

great persecuting empire of Rome, the incarnation not only of human malice but of Satanic enmity. In the signs of the times, John sees so many precursors of the coming of the Lord, milestones on the way to the great consummation, and he depicts grievous judgments upon the world designed to lead men to repentance.

In the *epistles to the seven churches* (chapters ii. and iii.) and in other references throughout the book, we find the concrete historical situation to which the book belongs. It may be that the number seven is the number of perfection, and that the churches named and addressed are taken to represent the universal church. Nevertheless definite historical churches are named and a historical situation is described. On the whole, the churches are faithful and prosperous, earnest and patient in all good work. But there are rebukes for declension, for heresy, or for lukewarmness. The most striking feature in the situation is the prevalence or imminence of persecution, in some cases Jewish, but usually general, and in some passages unmistakably Roman. The later chapters are crimsoned with the martyr blood of the days of Nero, when the brute force of the empire flung itself with crushing weight and yet in vain upon the Christian Church.

In chapter vi., vs. 9-11, we hear the cry of the souls underneath the altar, "the souls of them that had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held: and they cried with a great voice, saying, How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth. And there was given them to each one a white robe; and