantic Ocean on the west, and the Euphrates River on the east."<sup>2</sup> Thus John could truly picture Rome as a harlot "seated upon many waters."<sup>3</sup> A few verses later he interprets these waters as "peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues."<sup>4</sup> And so it was. Rome was a world empire.<sup>5</sup>

Christianity made good progress in this situation in its beginning. With good roads, a good transportation system, a well-developed postal system, stable economic conditions, the universal use of the Greek language, and other favorable factors, there were no external factors to hinder its spread. Paul was the great missionary for

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1. Ante., p. 42 ff.
2. Allen, op. cit., p. 27.
3. Revelation 17:1.
4. Revelation 17:15.
5. Cf. Allen, op. cit., pp. 27-53.

Christianity and soon founded churches in Asia Minor, Greece and Macedonia.<sup>1</sup> On the whole, the government was friendly to this new religion and at times even protected its leaders.<sup>2</sup> This attitude changed, however. It soon became apparent that here were two institutions, each demanding supreme loyalty.<sup>3</sup> The issue involved the cult of emperor worship which was growing throughout the empire. The real conflict finally broke into the open during the reign of Domitian when he issued an edict that throughout the Empire he should be paid divine honors.<sup>4</sup> This was the climax of the development of emperor worship and seriously affected the Christians.<sup>5</sup>

The Christians, of course, refused to worship the emperor, for their allegiance was to the True God as He had been revealed in Christ. This refusal was construed as treason, and was punishable with death, torture or banishment. The Christians called their Saviour "Lord Christ" (kurios christos), while the devotees of emperor worship referred to Domitian as "Lord Caesar" (kurios

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1. Acts 13-20.
2. Acts 16:35-40; 19:12-17; 21:30-40; 23:23-35.
3. Westcott, B. F.: The Epistles of John, pp. 247-282, has a very good essay on this subject, The Two Empires.
4. Beckwith, op. cit., p. 200. It should also be mentioned here that the Christians suffered under Nero in 64 but this matter was more the demands of a heartless tyrant than a matter of definite and serious imperial policy.
5. For further details of the development of emperor worship, see Sweet, L. M.: Roman Emperor Worship, and Case, S. J.: The Revelation of John.

kaisaros).<sup>1</sup>

This, then, was the crucial situation which faced the Christians.

"Two empires were about to meet in mortal combat: The Kingdom of God represented by the Church, the World-Power represented by Rome. As the struggle revolved itself to the eyes of the Seer, it was a war of Christ with Antichrist."<sup>2</sup>

### 3. The Condition of the Readers.

The Revelation was written to the Seven Churches in Asia.<sup>3</sup> Here the persecution of Christians was especially severe for this province was the stronghold of emperor worship.<sup>4</sup> Christian blood was soon shed at Pergamum, the first official site of emperor worship.<sup>5</sup> And when the book was written there were already those who "had been

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1. Dana, op. cit., p. 92.
2. Swete, op. cit, p. lxxviii.
3. Revelation 1:4. We cannot go into a discussion here of why these Seven Churches, but quote the conclusions of a scholar who has made a thorough study and written a book on this subject. Wm. Ramsay in The Letters to The Seven Churches says (p. 183): "All the Seven Cities stand on the great circular road that bound together the most populous, wealthy, and influential part of the Province, the west-central region...." "They were the best points on the circuit to serve as centres of communication with seven districts: Pergamum for the north...; Thyatira for an inland district on the north-east and east; Sardis for the wide middle valley of the Hermus; Philadelphia for Upper Lydia...; Laodicea for the Lycus Valley and lower Maeander Valleys and coasts; Smyrna for the lower Hermus Valley and the North Ionian coasts."
4. Dana, op. cit, p. 93.
5. Case, op. cit, p. 38.

slain for the word of God and witness they had born."<sup>1</sup>

But as though persecutions were not enough, there was an enemy on the inside likewise threatening the life of the Church. Many had lost their first love for the Church;<sup>2</sup> others had grown cold and indifferent;<sup>3</sup> still others were threatened with heresy.<sup>4</sup>

It is not difficult to understand this situation. These Christian churches were in the early stage of development. At the time there was no New Testament canon and the Old Testament threw little light upon distinctively Christian truth. Furthermore, the generation of teachers trained by the apostles had passed away, and others took their places who were very decidedly more independent in thought and teaching. This situation made the churches an easy prey to error and confusion. In this kind of soil, Gnosticism, with its lure of speculative philosophy and indulgent living, was a real threat.

The situation was desperate. On one hand there was the possibility of being martyred for the faith; on the other, there was an intense struggle to maintain purity of faith and life. It was a crisis that demanded action. It was a life and death struggle.

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1. Revelation 6:9.
2. Revelation 2:4.
3. Revelation 3:1-2, 15-17.
4. Revelation 2:14-15, 20.



#### 4. The Purpose of the Book.

With this crisis in mind it is easy to see the immediate purpose of The Revelation. It is addressed to the Church in an hour of peril. It unfolds inspiring visions of the power and omnipotence of God and Christ and on the basis of this pleads with the Christians to be faithful to the end. The downfall of Rome and the final destruction of evil are predicted. And also on this basis it calls on Christ's followers to fight, to endure, to suffer and if need be, to die for Him.

Thus, by the warnings, exhortations, and re-assuring promises in the Seven Letters, and by the prediction that "the time is at hand", God's judgment of evil will soon take place and Christ will return for His own, those of "The Way" are exhorted to "be faithful unto death."

#### D. The Author of The Revelation

There is no attempt to conceal the authorship of The Revelation. The book claims to have been written by John.<sup>1</sup> The questions relative to who "John" was are not within the purposed scope of this paper. There have been many theories and much controversy, but the balance of evidence seems to favor the Apostolic authorship.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Revelation 1:4, 9; 22:8.
2. For the arguments for the Apostolic authorship see Beckwith, pp. 343-353; Erdman, pp. 17-18; and C. A. Scott. For the arguments against see Charles, p.

We are more concerned here about the writer himself than with his identity. And in studying the book we learn a great deal. The author states that he is a servant of Christ;<sup>1</sup> he is a brother of the Churches in Asia, and is sharing in their suffering;<sup>2</sup> he received the revelation when he was on the island of Patmos<sup>3</sup> "on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus";<sup>4</sup> and at the end of the book he affirms that he himself has seen and heard the things contained in the book.<sup>5</sup> Not only that, he also mentions that he was "in the Spirit" when these visions occurred.<sup>6</sup>

Most of the time John is a spectator but he is also given a specific job. In chapter 10 he is definitely commissioned as a prophet to "many people and nations and tongues and kings."<sup>7</sup> The message he is to proclaim is both sweet and bitter;<sup>8</sup> sweet for those who respond to it, but bitter for those who reject it and thereby invite God's judgment upon them.

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xxix ff.; and E. F. Scott, pp. 30-35.

1. Revelation 1:1.
2. Revelation 1:9.
3. According to the Westminster Dictionary of The Bible, p. 453, Patmos is a small rocky island, one of the Sporades, in the Greek Archipelago, and is now called Patino. It lies off the southwest coast of Asia Minor, about 30 miles south of Samos. The island is about ten miles long and six miles wide and quite barren.
4. Revelation 1:9.
5. Revelation 22:8.
6. Revelation 1:10; 4:2; 17:3.
7. Revelation 10:11.
8. Revelation 10:9.

The author's knowledge of the Old Testament is worthy of mention. On this Beckwith says:

"...the author's mind was stored to a marvelous degree with the ideas, the language, and the imagery found in the Old Testament and in apocalyptic writings. The evidence of this appears on every page, one might also say in every paragraph of a few verses."<sup>1</sup>

In this use of the Old Testament, Isaiah is used most frequently, the Psalms second and Ezekiel third.<sup>2</sup>

#### E. Its Characteristics and Plan.

##### 1. General Characteristics.

When one begins to scan this book and record his observations he cannot help but be amazed by what he finds. Erdman has quite rightly said:

"Because of the intricacy of its literary structure, the splendor of its poetic imagery, the majestic scope of its inspired visions, the mystery of its cryptic symbols, and its dramatic presentation of eternal truths, this book is distinct in character from all other parts of the Bible."<sup>3</sup>

One of the first things we note is that, as a typical apocalypse, it is a book of visions and symbols. Except for the introduction and conclusion, and the brief section containing the letters to the Seven Churches, the book abounds with visions. To mention only the major scenes, there is the vision of the son of man (1:12-20); the scene

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1. Beckwith, op. cit., p. vii.
2. From notes taken from a report in class on The Old Testament in The Revelation.
3. Erdman, Charles R.: The Revelation of John, p. 11.

in heaven (4-5); the opening of the seals (6); the blowing of the trumpets (8-9); the war in heaven (12); the beasts of land and sea (13); the pouring of the seven bowls of wrath (16); the destruction of Babylon (18); the last judgment (20); and the new heaven and the new earth (21). These scenes are vivid and picturesque, but far from being literal "they are dramatic representations of truth. ... mental images expressing objective realities."<sup>1</sup>

This is a book of doom and judgment. The people are suffering at the hands of evil forces. They must be vindicated. That vindication comes as the seals are opened, the trumpets blown, the bowls of wrath are poured out, Babylon is destroyed, and the rider of the white horse rides forth to "tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty."<sup>2</sup> There is tremendous conflict and we are made aware of it especially in chapters 12 and 13.

Christ is the leading character in this moving drama. This is a revelation of Him;<sup>3</sup> He is "the first and the last, and the living one";<sup>4</sup> He has the keys of Death and Hades;<sup>5</sup> He alone, "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David", is worthy to open the scroll and its seven

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1. Erdman, op. cit., p. 13.
2. Revelation 19:15.
3. Revelation 1:1.
4. Revelation 1:17.
5. Revelation 1:18.

seals.<sup>1</sup> He is the "King of kings and Lord of lords."<sup>2</sup>

At least sixteen different names are used for Christ and of these "the Lamb" is used twenty-eight times.

This is a book of poetry and song.<sup>3</sup>

"Here celestial music is sounding, choirs of angels are singing, and 'harpers harping with their harps,' and we hear the hymns of the redeemed in glory. Some of the songs are pitched in a minor key. There are lamentations and threnodies, as well as hymns of triumph."<sup>4</sup>

The dominant note in these hymns, however, is that of praise.<sup>5</sup>

Numbers play an important part in the book and form an important part of its symbolism. The numbers 4, 7, 12 and 1000 are examples and should be not taken literally, but as Erdman suggests, "as the world number, the number of totality, the number of completeness and the number of superlative greatness."<sup>6</sup>

This is a book of great contrasts. There is mention of "The Lamb who was slain" (5:12), but also of "the wrath of the Lamb" (6:16); the love of God is implied (7:17), but we also see "the great wine press of the wrath of God" (14:19); there is a river of life (22:1), but also a lake of fire (20:10); there is loud noise (11:19), and there is also dead silence (8:1).

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1. Revelation 5:5.
2. Revelation 19:6.
3. Revelation 4:8, 11; 5:9-10, 12, 13; 7:12, 15-17; 11:15, 17-18; 15:3-4; 16:5-6; 18; 19:1-8.
4. Erdman, op. cit., p. 12.
5. Cf. 4:8; 5:9-10, 12; 11:17-18; 19:1-8.
6. Erdman, op. cit., p. 15.

In this book we have color, light, movement and brilliancy. There are colossal structures, scenes of masses and cosmic disturbances. Also of significance are the seven beatitudes.<sup>1</sup>

Much more could be said but this is sufficient to show that "it is supreme among all apocalyptic productions."<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Its Comparison to Other Apocalypses.

Because this book abounds in visions and symbols and because of its message of comfort to God's people under persecution it is quite rightly called an "apocalypse". However, it is also different from them.

We noted that most apocalypses were pseudonymous; The Revelation bears the author's name. In the second place, it was difficult to determine the date, origin and destination of most Jewish apocalypses. The Revelation, on the contrary, makes no secret as to where it was written or to whom, and the circumstances described in the book practically determine its date. But there is more than these outward characteristics that make it different.

"It breathes a religious spirit which is not that of its predecessors; it is marked with the sign of the Cross, the note of patient suffering, unabashed faith, tender love of the brethren, hatred of evil, invincible hope; and, notwithstanding the strange forms which from time to time are seen to move across the stage, the book as a whole is pervaded by a sense of stern

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1. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14.
2. Erdman, op. cit., p. 16.

reality and a solemn purpose which forbid the approach of levity."<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Its Structure and Plan.

The great struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil is the main theme of The Revelation. The book, however, does not immediately begin with this theme. After an introduction, the vision of the son of man is related. This is followed by the Seven Letters exhorting the people to "be faithful unto death". Then comes the majestic scene in heaven where the people are assured that God is still on the throne and that He holds the destiny of the world in His hands.

The struggle begins in earnest in chapter 6 as the seven seals are opened. "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" represent evil as they ride forth conquering and destroying. But over against this slaughter and destruction we see the martyrs. As the fifth seal is opened they cry out, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?"<sup>2</sup> These saints are assured that they will be avenged when "the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete."<sup>3</sup> In the next paragraph, when the sixth seal is opened, this promise

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1. Swete, op. cit, p. xxviii.
2. Revelation 6:10.
3. Revelation 6:11.

is partially fulfilled and the end seems near, as great cosmic disturbances terrorize the wicked. But between the sixth and seventh seals an interlude is introduced<sup>1</sup> which shows the safety of God's people amid the terrible judgment which has fallen.

On the opening of the seventh seal,<sup>2</sup> a new series of visions begins with the seven trumpets. Each trumpet is followed by a vision of destruction upon the sinful world ending with the Last Judgment. But between the sixth and seventh trumpets another interlude is introduced.<sup>3</sup> Here the saints are assured there will be "no more delay". Then the seventh angel blows his trumpet and a climax is reached with a proclamation of the final triumph of Christ's Kingdom.<sup>4</sup> This again is only a summary though.

Another scene of visions begins,<sup>5</sup> and the conflict intensifies. 'Behind the scenes' we see the real character of this conflict as Satan and his hosts are defeated and cast from heaven only to continue their warfare upon the earth.<sup>6</sup> Voices from heaven, however, proclaim the impending judgment on the forces of unrighteousness and once again God's people are assured of final victory.<sup>7</sup> The

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1. Revelation 7:1-17.
2. Revelation 8:1.
3. Revelation 10:1-11
4. Revelation 11:15.
5. Revelation 12:1.
6. Revelation 13.
7. Revelation 14:6-20.



visions of the seven bowls which follow<sup>1</sup> detail these judgments leading up to the final overthrow of evil. But though at the outpouring of the seventh bowl, it is proclaimed, "It is done",<sup>2</sup> the end is again held over till these final judgments are shown in detail.

Next follows the vision of the harlot city, Babylon, and her destruction.<sup>3</sup> Then, as the white horseman appears in chapter 19 and becomes "King of kings and Lord of lords", we conclude that this is the end. But again an interlude is introduced,<sup>4</sup> and Satan is bound for a thousand years while Jesus and His saints rule in peace and safety.<sup>5</sup>

When Satan is released the final battle is fought,<sup>6</sup> he is defeated and thrown into the lake of fire,<sup>7</sup> and the final vision of the book is that of the reign of Christ in a world where sin and suffering have no place.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the whole book, from beginning to end, teaches the great truth, good shall triumph over evil, Christ shall triumph over Antichrist, God shall triumph over Satan.

#### F. Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to obtain an

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1. Revelation 16.
2. Revelation 16:17.
3. Revelation 18.
4. Revelation 20:1-6.
5. Revelation 20:4-6.
6. Revelation 20:7-9.
7. Revelation 20:10.
8. Revelation 21:1-22:5.

understanding of the general background of The Revelation. First, in this procedure, was a discussion of apocalyptic literature. We saw that this literature came out of times of severe suffering and persecution, especially under Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century B. C. During these times Israel was no longer a free nation but subject to foreign powers whose leaders tried to exterminate the Jewish religion. In such dark days apocalyptists came forth with a message of comfort and hope. They did not promise relief from suffering but assured the people that if they remained true to God He would vindicate their suffering in the end.

As unique literature we noted four of its distinct characteristics: the mode of revelation was visions; it was generally pseudonymous; apocalyptists used symbols freely; and lastly, they had little hope of reforming this world.

In comparing apocalyptic with prophecy we noted the similarities-- both claim to be messages from God as to His Divine will for the future--but primarily we saw that they are different. Their literary form and content is basically different; they come out of different historical situations; and they had different views as to how God would fulfill His purposes, the prophet emphasizing reformation through moral regeneration, the apocalyptist waiting for God's catastrophic judgment.

We then turned to the historical setting of The Revelation and saw how it came out of a time of crisis and peril also. The faith of the Christians was tested by the demand of Domitian to worship him. If anyone refused he was slain. The testing was particularly severe in Asia Minor where emperor worship had a stronghold. It was in this province where the Seven Churches of Asia were located to whom John wrote.

John, himself, was suffering in banishment on Patmos. It was during this exile that he received great visions which are recorded in his apocalypse. As we studied these visions we saw that they lead on step by step to certain victory for the Kingdom of God. Though there is always an intense struggle there is never a question as to its outcome. God is on His throne "high and lifted up". He is the Ruler and His will must be fulfilled. Christ is to reign and reign supreme.

CHAPTER IV  
THE INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY  
IN  
THE REVELATION

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IN  
THE REVELATION

A. Introduction

John is writing to people who are being persecuted and martyred for the faith. His purpose in writing to them is to encourage them to be "faithful unto death". They are to remain faithful because God is still on His throne and though evil has an upper hand in the world God still has a stake in the affairs of men and some day will vindicate their suffering. Thus, as John fulfills his purpose he cannot help but set forth his interpretation of history.

As we turn to an inductive study of The Revelation to discover its interpretation of history we shall discuss these elements: God in History; Christ in History; The Crisis in History; Judgment in History; and finally the Final Goal of History.

B. God in History

In Jeremiah it was seen that his concept of God was the basis of his interpretation of history. We find this true of The Revelation also. However, John's concept of God

is set forth in a different way. Like Jeremiah, he does not try to argue about Him. But unlike Jeremiah, he does not talk to God. Rather he ~~attempts to~~ get his point across by telling his readers of the heavenly vision of God on the throne.<sup>1</sup> That great vision, the basis of John's hope for the cause of the Church, was meant to bring courage to its members.

"The cry reverberating through the book of Revelation, ... is 'Behold your God.' What these harassed Christians needed was a vision of the almighty, holy Lord of creation, whose purposes none can thwart and whose recompense is sure. They needed to be told again that this is a moral universe, that the tides of evil beat against its foundations in vain, for it is God's house. His laws are immutable and his purpose will ultimately prevail."<sup>2</sup>

#### 1. The Sovereignty of God.

One need not read far into The Revelation to find that for John God is eternal and sovereign. John begins his salutation with this paraphrase of the divine name, describing God as the eternal one: "Grace to you and peace from him who is and whoswas and who is to come."<sup>3</sup> This same phrase is repeated twice in the book,<sup>4</sup> and in two other places only the 'who is to come' is omitted.<sup>5</sup> Along with that the paraphrase "who lives forever and ever" is used at least four times.<sup>6</sup> In addition, God declares

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1. Revelation 4-5. All references are to The Revelation.
2. Blair, op. cit., p. 125.
3. 1:4.
4. 1:8; 4:8.
5. 11:17; 16:5.
6. 4:9; 4:10; 10:6; 15:7.

Himself to be "the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end."<sup>1</sup> He is the supreme "God of heaven",<sup>2</sup> "Lord of the earth",<sup>3</sup> and "King of all the ages"<sup>4</sup> whose throne is in the heaven,<sup>5</sup> and who "shall reign forever and ever."<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the God of The Revelation is, in the words of Swete, "the God of the Old Testament; the 'I am' of the Exodus, the 'Holy, Holy, Holy' of Isaiah, the 'Lord God' of Ezekiel, and the 'God of heaven' of Daniel."<sup>7</sup>

## 2. God the Creator.

Along with John's high concept of God as sovereign and eternal is his concept of God as Creator. This is revealed as the twenty-four elders fall down to worship Him and sing,

"Worthy art thou, Our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honor and power,  
for thou didst create all things,  
and by thy will they existed and were created."<sup>8</sup>

It is echoed again as an angel swears by Him "who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it."<sup>9</sup> And once more God is acknowledged as Creator when another angel proclaims, "Worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water."<sup>10</sup>

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| 1. 1:8; 21:6.             | 6. 11:15.                    |
| 2. 11:13.                 | 7. Swete, op. cit., p. clix. |
| 3. 11:4.                  | 8. 4:11.                     |
| 4. 15:3.                  | 9. 10:6.                     |
| 5. 4:2; 4:10; 19:4; 21:5. | 10. 14:7.                    |

### 3. God the Controller of Destiny.

Since God is eternal, sovereign and Creator, He holds the destiny of the creation in His power. Thus, he gives Christ the revelation "to show his servants what must soon take place."<sup>1</sup> And as He sits on the throne He holds in His hand "a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals."<sup>2</sup> That scroll is the Book of Destiny.<sup>3</sup> As the seals are opened God's divine will regarding the consummation of His Kingdom is set forth. Moreover, there is a set time for the various events to take place; a time "for the dead to be judged, for rewarding the prophets and saints, ...and for destroying the destroyers of the earth;"<sup>4</sup> a time to reap the harvest of the earth.<sup>5</sup>

### 4. His Relation to Man.

Although John saw God as Creator He nowhere represented Him as the Father of men in a specific way. He did imply it, however. Frequent references are made to the wrath of God<sup>6</sup> which reveals His rule over the unchristian world. Furthermore, the harlot is to be destroyed by the beast and his helpers "for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose."<sup>7</sup> Over against the wrath of God is

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1. 1:1.
2. 5:1.
3. Cf. Swete, p. 75, and Beckwith, p. 504.
4. 11:18.
5. 14:15.
6. 6:16; 11:18; 14:10, 19; 15:17; 16:1, 19; 19:15.
7. 17:17.



seen His loving care for His people.<sup>1</sup>

Why this difference in His attitude toward men? The answer is found 'between the lines' of various passages. God expects men to despise evil, love Christ and hold fast to his name;<sup>2</sup> they are to be on guard against error and keep His word;<sup>3</sup> good works is expected of men and it is their duty to "keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus;"<sup>4</sup> He alone is to be worshiped by His servants.<sup>5</sup> Those who do not fulfill these obligations are under His wrath and judgment. And since the book is written to Christians who are concerned about the reign of evil this is a justified emphasis.

"A revelation of the 'severity' of God was needed by Churches which were hard pressed by the laxity of pagan life and the claims to Divine honours made by the monsters of the Empire. The Apocalyptist meets the immoralities and blasphemies of heathendom by a fresh setting forth of the majesty of the One God and a restatement of His sole right to the worship of men."<sup>6</sup>

In summary then, God is eternal, sovereign, and has created all things. He is the Lord of History, the Controller of destiny, and His attitude toward man, revealed in love and mercy or judgment, is determined by man's attitude toward Him. But again we must emphasize that above all these, John's hope is in God Himself.

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1. 6:9-11; 7:15-17; 11:18; 12:6, 14, 16; 19:2.
2. 2:2-4, 13.
3. 2:14-15, 20; 3:10.
4. 3:2; 14:12.
5. 19:10; 22:9.
6. Swete, op. cit., p. clxi.

"This entire picture of God (chs. 4-5) enthroned in heavenly glory means for John a guaranty of victory for all Christians who will faithfully resist the aggressions of the imperial cult. However great the odds against them may seem to be when viewed with the eyes of ordinary mortals, the seer whose vision penetrates to the heavenly regions knows that the power of the Almighty God is on the side of the persecuted saints."<sup>1</sup>

### C. Christ in History

Above it was seen that God is the Lord of History. Because of Who God is good must triumph over evil. However, we cannot entirely understand God as the Lord of History without also realizing Christ's function in God's plan for the world. As this section develops it will be seen that Christ becomes the center of history and reveals its final meaning.

#### 1. His Relation to God.

No where in The Revelation is there a specific reference to Christ's earthly ministry, except to his death. Instead, the curtain is drawn aside and he is seen as the glorified, risen Christ, who has triumphed over death. In fact, John exalts him so much at times that he is equal with God. He searches men's hearts;<sup>2</sup> life belongs to him as to God;<sup>3</sup> worship is offered to him in common with God;<sup>4</sup>

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1. Case, op. cit., p. 253.
2. 2:23.
3. Cf. 1:18 with 4:9-10.
4. 5:13.

his priests are also priests of God;<sup>1</sup> he occupies one throne with God;<sup>2</sup> both are the source of light in the New Jerusalem;<sup>3</sup> doxologies are sung to him as to God;<sup>4</sup> and he shares God's sovereignty.<sup>5</sup> Further, he receives titles which are assigned only to God; he is the first and the last and the living one,<sup>6</sup> the beginning and the end,<sup>7</sup> the holy and the true one,<sup>8</sup> and with God he is the Alpha and the Omega.<sup>9</sup>

But though John exalts Christ in this way he does not confuse the two Persons. Christ is the Son of God;<sup>10</sup> God is his Father;<sup>11</sup> God is his God;<sup>12</sup> he receives his power to rule from God;<sup>13</sup> in fact, the revelation itself which he is showing John is received from God.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. His Relation to the Churches.

To the Christians who are being threatened from both sides Christ is all in all. He loves them, has redeemed them by his blood, and has made them a kingdom of priests;<sup>15</sup> he is still alive, their living Lord, still able to protect his servants and defend his cause against the enemy;<sup>16</sup> though he has ascended to heaven he is not separated from

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1. 20:6.
2. 22:1, 3.
3. 21:22.
4. 1:6.
5. 11:15.
6. 1:17-18.
7. 2:8.
8. 3:7.

9. 22:13.
10. 2:8.
11. 1:6; 2:27; 3:5, 21; 14:1.
12. 3:2, 12.
13. 2:27.
14. 1:1.
15. 1:5-6.
16. 1:17-18.

them; he is holding them in his right hand, ready to sustain them in all their afflictions;<sup>1</sup> he is in their midst as their shepherd and friend.<sup>2</sup> Nothing could enhearten the persecuted Christians more than this assurance that Christ is exalted and triumphant.

### 3. His Relation to the World.

It was noted that John saw God as Creator.<sup>3</sup> However, he realized that Christ also had a part in the creation, in fact, is its beginning and its goal.<sup>4</sup> Likewise in the affairs of men and nations he plays a vital part. Swete says of him:

"In human history He is supreme: He alone is able to open, one after another, the seals of the Book of Destiny (5:5, 6:1 ff.); He is the 'Ruler of the kings of the earth' (1:5); He was born to rule the nations with the iron-tipped rod of the Universal Pastor of men (12:5); the greatest of Emperors in His vassal (17:14), and the day will come when the Augustus and the meanest slave in his empire will tremble alike before His victorious wrath (6:15 ff.)."<sup>5</sup>

### 4. Christ the Center of All History.

All that has been said thus far upholds the statement made at the beginning of this section: Christ becomes the center of history and reveals its final meaning; he is the focus of all history. This breaking into history in Christ was necessary in God's plan. Of this Calkins

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1. 1:13; 2:1.

2. 7:17; 14:1.

3. Ante., p. 69.

4. 3:14; 22:13.

5. Swete, op. cit., p. xlxi.

says:

"Without the leadership of Christ and without the teaching of his spirit who alone leads us into all truth, God's scheme and plan for the world could never be translated into history! The events of the on-marching world are thus the Gesta Christi, since Christ alone enables men to make actual what otherwise would remain God's hidden purposes. Men have always been palsied by the doubt of whether they understood those purposes. That doubt is removed and assurance is attained through the breaking of the seals by Christ alone. (The opening of the book by Christ signifies that present events are his fulfillment of God's purposes, and that thus they lead in the end to the salvation of the people of God and the servants of Christ. Human history is thus interpreted as the gradual unfolding of the will and purpose of God, every event, however, contradictory though it may seem to be, in the hand and keeping of Christ."1

Thus, not only the conviction of who God is, but also the assurance that Christ is the center of all history, bring strength, hope and courage to the suffering saints.

"These marvelous pictures of God and Christ painted by John as the opening scenes in his revelation of coming events are designed to inspire courage and confidence in the minds of his readers. With these scenes of divine power and glory before their eyes, the seer would have them share his confidence in the ultimate overthrow of the hostile Roman emperor who now claims for himself those titles of reverence which Christians refuse to ascribe to any authority except that of heaven. Since God and Christ are the supreme powers in the whole universe, Christians are sure of Rome's ultimate overthrow and of their own glorious triumph, however severely they may have to suffer in the meantime."2

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1. ~~Calkins, Raymond~~: The Social Message of the Book of Revelation, p. 77.
2. Case, op. cit., pp. 258-259.

#### D. The Crisis in History

John was writing to Christians when their cause seemed hopeless. The whole might of the world was against them. They were being overwhelmed. As they looked around and saw their world it seemed that evil had reached a climax and that everything would presently go to ruin.

These thoughts were soon to be dispelled from their minds by the heavenly vision of the eternal God and Christ as John related it to them. Then to verify this there are a series of judgments reaching a climax.<sup>1</sup> After this they are taken 'behind the scenes' where they see the real crisis in history. In the world the crisis is the great struggle between Rome and the Church. But that struggle has its counter part in the spiritual realm. Here it is the struggle between the divine and devilish orders; between Christ and Anti-Christ; between Satan and God.

"The human struggle is only a reflection of a more fundamental struggle: that between the cosmic forces of good and evil. God and the devil are at enmity. Both, like military leaders, are trying to win the battle on all fronts--on the land, in the sea, and in the air."<sup>2</sup>

Satan is supreme in the realm of evil,<sup>3</sup> while God reigns in the kingdom of righteousness;<sup>4</sup> Satan's rule is in the

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1. 6:8-9; 11:15.
2. Blair, op. cit., p. 135.
3. 13:4.
4. 12:10-11.

earth with his assistants,<sup>1</sup> while God's throne is in heaven where His angels fight for Him.<sup>2</sup>

This, then, is the crisis. It is a contest between the people of God and the powers of this world; it is the old antithesis between the Civitas Dei and the Civitas Diaboli; a life and death struggle between God and Satan.

"In this book, therefore, there is an interpretation of history from the religious point of view. It is assumed that in all ages two powers have been contending for the mastery. On the one hand there is the power of this world, which consists in brute force and material wealth, and it has finally embodied itself in the all-controlling Empire of Rome. But in the advance towards this consummation John sees, not a progress, but a growing debasement. The world has become ever more worldly; material power has revealed itself, ever more plainly, for what it is--the enemy of all good, the negation of God's will. It has issued at last in the crowning blasphemy of Caesar-worship. Over against the worldly power, John sees the spiritual. This also has been continually active, aiming at the assertion of the Divine order. It manifests in the Church. For John, the appearance of Christ is the central event to which everything before it was leading up, and from which all later history was to take its departure. Since Christ appeared, the two powers which have always been opposed to each other, have definitely joined battle. It is now to be decided once for all whether God or Satan will be supreme."<sup>3</sup>

#### E. Judgment in History

The Writer of The Revelation pictured for his readers the real crisis in history. But he did not leave them in the dark as to the final outcome of the struggle.

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1. 12:17; 13.
2. 12:5, 7.
3. Scott, E. F.: op. cit., p. 157.

He is confident that God is on His throne and will accomplish His purpose. To accomplish that purpose He sends forth His ministers of doom. Thus, the greater part of the book is occupied with the judgments which are to fall upon the earth.<sup>1</sup> Most of these judgments are partial, however, for they lead up to the final judgment when evil will be banished forever.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. The Character of Judgment.

The nature of the judgments John describes is varied. There are the three disasters mentioned so often in the Bible--war, famine and pestilence;<sup>3</sup> great cosmic disturbances take their toll;<sup>4</sup> other natural phenomenon play a role;<sup>5</sup> and the plagues of Egypt are repeated far more dreadfully.<sup>6</sup> As to Satan, he is thwarted in his efforts to defeat God's redemptive purpose;<sup>7</sup> then he is thrown down from heaven to make war upon the earth;<sup>8</sup> but finally he is thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone to be tormented for ever and ever.<sup>9</sup>

### 2. The Purpose of Judgment.

These judgments, as John sees them, are punitive, not remedial. There is no thought that they may turn men to repentance.<sup>10</sup> They do make the wicked aware of

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|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Chs. 6; 8-9; 16-20. | 6. 16:1-14.                |
| 2. 20:10.              | 7. 12:5-6.                 |
| 3. 6:3-8.              | 8. 12:9, 12, 17.           |
| 4. 6:12-17.            | 9. 20:10.                  |
| 5. 8:7-12.             | 10. 9:20-21; 16:9, 11, 21. |



God and Christ,<sup>1</sup> but instead of repenting, the wicked curse God all the more.<sup>2</sup>

This idea is in harmony with all apocalyptic literature, for as was noted, apocalypses were not aimed at reform. They taught, as John did, that the world was past that stage.

"Indeed it is part of the writer's conception that the world has passed beyond the stage where redemption is possible. It has become wholly corrupt, and is fit only for the lake of fire. God's mercy is reserved for His own people, and will be manifest in the blessedness he bestows on them after their enemies are destroyed."<sup>3</sup>

The judgments are carried out by angels, as the seals are broken, the trumpets are blown, and the bowls of wrath are poured.<sup>4</sup> But behind these we can see evil judging itself also. Sin strikes back and punishes sin. Thus, Rome is destroyed by one of its own emperors returning, while he, in turn, will be destroyed by the servants he gathered around to help him.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. The Final Judgment.

John saw judgment already beginning in the disasters of his day; but he also looked forward to a day in the future which is to be the final judgment. Before this, though, he saw a preliminary judgment taking place at

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1. 6:16-17.
2. 16:9, 11, 21.
3. Scott, E. F., op. cit., p. 162.
4. 6:1 ff.; 8:7 ff.; 16:1 ff.
5. Ch. 17.

the end of the present age. Christ, as the rider of the great white horse, will lead the armies of heaven against the kings of the earth and their armies. He will be victorious and the task on earth will be finished.<sup>1</sup> Then Satan will be bound while the saints and martyrs rule with Christ for a thousand years.<sup>2</sup> After the thousand years are finished, Satan will be loosed for one last effort to establish his reign.<sup>3</sup> God, however, will come to the rescue of His own, consuming the armies with fire, and casting the Devil into the lake of fire.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the judgment of Satan is ended. God is the final victor.

Then, according to John, will be the judgment of the great white throne.<sup>5</sup> All people, living and dead, will stand before that throne to receive their reward.<sup>6</sup> The basis of judgment will be the books--the records of what men have done in their life time. On this evidence some will be justified, others condemned.

For suffering Christians this message was a great hope. Those trying to destroy them would come to judgment. God would vindicate them. God remembers the iniquities of Babylon;<sup>7</sup> just and true are His judgments.<sup>8</sup>

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- 1. 19:11-21.
- 2. 20:1-6.
- 3. 20:7-9a.
- 4. 20:9b-10.

- 5. 20:11.
- 6. 20:12a.
- 7. 16:19; 18:5.
- 8. 16:7; 19:2.

## F. The Final Goal of History

For Rome, John's message was a message of doom. For the Christians, it was a message of hope. Not that the immediate future was bright; they could expect greater tribulations and trials. But in the final end God will triumph and at the judgment of the great white throne each man will receive his due reward. John then pictures, for the saints, the New Jerusalem, the goal toward which history is moving.<sup>1</sup>

There is to be a 'new' heaven and a 'new' earth.<sup>2</sup>

"The old order--the demon-inhabited heavens, the sin-scarred and pest-ridden earth, the restless and treacherous sea, the sorrow, the death, the **pain**, the separation between God and men--will flee away from the face of him who makes all things new (20:11; 21:5). In its place God will bring a new order."<sup>3</sup>

This new order, with relation to man, is characterized by three things. First, it is God-initiated. In God's plan and purpose it is "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."<sup>4</sup> Second, it is spiritual. It is a community of the redeemed in fellowship with God. "Behold the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them."<sup>5</sup> "It is both the ideal Kingdom or Church made actual, and

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1. 21:1-22:5.
2. 21:1.
3. Blair, op. cit., p. 153.
4. 21:2b.
5. 21:31.

the actual hope of the Christians made ideal."<sup>1</sup> Third, it will be a perfect order. The sorrows of this world will be absent. "...death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more."<sup>2</sup> All suffering and tears and loneliness will be turned to peace and joy and fellowship. There man shall be satisfied. "To the thirsty I will give water without price from the fountain of the water of life."<sup>3</sup>

In describing this city at length, "John exhausted the rich resources of the O. T., contemporary literature, and language."<sup>4</sup> In its total effect it is brilliant, "having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal."<sup>5</sup> It is a massive city with "a great high wall, with twelve gates, and ... twelve foundations."<sup>6</sup> Bearing "the names of the twelve tribes of Israel" and "the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" it belongs to the people of both the old and new covenants. It is an immense city,<sup>7</sup> and made of the most costly substances known to man.<sup>8</sup>

But again John comes back to its real significance.

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1. Gettys, Joseph M.: How To Study the Revelation, p. 106.
2. 21:4b.
3. 21:6b.
4. Blair, op. cit., p. 154.
5. 21:11.
6. 21:12-14.
7. 21:15-17.
8. 21:18-21.

The whole city is a temple where God and the Lamb fellowship with man.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, their radiance gives it its light,<sup>2</sup> and by that light all men shall walk.<sup>3</sup> The people of the city are sustained by the river of life and the tree of life.<sup>4</sup> Their service is the worship of God with whom they shall reign for ever and ever.<sup>5</sup>

In summary,

"The central idea throughout this description of the New Jerusalem is that direct, intimate fellowship with God and his Christ is heaven's highest value. The barriers that walled off the awful Presence from sinful men are now down. The stain of sin has been removed. God and men are completely reconciled. They as his children see his face and know him as he is. This is the highest privilege of which the devout Jew or Christian could conceive."<sup>6</sup>

#### G. Summary and Conclusion

1. God is the Lord of History. He is eternal and sovereign. By His wisdom and power He created the world and as Creator He alone has the right to receive the worship of the creatures he has made. Moreover, He has a plan for the world, and He will carry that plan out to its final completion.

2. Christ also has a part to play in History; he is the center of all History. By virtue of his triumph over death he has "freed us from our sins by his blood" and has earned the right to carry out God's purposes.

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1. 21:22.  
2. 21:23.  
3. 21:24-26..

4. 22:1-2.  
5. 22:3-5.  
6. Blair, op. cit., p. 156..

3. The real crisis in History is the conflict between God and Satan. This struggle is expressed on earth in the struggle between the Church and Rome.

4. For those who are against God judgment is coming. This judgment is not intended to be corrective but is a punishment. However, all judgments here on earth are but leading up to a final judgment when all books will be opened and each man receive his reward according to what is written therein.

5. The goal of history--the universe is moving to a time of "intimate spiritual fellowship between God and man in an order free from sin and finite limitation."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Ibid., p. 159.

CHAPTER V  
SUMMARY, COMPARISON AND CONCLUSION

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, COMPARISON AND CONCLUSION

#### A. Restatement of the Problem

The problem of this study has been to discover the prophetic and apocalyptic interpretations of history as they are set forth by Jeremiah and The Revelation.

#### B. Summary

The world of Jeremiah's day was a day of great uncertainty. On the international scene Assyria and Egypt battled for supremacy. Assyria finally won out but before Jeremiah's career was over, another nation, Babylonia, had risen up to become supreme in Western Asia.

These international wars were of significance for Judah for she was a buffer-state and consequently was always in peril of being over-run. The great problem the country faced was the problem of political security. Though the prophets urged trust in God for this security, the rulers listened to the politicians who advocated siding in with the nation which was the strongest at the time. In the end it was seen that Judah paid dearly for such vacillation.

But though this was not enough, there ~~were~~ internal problems within the nation which were of much greater



significance. Judah had lost her first love; she had forsaken the "fountain of living waters." Religious purity was sacrificed for political security by Ahaz and Manasseh. This led to corrupt social life and economic injustice and oppression. To such a situation the youth of Anathoth was called to preach.

As Jeremiah spoke to his generation he set forth God as the Lord of History. He is Creator and as such has sovereign right to choose nations and peoples. But more important He demands that men live according to His standards of righteousness. When these obligations are not met a crisis exists. Judgment becomes inevitable unless there is a heart-searching repentance. That judgment is a punishment but in it God is also working to fulfill His ends. Over and over He keeps working with men to reach the goal of history--a day of perfect peace and righteousness; a day when there shall be a perfect spiritual fellowship between God and men. This day will be possible because the Ruler will have the characteristics of the ideal Ruler.

Turning to Apocalyptic literature, it was seen that it also came out of times of crisis but of a different kind. God's people were not breaking His laws but were trying to be faithful in the face of severe torture and persecution. Israel was no longer a free nation but subject to other powers who were trying to do away with

their religion. In the midst of this crisis the apocalyp-  
tists came with their messages of hope. They saw in this  
struggle the earthly counter-part of the struggle between  
God and the Devil. For the time it looked as though God  
was defeated but the apocalyp-tists rested in the hope that  
in the final end God would be triumphant over all. God  
was not defeated but was still Ruler and some day would  
judge those who had persecuted His children.

This theme runs through The Revelation, the greatest  
of all apocalypses. That time, too, was one of great  
peril, for Domitian, the emperor, demanded supreme al-  
legiance. John, himself suffering in exile as the result  
of this cult, did not give up hope, but with the great  
beauty exhibited in the book, penned a letter to the  
Seven Churches of Asia. He pictured for them, God as  
the majestic Ruler who alone holds the destiny of the  
world in His hands. This destiny is to be fulfilled  
through one who is worthy, "the Lamb slain before the  
foundation of the world." He is the center of all History,  
and through him judgment will come to pass on the forces  
of evil. In the final end, evil, with its father, Satan,  
will be banished forever. A new order will take the place  
of the old; an order free from the limitations of this  
earthly life; an order where there is perfect fellowship  
between God and man.

## C. Comparison

### 1. Similarities.

Both prophet and apocalyptist claimed to be inspired messengers of God revealing His divine purpose in History. Both saw God as the Lord of History, but through somewhat different eyes. Jeremiah saw Him as Lord through His choosing of nations, and particularly Israel and Babylonia, to fulfill His purposes; John saw Him as Lord in his vision of Him on the throne; He is supreme Ruler as over against any earthly Ruler.

These two views also agree as to the final end of History. They look forward to a day of perfect spiritual fellowship between God and man. Both see the old order vanish with a new one taking its place. Jeremiah, however, thought of it in terms of the 'new covenant' while John thought of it in terms of the 'new Jerusalem'.

### 2. Differences.

Both Jeremiah and John agree as to the final end of History. But they disagree in the means of attaining that end. Each saw a crisis in History but in a different light. According to Jeremiah, God was trying to fulfill His purpose through a chosen race which was disobeying God and therefore thwarting His will. John likewise saw God's will being thwarted but attributed it directly to the forces of evil.

This naturally led to different outlooks on judgment. To the prophet, God was punishing men in judgment but He was also trying to correct the ways of the people. Through moral regeneration he believed this world could become a world of true righteousness. For the apocalypticist, judgment was only punishment, and there was no thought that the punishment might bring repentance. God was not punishing His people for disobeying but He was bringing judgment to pass on evil. Judgment was catastrophic in character for this was the only way in which God could overcome the darkness.

Thus, Jeremiah believed that moral regeneration was the means of attaining an ideal spiritual fellowship, while John believed that it could come only through the destruction of the old order by catastrophic judgment.

#### D. Conclusion

Both the prophetic and apocalyptic interpretations of history are pertinent for our day. The prophetic is important for it sets forth God's demands for moral righteous living, demands which are being ignored very freely. But for those who live up to these demands, yet are being persecuted for it, the apocalypticist has a message; a message that their trust is not in vain; a message that assures them of final victory over the hosts of evil. "And He shall reign for ever and ever."

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