

APOCALYPSE OF JOHN

Isbn T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House,1979),

The Times of the Apocalypse of John

What were the conditions in the Roman Empire and especially in the Roman provinces of Asia, where the Apocalypse originated. According to the earliest external testimony the Apocalypse of John was written in the last part of the first century. There were in this period two great movements which touched most closely the future destiny of Christianity, and which as the writer of the Apocalypse shows, called forth the book and largely shaped its content. These were 1) the erection of the emperor-worship into the state religion of the Roman Empire; and 2) the persecution of the Christians. ¹

THE PURPOSE OF APOCALYPSE

The Apocalypse was written with the practical purpose of meeting a need of the particular readers addressed, in their existing condition and in the circumstances of their own time or of the time supposedly about to come. At the first century, to whose closing years the Apocalypse belongs, advanced through the later decades the antagonism of the world to the Church assumed a more and more distinct form. Christianity, now spreading widely and growing in power, was by its very nature hostile to the social, moral and religious life of the time; ²it was making to itself bitter enemies in every rank of society, Jew and Gentile were uniting against it; and finally it ranged among the forces opposing it the power of the imperial government. The general establishment of emperor-worship as a political and religious institution of the empire brought the Christian fact to face with the question of his loyalty to his lord Caesar and his Lord Christ. The Roman government, which held sway virtually over all the world, was adopting a policy, more or less settled and regular, of suppressing Christianity; Persecution, begun under Nero, was revived and society at large was quick to avail itself of this aid in its warfare. The leaders among the Christians could see clearly that the Church was entering upon a life-and-death struggle, a time of storm and stress, of great suffering. To meet this crisis Christians would be called to the supreme test of their faith, steadfastness and self-surrender. Of this they must be forewarned. Church needed also in the hour of awful trial coming upon it an assurance of its final deliverance and of the glorious reward which should be meted out to the faithful in the end. These

¹ Isbn T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House,1979), 197.

² Beckwith. *The Apocalypse of John*. 208.

urgent needs of the Church, were clearly perceived by a great Christian prophet, and he saw himself commissioned by God to bring to the Church his wonderful message – a message designed on the one hand to forewarn the Church of its peril and arouse it to the purified, vigorous life; on the other, to fortify its courage and hope by revealing the ultimate destruction of the powers of evil, and the perfect consummation of the Christian hope in the establishment of the kingdom of God. Such were the circumstances calling for voice of the prophet, and such the purpose of his book.³

It is a book for the years forming the close of the first century and the beginning of the second, and is addressed to the precise needs and hopes and fears of that age. It was read in the congregations of those Asiatic churches, and from them spread to other parts of the Church, it added mightily to the forces which nerved Christians to stand firm in their great trial.⁴

³ Beckwith. *The Apocalypse of John*. 209.

⁴ Beckwith. *The Apocalypse of John*. 213.