

THE SCRIPTURE OF THE AUTHOR OF THE REVELATION OF JOHN

HAROLD M. PARKER, JR.

The bible of the New Testament Church was the Old Testament. This is not only verified by numerous direct and indirect citations of OT passages used to trace any theological theme in the NT, but the numerous cross references in any bible verifies this statement. Reference after reference vertically relates the NT to the OT. In almost any of the standard works on biblical theology a similar attitude obtains. In fact, emphasis frequently appears to be centered more on "biblical" than "theology."

In the Protestant tradition there is no question as to what the "bible" is. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1:2) lists the books of the OT and the NT by name, commenting that "all which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life." Insofar as the books of the Apocrypha are concerned, since they "are no part of the canon of Scripture," therefore they are "of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings" (1:3). Thus the religious and moral teaching and the history found in the Apocrypha have no place or authority in the emerging thought of the various theological loci or in any concept of ethical injunction. The historiographical effort of I Macc is viewed as having less value than that of the Prophetic school or of the Chronicler. And so far as the pseudepigraphical literature is concerned, since much of it was probably not known at the time when the Westminster Divines assembled, the Confession of faith does not even touch on it.

However, any serious study of the Revelation of John will quickly reveal that the early church—or at least a part of the church—did not accept such canonical strictures. In the cross references of the Revised Standard Version, numerous instances may be found in the cross columns of Revelation to the Apocrypha. A similar situation exists in the American Standard Version of 1901. Neither version, however, makes any reference to the vast amount of pseudepigraphical material. However, as shall be demonstrated, there are numerous allusions to pseudepigraphical material in Revelation, as well as to Apocryphal and OT books. Nor did the Seer make any distinction between these three collections of literary materials as we do today. The purpose of this exercise is to examine the matter of authority in that

HAROLD M. PARKER, JR. is Professor of History at Western State College of Colorado. He has dedicated this article in gratitude to the memory of Dr Rist, who supervised his doctoral program and dissertation.

portion of the early church which produced the Apocalypse of John through an intensive investigation of the Cycle of the Seven Seals (Rev 6:1-8:5). This particular cycle was not selected on the basis of any quantitative analysis, but simply to demonstrate the hypothesis that in the community that produced the Apocalypse the matter of biblical authority was not at that time relegated to the 39 books which Protestants, at least, view as the OT, but rather the "bible" of the community included many of the works found in both the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha, particularly material from other apocalypses.

One of the major contrasts between apocalyptic and prophetic literature is that while the prophet speaks, the apocalypticist writes so that his message may be read in public (Rev 1:3). After the prophet spoke, his message was reduced to writing;¹ but the apocalypticist was primarily a writer, not a speaker—a seer, "a ponderer of what he has seen, *a student of what those before him have written.*" Apocalyptic literature was not prepared to be delivered orally before it was written; it is basically literature in nature. The apocalypticist had in hand documents to which he could refer with great ease. And it is precisely this which differentiates him from the prophet. There is little doubt, for instance, that Amos preached; but there is considerable question that the Seer preached his apocalypse. The literary characteristics must be understood as a key to the nature of apocalypticism, for it was primarily a literary rather than an oracular vehicle for conveying the author's message.

There were certain themes, strains which the apocalypticists employed, and which can be traced in varying degrees in their writings.² The readers of such material were conditioned through the years to the apocalyptic genre, which was "perhaps the best way to gain their ear."³ The apocalyptic literary phenomenon developed among the Jews in the circumstances surrounding the Seleucid attempts at Hellenization in the second century B.C., and it continued well into the first century A.D. Apocalypticism became a theological propagandistic literature with several distinctive theological themes. Christians who had been reared in Judaism were not unfamiliar with the apocalypses which had been written to meet the numerous historical exigencies in Jewish history. But the use of these documents did not stop

¹For a succinct presentation of the prophet's oral delivery, see W. G. Williams, *The Prophets - Pioneers to Christianity* (New York/Nashville: Abingdon, 1956) 46-47 "His message had to be couched in metrical form and chanted at the stated festivals of the Hebrew religion."

²C. A. Scott, *Revelation* (Century Bible; New York: Henry Froude, n.d.), 26, italics mine.

³Ibid. 32.

⁴N. Turner, *PCB* par. 913f.

when the Jews became Christians. The latter simply brought them into their new faith and shared them with their later gentile converts.

That Christians preserved a keen interest in this form of writing is further shown by the new Christian apocalypses which arose during the first and second centuries A. D. As a result of this situation John and his contemporaries were well prepared by custom and interest to recognize the value of a new Christian apocalypse for use in the hour of their special need.⁵

Thus it is not a question of employing non-canonical material over against canonical in apocalyptic writing; rather it is an assertion that both canonical and non-canonical apocalyptic materials were alluded to by the Seer of Patmos because both his mind and that of his readers were thoroughly saturated, impregnated with apocalyptic ideas, literature and symbolism.

Nor is it a coincidence that the Jewish apocalyptic writings dated from about 165 B. C. to about 120 A. D., for these years "embrace the period from the rise of Judas in opposition to the persecution of the Seleucids to the final subjugation of the nation to Rome."⁶ These writings were composed in periods of stress to encourage the readers to persevere in the faith even unto the end and to do good works. Early Christians thus found comfort in these works when they began to suffer persecutions at the hands of a powerful Rome. Compared to the Jews, they wrote few apocalypses, but they "eagerly read and adapted Jewish ones."⁷ In fact, it is the opinion of not a few scholars that because Christians used the Jewish apocalyptic works so zealously the Jews began to look askance on these writings and gradually forsook them. Only Daniel of all the Jewish apocalypses as a separate, identifiable work, made it into the Jewish canon. Rabbinical writings ignored apocalypticism, so that it reflects not Jewish orthodoxy but instead became a folk literature, or a phenomenon to be found among such sectarians as those at Qumran.

The apocalyptic writers employed older materials without necessarily referring to them. They would frequently edit or rework them

⁵S. J. Case, *The Revelation of John: A Historical Interpretation* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1919) 57-58.

⁶M. S. Enslin, *Christian Beginnings* (New York/London: Harper, ca. 1938) 351. Because it is very difficult to date some of the Jewish apocalypses, M. Kiddle (*The Revelation of St. John* [Moffatt New Testament Commentary; New York/London, ca. 1904] xxiii) suggested that some may be dependent on Rev, rather than the opposite.

⁷Turner, *PCB* par.913a.

⁸*Ibid.*; Enslin (*Christian Beginnings*, 351-352) suggested that none of these writings, with the exception of Daniel, would have been preserved had it not been "for Christian zeal."

to make them fit into their own rationale or time-table whenever the situation required it. A good example of this is in 2 Esdr 12:10-12 where the fourth beast of Daniel, which was Greece, becomes Rome. So if we reason that John derived some of his material not only from the OT, but also from non-canonical books, and especially apocalypses which were both current and well known in his generation, "it would be only what the comparative study of this literature would lead us to expect," as C. Anderson Scott has noted.⁹

What, then, was the bible of the early Church? With certainty we answer, "The OT." But such an answer needs qualification. The next query must be, "What version?" It is in answer to this question that we touch on the issue of authority. The Greek OT differed considerably from the Hebrew both in content and text. The normative version for the NT writers was the Greek in general, the LXX in particular. The LXX of Alexandria included the Apocrypha. This version, it must be remembered, was the bible of the Alexandria Jews before the Christians adopted it.¹⁰ Further, there were apparently varying degrees of inspiration in the Hebrew OT, for the Prophets were never placed on the same level as the Torah by all Jews.¹¹ The books that make up the Apocrypha did not form a separate section of the LXX. Goodspeed's insistence that the Apocrypha from the earliest Christian times down to the KJV belonged to the Bible and that "historically and culturally they are still an integral part of the Bible" must be seriously considered.¹² When the codex later developed, the various apocryphal documents were found scattered through it, not isolated. Thus when we attempt to differentiate between the OT and the Apoc-

⁹Scott, *Revelation* 33-34. This is in stark contrast with the general claim of Kiddle, but there is no question but that Scott is correct.

¹⁰R. H. Pfeiffer, "The Literature and Religion of the Apocrypha," *IB* 1. 393. Generally the Seer availed himself of the Alexandrian version of the OT. On the other hand, many of the references depart widely from the LXX in particular words, where the Seer has either rendered independently, or has used another version, or possibly a text of the LXX different from that which is found in our MSS; H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Indices* (3rd ed; New York: Macmillan, 1908; reprinted, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, n. d.), clv.

¹¹C. C. Torrey, *The Apocryphal Literature: A Brief Introduction* (New Haven: Yale University, 1945) 17. Even among the Jews of the first century A.D. the Sadducees accepted only the Pentateuch, whereas the more liberal Pharisees accepted the entire present Hebrew OT. The Council of Jamia, which in A. D. 90 finally settled the canon of the Jewish faith, was a meeting of Pharisees. It accepted those works which were written in Hebrew but omitted material in Greek. By placing the terminus ad quem for inspiration with Ezra, it also eliminated any possibility of late apocalyptic literature from gaining the status of canonization.

¹²C. T. Fritsch, "Apocrypha," *IDB* 1. 165, citing Goodspeed's preface to *The Complete Bible*.

rypha we are doing something which the early church at least did not do.¹³

An important factor which did lead the early church to place the Apocrypha on the same level with the canonical OT was the development of the codex in Christian circles. Whereas the Jewish custom was to use the scroll for religious books, Christians copied and deployed their works in codices. This placed the OT canonical documents under the same covers, side by side with Apocryphal materials. It was thus natural for the Christians to consider whatever was found in the codices as inspired scripture.¹⁴ Nowhere in the extensive literature of the early church are the books of what we term the "Apocrypha" referred to us as "apocryphal books"; as Oesterly pointed out, when the term "apocryphal" is applied to a document, it refers to one belonging to a sect, and is used in an opprobrious sense.¹⁵ There are numerous references to the Apocrypha in the NT since different books reflect much of the thought of the Apocrypha. This in itself is not evidence that the NT writers regarded the apocryphal books as canonical, "but the fact that the Septuagint was the Bible of the Church, and that most of the quotations from the Old Testament are from it, and not from the Hebrew, makes it certain these books were held to be Scripture by the New Testament writers."¹⁶

Since the earliest Christians came out of the Jewish community, it is difficult to explain how the Christians could have accepted the Apocrypha as an integral part of their Greek Bible if the Hellenistic Jews of the Mediterranean basin had not so done before them.¹⁷ Thus when they inherited the OT, the Christians found in the LXX which they used a number of works which were not in the Hebrew OT. Further, it must be remembered that the OT canon had not been closed until the Council of Jamnia in A. D. 90. By this time a good

¹³For a splendid bibliography on each of the Apocrypha books, see R. H. Pfeiffer, *History of New Testament Times with an Introduction to the New Testament* (New York/Evanston: Harper & Row, ca. 1949) 531-541.

¹⁴C. T. Fritsch, "Apocrypha," *IDB* 1. 163.

¹⁵W. O. E. Oesterly, *An Introduction to the Books of the Apocrypha* (London: SPCK, 1953) 125.

¹⁶*Ibid.* "In the earliest post-biblical Christian literature, some of the books are definitely quoted as Scripture; thus in the first Ep. of Clement 27:5, Wisd. 12:12 is quoted, being prefaced by the words: 'By the word of his majesty did he establish all things, and by his word can he destroy them: "Who shall say. . ."' In 55:3-6 Judith and Esther are described as 'women who received power through the grace of God. . .'. Once more, in the Epistle of Barnabas, the writer, in discussing an Ezekiel Passage (47:9) cites II Esdras 4:3; 5:5 with the words: 'Similarly, again, he described the Cross in another passage in another prophet.' In the same epistle, 6:7, Wisd. 2:12 is quoted as though part of Is. 3:9,10, an intermingling of texts which shows clearly that both books were regarded as of equal authority."

¹⁷Pfeiffer, "Lit. and Rel. of the Apocrypha" 1. 393; Torrey, *Apocryphal Literature* 18.

part of the NT had been written. It is very difficult—if not impossible—to assess the impact of Jamnia on the Christian Church, and particularly the community which produced Rev.¹⁸ There were thus a large number of works that were to become extracanonical by the standards of Jamnia, but which had been familiar to Jewish Christians from childhood. There was no reason, hence, in the early days of the church to proscribe the Apocrypha, and so the primitive Christians continued to read them for edification and even to cite them as holy writ.¹⁹ Nor were the Christians alone in this position. Flavius Josephus dipped deeply into the LXX as a source for the *Ant.* He freely drew upon 1 Macc, 1 Esdr, Add Esth (except A and F), considering them no less authentic and canonical than the Hebrew bible.²⁰

The Apocalypse of John alludes to three groups of Jewish religious literature—the (canonical) OT, the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigraphical writings. In Rev there are no formal quotations from either group; even the OT is not directly quoted. However there are numerous OT allusions. These are drawn from almost the entire range of the OT canon, particularly the Pss, Isa, Ezek and Dan; on the other hand there are no references to such works as Josh, Judg, Chr, Ezra, Neh, Esth, Eccl, Cant, Obad, Zeph or Nah. But as Metzger has urged, the absence of a direct quotation does not remove the work of a prophet from the canon.²¹ Even though direct quotations from the OT are lacking in Rev, the book contains many thoughts and ideas and even the language of the OT.²²

As noted above, there are numerous allusions to the Apocrypha in the Apocalypse, and C. Anderson Scott has urged that “it is . . . no infringement on our belief of the unity of the book, or of its apostolic authorship, if we are prepared to admit that there are in it some passages which the apostolic author quoted from earlier literature of the same class,²³ the “same class” being kindred apocalyptic literature. Certainly the Seer was well acquainted with the broad literature of apocalypticism, and used it, as well as the Apocryphal material, for instruction and example.²⁴ The fact is that the line that separates the non-canonical from OT material in Rev is not a sharp one. This is due in part because apocalypticism consists largely of expositions

¹⁸While the date for Rev is not uniformly agreed upon, this paper dates it about A. D. 95, during the last year or two of the reign of Domitian.

¹⁹Fritsch, “Apocrypha” 1. 163.

²⁰Pfeiffer, “Lit. and Rel. of the Apocrypha” 1. 393.

²¹B. M. Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University, ca. 1957) 171.

²²F. H. Woods, “Quotations,” *HDB* 4. 187; Fritsch, ‘Apocrypha’ 1. 163.

²³Scott, *Revelation* 60-61.

²⁴Fritsch, “Apocrypha” 1. 163.

and elaboration of OT material, particularly certain of the late prophets and Daniel.²⁵ The Seer shared with the Jewish apocalyptists the "stock of apocalyptic imagery and mystical and eschatological thought which was the common property of an age nurtured in the Old Testament and hard pressed by the troubles and dangers of the times."²⁶ He further expected his readers to be somewhat familiar with this apocalyptic store of imagery, concepts and teachings.²⁷ But the great storehouse of apocalyptic literature is garnered not in the Apocrypha but in the Pseudepigrapha. The importance of these materials has been cogently stated by C. T. Fritsch:

No one can understand the religious development of later Judaism or the background of the NT without studying the Jewish outside books. They serve as a bridge between the Old and New Testaments, supplementing much that is found in the Hebrew scriptures, and heralding new ideas which appear in the NT records.

He further noted that one of the pseudepigraphical works, *1 Enoch*, "has had more influence on the NT than has any other apocryphal or pseudepigraphical work."²⁸ In fact, it is the only pseudepigraphical book which is directly quoted in the NT (Jude 14). As to the Book of Rev, a reading of *1 Enoch* would make one "thoroughly familiar with the characteristic paraphernalia of apocalyptic . . . To read Enoch is to open up the whole field of apocalyptic imagery upon which the author of the New Testament apocalypse freely drew."²⁹ *1 Enoch* was a work which exerted a considerable influence on the Jews during the life of Jesus, and reflects a large number of religious concepts which were in the minds of men at that time, and which are not accounted for by the OT.³⁰ The popularity of the work is attested by the fact that ten fragments of it were found in Cave IV at Qumran

The citations of *1 Enoch* by the *T. 12 Patr.* and *Jub.* is evidence that at the close of the second century B. C., and into the first century B. C., the book was regarded in certain circles as inspired. The author of Jude apparently recognized it as scripture (notice the formula *epropheteusen . . . Henoch legon*); and in *Barn.* 16:5 a quotation from Enoch is introduced with the formula *legei gar he graphe*,

²⁵F. C. Porter, "Revelation, Book of," *HDB* 4. 255.

²⁶Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John* clviii.

²⁷"Before we speak of John as an editor, we must acknowledge that we do not know that he used sources, either written or oral, outside the Old Testament," is the guarded statement of Kiddle (*Revelation*, xxviii). One may add that we do not know that John used the OT, either.

²⁸C. T. Fritsch, "Pseudepigrapha," *IDB* 3. 962-963.

²⁹Case, *Revelation of John* 84-86.

³⁰Scott, *Revelation* 16.

indicating that apparently with certain Christian circles *1 Enoch* was viewed as holy writ as late as the second century. In his commentary on *1 Enoch* R. H. Charles pointed out that there are 22 references to Enoch in Rev, more than in any other NT book.³¹ The teachings of *1 Enoch* about angelology and demonology are readily apparent in Rev.

There is also a certain amount of literary relationship between Rev and 2 Esdr which may be not a literary dependence, but due to a common source or sources.³²

In the commentary which follows an attempt has been made to demonstrate the relationship between Rev and the extra-canonical materials. This relationship may be expressed through literary parallels, such as word usage or religious concepts; in some instances an OT theme has been elaborated upon through an apocalyptic manner; and there are a few instances in which OT references have been employed. The examples referred to have not been done in order to demonstrate sole dependence on the non-canonical material by the Seer, but simply to keep the under growth of OT passages cut away in order that one may better see the configuration of the extra-canonical trees. In the material to be covered (Rev 6:1-8:6) there are numerous passages in which there are no relationships which have been established between Rev and extra-canonical books; but there are passages wherein dependency can be well established.

6:1-8. *The four horsemen.* The symbolism is borrowed directly from Zech 6:108. Zechariah's four horsemen are the four winds of heaven (v 5), and their mission is to execute judgment upon Babylon, Egypt and other heathen nations. The Seer borrows only the symbol of the horses and their colors, however. Rather than yoking the horses to the chariots, he makes them cavalry units with riders. Here is one of the woes that is a secondary characteristic of apocalypticism.³³ The diverse lists of woes in apocalypticism were suggested by the plagues of Egypt, by various calamities which would usher in the Day of the Lord as predicted by some of the OT prophets and by apocalyptic accounts of woes that would precede the coming of the Messiah. Such lists of woes that are to precede the end of the age, and thus help bring it to pass, may be attributed to a common desire of apocalyptists to expand on the statement of Dan 12:1 that before the end comes "there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation."³⁴

6:3-4 *Civil strife.* References to civil strife as precluding the Parousia in Jewish literature may be found in *Jub.* 23:17; *1 Enoch* 56:7; 2 Esdr 5:9; 6:24; 13:31; 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 48:32; 70:3,6. "The expectation that civil strife

³¹R. H. Charles, "I Enoch," *APOT* 2. 180-181.

³²G. H. Box, "IV Ezra," *APOT* 2. 559.

³³M. Rist, "Apocalypticism," *IDB* 1. 160.

³⁴M. Rist, "Revelation," *IB* 12. 411.

would herald the end of the world is also found in Babylonian literature," according to Charles.³⁵

- 6:4. *A great sword.* The very words *edothē . . . machaira megale* are found in *1 Enoch* 90:19; "a great sword was given to the sheep and the sheep preceded against all the beasts of the field to slay them." The object for which the sword is given in *1 Enoch* is to enable the faithful Israelites to destroy their enemies, who are, of course, the enemies of God.³⁶
- 6:9-11 *The fifth seal.* The basic elements of the Fifth Seal are taken from *1 Enoch* 47:1-4 where the prayer and blood of the martyred saints "rise from the earth before the Lord of Spirits," while the angels rejoice that such blood has not been shed in vain. In 97:3-5 the prayer of the righteous for vengeance overtakes their persecutors on the day of judgment with woeful issues (99:3,16).
- 6:9 *The souls under the altar.* It is virtually impossible to grasp the significance of this vignette without an understanding of the contribution of inter-testamental literature. According to 4 Macc 6:29 the martyr's death was conceived to be a true sacrifice which also possessed an atoning power: *katharismōn auton poiesōn to emon haima antipsychon auton labe ten emen psychen*. Cf also 17:2,22. If the Jewish martyrs of the pre-Christian age were regarded as an atoning sacrifice, "it is more probable that the belief in the abode of righteous souls under the heavenly altar arose first in connection with the martyrs, and that this privilege was afterwards extended to the righteous generally," is Charles' observation.³⁷ Cf also *1 Enoch* 47:4. Though the martyr body was slain on earth the sacrifice in reality was made in heaven, where the soul was offered on the heavenly altar—a possible hint of Alexandrian Platonism. This idea is also expressed by Paul in Rom 12:1 where he exhorted his readers to offer themselves a living sacrifice.
- 6:10 *Lord.* The term here is not the commoner *kyrios* but *despotes*. The Seer uses the term as implying the divine might and majesty,³⁸ a reflection of 3 Macc 5:28. *Despotes* is used some 25 times in the LXX. In his *War* 7.418-419 Josephus related that the Jewish rebels endured torture and death rather than acknowledge the Roman emperor as *despotes*. Thus the term as employed here by the Seer is used by martyrs to acknowledge that God is the true sovereign.³⁹
- 6:10 *The Prayer of vengeance.* In apocalyptic thought suffering was viewed neither as corrective or retributive, stemming from God, but as malicious, vindictive, arbitrary, originating from Satan's attacks on God's elect.⁴⁰

³⁵R. H. Charles, *Revelation of St. John* (2 vols; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920) 1. 164.

³⁶Ibid. 1. 165.

³⁷Ibid. 1. 173n.

³⁸James Moffatt, "Revelation," *Expositor's Greek Testament* (5 vols.; Grand Rapids Wm. B. Eerdmans, n. d.) 5. 391.

³⁹J. M. Ford, *Revelation* (AB; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1975), 99. Domitian decreed that he would be acknowledged as god and lord, *deus et dominus*. The expression *kyrios ho theos* is found in Rev 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 18:8; 19:6; 21:22; 22:5,6. In 19:6 the expression *ebasileusen kyrios ho theos* may be used to contradict the apparent rule of Domitian. In Rev Jesus is never referred to as *theos ho kyrios*, although he is ascribed *basileus basileon kai kyrios kyriōn* (19:16).

⁴⁰J. Kallas, "The Apocalypse—An Apocalyptic Book?" *JBL* 86 (1967) 74.

There is a certain similarity between the thought of the passage here and Luke 18:7—"will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night?" But there are differences as well. In Rev it is the souls of the martyrs that is referred to, and the personal note of vengeance cannot be completely eliminated from their prayer. In Luke it is the living who pray that God would free them from unjust oppression and secure for them their rights. In Rev the departed pray for vengeance for what they have suffered and lost. Luke is prospective and breathes the spirit of justice, where Rev is retrospective as well as just.⁴¹ Sir 32:15-22 urges that God is just and listens to the prayer of the wronged, to the widow's supplication, etc. This is Lukan; but in *1 Enoch* 47:2,4 is found the true forerunner for Rev. In *1 Enoch* 22:5,7 the spirits of the righteous, who are in Sheol, and have suffered persecution or violent death, pray for vengeance. In 2 Esdr 4:35 the souls of the righteous in the chambers of Sheol cry, "How long are we to remain here? when cometh the fruit upon the threshing-floor of our reward?" Prayer for vengeance is taught as a continuous duty in *1 Enoch* 99:3; 104:3, the manifestation of a permanent attitude.⁴² Similar prayers, involving God's wrathful judgment on persecutors, are found in 2 *Apoc. Bar* 21:19-25. Now in Rev a similar plea is uttered by Christians against the Romans, imploring God to judge and avenge their blood upon their persecutors.

- 6:10 *Avenge our blood.* The thought here is very close to that "notorious passage," 2 Esdr 7:85-95, wherein the righteous delight to see the suffering of the wicked.⁴³ In Gen 4:10 the blood of Abel cried from the ground; cf. *1 Enoch* 22:5; 47:2.
- 6:11 *The White robe.* There is no white robe in the OT. This is strictly a figure from Jewish apocalypticism. Moffatt pointed out that the white robe assigned each of the martyr spirits as a pledge of the future and final glory was a consoling proof that no judgment awaited them, since the robe was a favorite gift in the Jewish heaven (*1 Enoch* 62:15-16; *Asc Isa* 9:24-25).⁴⁴ In intertestamental Judaism the white robe probably symbolized the glorified resurrected body (*1 Enoch* 108:12; 2 *Enoch* 22:8-10, where the garments of the blessed are composed of God's glory). It must be kept in mind that OT theology does not contain a doctrine of certain future life. Blessings come in this world, and long life was the symbol of blessings. But with persecution and martyrdom which developed in the Hellenistic period, death frequently came to the young. Where then was their reward to be? They will be clothed in white, resplendent garments in their resurrection. Only the *martyrs* shall experience this. This is a basic contribution of apocalyptic thought: reward comes only to those who die for their faith—"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord . . . that they may rest from their labor's and their works do follow them" (Rev 14:13).

⁴¹Charles, *Revelation* (ICG) 1. 175.

⁴²Ibid. 1. 176. "...the Acts of the martyrs relate many instances in which the sufferers met their judges with threatenings of the coming wrath, not always free from the spirit of vindictiveness. . .," Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John* 90.

⁴³Turner, "Revelation" par. 919c.

⁴⁴Moffatt, "Revelation" 5. 392. Cf. Scott, *Revelation* 183; Turner, "Revelation" par. 919d; Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John* 91.

6:11 *Until the number . . . be complete.* The germ for this concept is found in *1 Enoch* 47:4. A parallel thought is also found in *2 Esdr* 4:36,⁴⁵ and *2 Apoc. Bar.* 30:2, and there appears to be an echo of this in *Heb* 11:39,40. S. J. Case correctly observed, "It was a characteristic feature of Jewish apocalyptic thinking to assume that God had foreordained a certain number of martyrdoms which must be accomplished before he would intervene to bring an end to the present evil age."⁴⁶ *2 Esdr* 4:33-43 points out that everything is carried out in the divine ruling of the world according to a certain predestined number, time or measure. Predestination has a strong emphasis in apocalypticism, for it ties in with the basic idea of world history in that literature that there is no turning back, no repentance. Things will keep getting worse until God finally intervenes. That will come with the completion of the foreordained number of righteous martyrs. In *Rev* 7 that number is given, and the implication is that the wait will not be long.⁴⁷ Here is another instance wherein the Seer has borrowed heavily— if not exclusively— from Jewish apocalyptic thought, not from the OT. Yet he used this literary tradition as authoritatively as though it were scripture.

6:12-17 *Natural Convulsions.* In the opening of the Sixth Seal numerous natural convulsions are described. The portrayal of these calamities that await the wicked "exhibits the violent convulsions in nature which frequently recur in Jewish and early Christian descriptions of events to occur as the end of the present world draws near."⁴⁸ Apocalyptic material, both canonical (*Isa* 2:10,19,21; *Ezek* 32:7-8; *Joel* 2:10,30-32) and non-canonical (*2 Esdr* 6:14-16; *Sib. Or.* 3:80) attest these things. In most instances intertestamental apocalypticism is merely reworking OT themes. If there is any addition to OT material, it lies in the fact that in apocalypticism the world and its well being depend on the faithfulness with which the heavenly luminaries fulfill their functions. The unvarying order and loyalty with which they do this was a favorite theme of apocalyptists (*1 Enoch* 2:1, 41:5; 43:2; *T. Naph.* 3:2; *Pss. Sol.* 18:11-14; *2 Esdr* 6:45-46). Thus when the sun, moon and stars forsake this order, the end of the world is at hand (*1 Enoch* 80:5,6; *2 Esdr* 5:4,5; *Sib. Or.* 3:801-806). "The earthquake . . . , the darkening of sun by atmospheric disturbances . . . , reddening of the full moon as in a total eclipse . . . , the dropping of stars, the removal of the sky, and the displacement of mountain and island are all more or less stereotyped features of the physical situation in apocalyptic eschatology, where naturally agonies and distortions of the universe precede some divine punishment of men."⁴⁹

6:12 *Disorders in the heavenly bodies.* These appear to represent the decay of society. In *Sir* 12:2 such phenomena are symbols of old age and declining strength. *As. Mos.* 10:5 is probably the source, based on *Joel*

⁴⁵Moffatt, "Revelation" 5. 393. Swete (*Apocalypse of St. John* 92) acknowledges that there is a parallel between *Rev* 6:11 and *2 Esdr* 4:35, but attributes it to the fact that the writer of the latter work or his redactor borrowed from *Rev*. This position is quite typical of Swete, since he was very reluctant to concede that the Seer borrowed from other apocalypses.

⁴⁶Case, *Revelation of John* 266.

⁴⁷Rist, "Revelation" *IB* 12. 415.

⁴⁸Charles, *Revelation* (ICC) 1. 178.

⁴⁹Moffatt, "Revelation" 5. 393-394.

2:31, except that the former adds the idea that the *whole* moon shall be turned to blood.

- 6:15** *Cases of mankind.* For similar lists of social and economic classes of men, see Jub 23:19 and 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 70:3-6. The panic of kings and mighty men is taken from the description of the Judgment in 1 *Enoch* 42-43. There before the throne of the Messiah "the mighty and the kings" in despairing terror repent in vain: "and one portion of them will look on the other, and they will be terrified, and their countenance will fall, and pain will seize them" when they behold the Messiah. In 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 25:3 "a stupor shall seize the inhabitants of the earth"; in Wis 6:1-9 a similar stress falls on kings, judges, princes, etc. Here again is material quite foreign to the OT, and which can be understood only in terms of apocalyptic woes which must fall on men before the end of the world.
- 7:1-8** *An interlude.* One of the two interludes between the sixth and seventh seals. C. A. Scott commented that "the writer is here quoting from some Jewish apocalypse in which the Jewish anticipation of the final deliverance is described. . . ." ⁵⁰ There are similar literary intermissions in apocalypticism, before the building of the ark (1 *Enoch* 66:1,2; 67) and prior to the destruction of the temple (2 *Apoc. Bar.* 6:4-7:1).
- 7:1** *Four angels at the four corners.* Cf. 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 6:4. In Jewish thought, a wind blowing from between the four corners, i. e., from an angle, was considered a dangerous wind (1 *Enoch* 34:3; 76:1-14).
- 7:1** *Four winds.* 1 *Enoch* 76:1-4 refers to the 12 portals which open to the four quarters of the heavens whence proceed the winds. Four are winds of blessing, eight are hurtful winds. Vv 5-14 mention not only the four major directions, but also the intermediate points. From the east come drought, heat, destruction and cold; from the south come heat, locusts and desolation; from the north come locusts and destruction; and from the west come dew and hoar frost, cold and snow.
- 7:3** *Sealed the servants.* This passage is subject to numerous interpretations. In Ezek 9:4 the prophet is directed to put a mark (the Heb letter *tau*) upon the foreheads of those who sigh over the abominations that are committed in Jerusalem. The Passover event required the Israelites to touch the lintel and doorposts with blood in order to identify themselves when the angel of the Lord passed over Egypt to slay the firstborn (Ex 12:21-23). Thus that some kind of a mark used to identify the true Israel was not unknown to the Jews. Consequently the references herein cited from non-canonical material may be treated in two ways: to strengthen the concept of sealing, or to introduce new elements to the sealing-identification process. It is our opinion that the latter is meant. In 2 Esdr 2:38-41 the predetermined number of "confessors" had been sealed, "called from the beginning." Here the emphasis is not only on the act of sealing, but the fact that the number sealed was a predetermined number—from the beginning. Later in 2 Esdr (6:5) the

⁵⁰Scott, *Revelation* 189. Charles (*Revelation* [ICC] 1. 191-203) proposed that the subject matter in this section was derived from two Jewish sources: vv 1-3 relating to the winds, and 4-8 relating to the sealing of the 144,000.

faithful are described as being sealed before creation itself to ensure their bliss in the Messianic age.⁵¹ These two passages bespeak of a sealing before time itself began, quite in contrast to the historic events related in Ex and Ezek. In *Pss. Sol.* 15:8 the righteous receive a mark that they may be saved from the wrath which will consume sinners; and in v 10 the enemies shall be overtaken, for the mark of destruction is on their foreheads. Here a new dimension is added to sealing—the mark of the enemies of God. This passage in the *Pss. Sol.* indicates that before the crisis good and evil must be discriminated. The mark not only identifies the bearer as God's own, but there is also a mark that identifies the bearer as one marked for destruction. One further passage (3 Macc 2:29) should be noted. According to this verse the Alexandrian Jews were compelled by Ptolemy IV Philopater to have branded on them an ivy leaf, the sign of Dionysius. Here an act of reproach could become a symbol of God's grace.

7:4-8. *The listing of the tribes.* Two points should be considered here—the substitution of Joseph for Ephraim and the omission of Dan. Contrary to popular opinion, the various tribal lists in the OT do not agree (1) as to order or (2) the composition of tribes.⁵² Thus on first appearance, the omission of Dan should not elicit unusual concern. However, a close examination of intertestamental material will provide a rationale for Dan's exclusion, for such exclusion by the Seer reflected the growing disrepute into which Dan had fallen. In some lists (Josh 19:40-48; Judg 1:34) Dan stands last or is omitted. The exclusion of Dan in Rev from the tribal list may be due to the idolatry of Dan as recorded in Judg 18:30 and Kings 12:29-30 inasmuch as Rev is directed against idolatry.⁵³ But a more satisfactory solution lies in the literature of the apocalyptists. In *T. Dan* 5:6 Dan is connected with Beliar, as the source of the Antichrist, "the earliest authority which we have for the connexion of Dan and the Antichrist," according to Charles.⁵⁴

7:9 *Which no man could number.* This is in contrast to the preceding passage in which the number of the sealed was 144,000. Further, instead of coming from the 12 tribes, they come from every nation, from all tribes, peoples and tongues. In 2 Esdr 2:42 is found the expression "a great multitude, whom I could not number." The same idea of an innumerable multitude is found also in *1 Enoch* 39:6-7, where the righteous and the elect shall be for ever and ever without number before the Messiah, in mansions of bliss, and in 40:1 Enoch saw "thousands of thousands and ten thousand times ten thousands—a multitude beyond number and reckoning, who stood before the Lord of Spirits." There is no contradiction between this verse in Rev and the preceding passage; rather the Seer is simply interweaving two different sets of Jewish apocalyptic ideas to express the concept of the innumerable numbers of the redeemed—the martyred ones.

7:9 *Palm branches.* Palm branches were regarded as appropriate at any season

⁵¹Rist, "Revelation" *IB* 12. 418.

⁵²For a table showing the various orders of the twelve tribes, see W. H. Bennett, "Tribe," *HDB* 4. 810-813. No two lists correspond in order.

⁵³Ford, *Revelation* (AB) 118.

⁵⁴Charles, "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," *APOT* 2. 334.

of joy or triumph. 1 Mcc 13:51 records the incident when Simon cleansed the temple in 142 B. C. When he entered the temple people carried palm branches and musical instruments "because a great enemy had been destroyed out of Israel." In 2 Macc 10:7 when the temple had been purified, palm branches were also used in the joyous festivities. The Jews may have picked up this custom from the Romans, for the carrying of palm branches was a sign of festal among the Greeks and Romans, not unlike victory at games (Livy 10:47; Virg. *Aen* 5.109).⁵⁵

8:2 *The seven angels.* As the definite article indicates, "the seven angels who stand (perfect tense) before God" were familiar figures. These seven angels of Jewish tradition were Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Raguel, Saraqael and Remiel, known as the "Angels of the Presence," closely connected to God, as the -el suffix in their names implies (Tob 12:15; the list of the seven angels together with their functions is found in 1 *Enoch* 20:1-8). "Angels of the Presence" are mentioned repeatedly in *Jub* (1:27,29; 2:1, 18; 15:27; 31:14). The title comes from Isa 63:9 where the number is singular. The apocalyptic use of seven became prominent in the intertestamental period.

8:2 *Seven trumpets.* Trumpets are assigned to angels in 2 Esdr 6:23 and *Apoc. Moses* 22:1. This concept is picked up in the NT in Mt 24:31; 1 Cor 15:52; Thess 4:16⁵⁶ and is elaborated on in Rev 8:7-11:19, where the seven angels blow their seven trumpets.

From the above comments, it is obvious that the Seer was steeped in the apocalyptic tradition. In fact, there was a time when some scholars understood Rev as a Jewish apocalyptic work with Christian additions. This is no longer the case; but that it is apocalyptic is denied by few. The historical matrix which produced the work was not unlike that which brought forth the Jewish apocalypses. Further, apocalyptic imagery is found in almost every line. When one compares the literary merit of the Rev of John with other apocalypses which came from Christian pens—such as the *Apoc. Pet.*—, it is *not* difficult to ascertain why the Church settled on John's rather than some other in the canon, if indeed it were necessary to have an apocalypse in the canon! Both theologically and literarily it is a superior apocalypse.

That the Seer drew upon non-canonical Jewish material is without question. The problem that this raises is what value did he place on the numerous apocryphal and pseudepigraphical apocalypses he referred to. N. Turner anticipated this question when he wrote, "The

⁵⁵Moffatt, "Revelation" 5. 398. Deismann (*Bible Studies* 358-359) suggested that the imagery is drawn from the religious processions around Ephesus, in which those who took part walked clothed in white and crowned with a bough and holding a bough in their hands, Scott, *Revelation* 194.

⁵⁶This is not to imply that the *Apoc. Moses* is older than the NT documents which are cited. For problems concerning the date of the *Apoc. Moses*, see L. S. A. Wells, "The Books of Adam and Eve," *APOT* 2. 126-127.

present tendency among writers on 'Rev. is to leave source-criticism alone and seek for the author's meaning by taking the book as we have it. This is a pity, because to know where the man drew his material might help us to know the man."⁵⁷ And to know the man and his place in the early church might give us insight into the concept of what his area of the church considered scripture.

The references to non-canonical material which has been examined in the Cycle of the Seven Seals leads us to the conclusion that the Seer placed great emphasis not only on the OT, as well as certain NT documents which were in circulation at the time he wrote, but that he also drew deeply from the unique well of Jewish apocalypticism. There are at least three categories into which the references to non-canonical literature may be divided: doctrinal, supportive and interpretative. The passages which deal with doctrines are those which have no frame of reference in the OT canon. Yet these doctrines play a prominent role in the theology of the Apocalypse. As the other two categories, only those doctrines which are touched upon in the Cycle of the Seven Seals will be mentioned. In the Cycle there are at least five important teachings that are derived solely from non-canonical material: the intercession of martyrs (6:9-11), prayer for vengeance (6:10), the predestined number of the elect (6:11), the innumerable multitude of the elect (7:9) and the seven angels (8:2). These are not theological fads; rather they are at the heart of apocalyptic faith and tradition. If it be argued that there is no *gegrapti* before any of these doctrines, let it also be noted that there is no *gegrapti* before any allusions to the OT, either.

The second category of non-canonical literature is supportive. By this is meant that apocalyptic and apocryphal materials are used to develop themes which are alluded to in the OT, but which are strengthened greatly in the apocalyptic manner. In the Cycle of the Seven Seals there are at least three supportive concepts which can be found: natural convulsions as a sign of end-time (6:12-17), the sealing of the saints (7:3) and the listing of the tribes of Israel (7:4-8). These are not peculiar to the Seer, but they certainly are given tremendous buttressing by him as he developed them into major emphases.

Finally, there are certain practices which are understood only through the interpretation of non-canonical apocalyptic literature. These are not doctrinal, but rather give insight into customs which the early church made of them certainly finds their origin here. Two paper to trace their usage in the early church, but the usage which

⁵⁷Turner, "Revelation" par. 913d.

the early church made of them certainly finds their origin here. Two in particular stand out: the white robe (6:11; 7:14) which is given to the martyr-saints and the practice of using palm-branches for a triumph (7:9).⁵⁸ The Seer did not hesitate to lift these practices out of non-canonical literature and utilize them as though they had the sanction of scripture.

In light of these things, it may be concluded that at least the community which the Seer represented had a different attitude toward scriptural authority than did, for example, Paul or the author of Matthew. R. H. Charles, for instance, put forth the suggestion that the Seer came from Galilee because the writers of apocalypses lived there, not in Judea, and apocalyptic literature was usually read where the Law had least authority.⁵⁹ Such a contention could also be supported by the Seer's poor Greek and his multitudinous Hebraisms. We must bear in mind that one of the important steps in the canonization process was popular acceptance of the document in question. Jewish apocalypticism retained its popularity because of its implicit doctrine of hope which resides in turn only through God's intervention. This was a theme which the church most certainly picked early and quickly as persecutions set in. The Jewish canon was not closed until A. D. 90 at the Council of Jamnia. The Rev of John was probably written not more than five or six years after that event. But whereas the Jewish canon was based on the Hebrew books, the early Christians employed the LXX, a fact which cannot be too emphasized. Thus when we speak of canonical authority, we must ask, "What canon?" To one man, at least, authority reposed in material with which both he and his readers were well acquainted; and he put his writing together, he had a literary masterpiece in which strands

⁵⁸In the Synoptic accounts of the Palm Sunday incident, there is no specific mention of palm branches. Only John (12:13) refers to them. Note also the parallel between John 12:12-13 and Rev 7:9-10:

John

The next day a great crowd who had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.

So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying

Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel.

Rev

I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes,

with palm branches in their hands,

and crying out with a loud voice, Salvation belongs to our God who sits

upon the throne, and to the Lamb.

⁵⁹Charles, *Revelation* (ICC) 1. xxxviii.

had been taken from the Hebrew scriptures, Greek apocryphal books, and a host of apocalyptic pseudepigraphical material. His ground for authority was not so much whether God had spoken, but how the people responded.

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