Chapter Five

Synthesis and Conclusions

5.1   Review of Stated Aims

This study has evaluated the following problem in John's Apocalypse: How will the establishment of God's eschatological rule determine the fate of earth's peoples outside the Christian communities? Will the nations persist in rebellion against God, or does John envision a comprehensive moment of repentance and conversion? What can we learn about the narrative tension between the author's universal language in scenes of eschatological worship and his global descriptions of judgment? Our findings suggest that, evaluated from both a literary-narrative and tradition-historical perspective, this tension in Revelation is less real than apparent.

The contention of this study (Chapter 1) has been that our difficulty with this issue stems, in part, from a lack of comparable literary data. Revelation's creative differences from other NT literature imply great literary isolation and theological disparity. This impression, however, misses the mark considerably; in fact, there is much evidence of a vibrant literary and religious environment in which apocalyptic visions of the future age were commonplace. A world exists within which the images and symbols of John's visions – and indeed the logical and narrative tensions they sometimes create – find their place in a considerable company of literary 'conversation partners'. The initial history of interpretation (above, 1.4) suggested that commentators' efforts to address this issue in Revelation have not yet sufficiently taken the matrix of Jewish apocalyptic literature from the 2TP into consideration.

Therefore, the narrative tension described in John's Apocalypse has been evaluated along three related lines of inquiry: First, in Chapter 2, several early Jewish documents that contain eschatological visions with universal language were analysed. These texts were read within their

immediate literary context; further, their function within the 'narrative trajectory' of that given document was also evaluated (literary-sequential criticism). Second, observations were made regarding how a given author employed and creatively appropriated biblical traditions in order to advance his own theological concerns and communicative strategy through these visions (history of traditions). Third, the analysis of Revelation in Chapters 3 and 4 produced evidence that John participated in wider interpretive patterns found in early Jewish literature. Common use of literary-narrative conventions (i.e. language of vindication, intentional narrative progression, contextual qualifying markers, 'stock' idioms and epithets) characterizes his appropriation of biblical traditions vis-à-vis the fate of the nations. Consequently, these observable traits necessarily qualify and restrict eschatological visions with universal language.

5.2　　Observations on Early Jewish Literature

Chapter 2 evaluated a sampling of Jewish apocalyptic documents, wherein the authors sought to rationalize present crises in terms of God's definitive action in the future. In cases such as the *Similitudes* and 4 Ezra, the questions surrounding God's future activity emphasize its effect for the faithful (with humanity at large in the background). Conversely, in the final chapters of Tobit, and the *Animal Apocalypse*, God's consummation of all things is more focused on creation and humanity as a whole.

　　Each of these documents demonstrates to a greater or lesser degree, the following interpretive strategies and patterns in their portrayal of the future age (and specifically, the fate of earth's peoples). (1) *Vindication*: A key feature of biblical traditions with universal language retained by the apocalypticists, was Gentile participation in the future age as a form of vindication. This vindication was depicted variously: as positive (though qualified) response to God (4 Ezra 6.25-28; *1 En*. 50; 90.30, 33); in scenes of God's judgment over the nations (4 Ezra 13.5-11; *1 En*. 48.4-5, 8-10; 62-63; 90.18-19); in descriptions of the restoration of Israel and Jerusalem (Tob 13.11-17; 4 Ezra 10.27, 39-56; *1 En*. 90.28-29, 33); and, through Gentile acknowledgment of the supremacy of Israel's faith (*1 En*. 62-63; 90.30; Tob 14.5-6). (2) *Narrative Development*: In each early Jewish document considered, some form of narrative movement was discernible *particularly* regarding the final fate of the nations. In

Tobit, we found remarkable development from nationalistic to universal categories in the main character's outlook. The *Similitudes* demonstrates dramatic change in the attitude of the earth's powerful people toward Israel's God (*1 En.* 62.6, 9; 63.1-4) – yet without future hope (*1 En.* 62.4-5, 10-11; 63.6-9). Most striking is the gradated narrative movement in the *Animal Apocalypse* from judgment and condemnation of the nations to unqualified acceptance and participation in the future age (*1 En.* 90.16-19, 30, 33, 37-38). However, the opposite is true in 4 Ezra where transformation in the main character (4 Ezra 9-10) results in a narrower, more negative view of the fate of the nations. (3) *Literary Qualifiers*: We have seen how these documents crafted visions of universal participation in the future age with literary signals and theologically delimiting language. This was most apparent where the language of 'mercy' left a degree of uncertainty (Tob 13; *1 En.* 50), or where the universal terms of a dream were significantly narrowed in its corresponding interpretation (4 Ezra 11-12; 13). (4) *Use of 'Stock' Idioms and Epithets*: Common use of designations such as 'the inhabitants of the earth', and 'the kings of the earth', suggests that these authors viewed humanity as predominantly antagonistic toward God and the faithful communities.

5.3   Observations on the Book of Revelation

Chapter 4 underscored instances where Revelation shares the literary-narrative conventions of apocalyptic thought outlined above. To these we may add the following ways John was seen to qualify universal language. (1) *Specific Narrative Structures*: The juxtaposition of the two 'city visions' (Babylon, 17.1-19.10; New Jerusalem, 21.9-22.5) illustrates the determinative influence of a larger narrative structure upon internal sub-structures, symbols and idiomatic images. Further, the reappearance of symbols from messages to the churches in the New Jerusalem visions suggests important narrative connections. This is also true of exhortations to 'insiders' which appear throughout Revelation – including eschatological visions. (2) *Favoured HB Traditions*: While this study has demonstrated John's wide-ranging use of traditions, it is also clear that certain biblical texts (notably Psalm 2; Isaiah 60) dominated his interpretive agenda with regard to the particular problem analysed in this study. These traditions not only provided linguistic material for his visions but also influenced his perspective of those outside the

community of faith – not unlike their influence on other early Jewish apocalypticists. (3) *Universal Constitution of the People of God*: John differs from his early Jewish counterparts through his principled view of how the people of God are constituted – *"from every tribe, tongue, people and nation"* (5.9; 7.9). We have seen that this view does *not* predetermine John's use of biblical traditions elsewhere in Revelation. Nevertheless, it provides an additional element to the conceptual framework within which universal language functioned. (4) *Christological Identity*: Our examination of two critical texts (1.5; 21.24-26) reveals that key Davidic / Solomonic traditions (Psalm 89; 1 Kings 5.14) inform John's vision of the exalted Christ. These biblical traditions contribute universal language and designations for earth's peoples that appear in visions depicting God's eschatological rulership.

The features of John's eschatological expectation regarding the fate of the nations are consistent with patterns of interpretation found in early Jewish literature. However, far from relegating these universal traditions in Revelation to the obscurity of awkwardly misplaced sources, or simply assuming that 'tension' is inherent in apocalyptic thought, the evidence is strong that an intentional, interpretive agenda is at work in John's Apocalypse. This is the contention of several commentators, especially literary-narrative critics; where this study diverges from them, however, is to propose intentional reasons for this convention. Here it is argued that universal language does not necessarily presuppose universal salvation; rather, it serves to vindicate the faithful community, and validate their present circumstances in light of a future reversal.

5.4   Outlook and Prospects for Further Research

This study evaluated potential parallels between Revelation and early Jewish apocalyptic literature. Much can yet be done to explore these literary and interpretive relationships. From this study, several areas of further inquiry emerge. First, the limits of this study dictate that several relevant Jewish documents have not been taken into account.[1] Second,

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1   This is particularly so of *2 Baruch* and the *Sybilline Oracles*. *2 Baruch*, while exhibiting strong similarities to 4 Ezra, nevertheless presents a unique perspective and deserves detailed analysis. In this regard see Frederick James Murphy, *The Structure and Meaning of 2 Baruch* (SBLDS 78; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 136-142, who contrasts the view of enemies in *2 Bar.* with that of 4 Ezra. His analysis also suggests narrative development in the form of transformation of Baruch. The *Sibylline Oracles*, while

how subsequent Christian apocalypses and Jewish writings developed the interpretive strategies described in this study is an important next step. Is there evidence that the fate of the nations (or opponents) was conceived in more, or less, universal terms? What influence might Revelation have had on such interpretive tendencies? Finally, the narrative tension in Revelation described above creates a pastoral dynamic worthy of analysis (i.e. the issue of motivation of the faithful). What are John's specific pastoral strategies and how might they inform further study on this issue? The problem at hand remains as stimulating for faith communities today as it was for John and his churches in Asia Minor.

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presenting textual difficulty, reflect similarities to Revelation in their communicative strategy and appropriation of biblical traditions (esp. Ps 2). See John Collins, *Seers, Sybils and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).