

A DEFENSE OF THE DOMITIANIC DATE
OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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ABSTRACT

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Two main dates for Revelation are commonly held: the early or Neronic date (A.D. 64–68) and the late or Domitianic date (A.D. 95–96). This dissertation is a defense of the A.D. 95 date for the composition of Revelation. The dissertation interacts extensively with Kenneth Gentry's work *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation*, since this work is the primary defense of the Neronic date. Gentry dates Revelation in A.D. 65–66.

The introduction establishes the need, importance, purpose, method, and assumptions for the dissertation. The dissertation is needed primarily because of the rise of preterist interpretation, which requires a Neronic date for Revelation.

The main body of the dissertation examines the pertinent external and internal evidence for the date of Revelation. Chapter two focuses on the testimony of Hegesippus and Irenaeus, the two earliest witnesses for the date of Revelation. The dissertation finds that the testimony of Hegesippus and Irenaeus supports the Domitianic date. Chapter three presents the relevant, external evidence from twenty additional ancient witnesses from the early third century to the twelfth century. A brief historical overview of the dating of the Apocalypse in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is also included in chapter three. The dissertation concludes that, when examined in its entirety, the external evidence points strongly in the direction of the traditional A.D. 95 date.

In chapter four the nine main internal arguments for the Neronian date are presented and critiqued. The dissertation concludes that the internal arguments for the Neronian date are unconvincing both individually and collectively. Chapter five presents and defends the internal evidence for the Domitianic date. Three commonly used late-date arguments are rejected, while five internal arguments for the late date are presented and defended. The dissertation concludes that the external and internal evidence support the Domitianic date of Revelation by a preponderance of the evidence.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AUSS</i>	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
<i>BDAG</i>	Bauer, Walter. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , revised and edited by Frederick William Danker, 3d ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BAR</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
<i>BR</i>	<i>Biblical Review</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>
<i>GTJ</i>	<i>Grace Theological Journal</i>
<i>HeyJ</i>	<i>Heythrop Journal</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, seu bibliotheca universalis omnium Ss. Patrum, Doctorum, Scriptorumque Ecclesiasticorum, series graeca</i> . Edited by J. P. Migne. 161 vols. Paris: S. Barnaba ad Photium, 1857–1866.
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina</i> . Edited by J. P. Migne. 221 vols. Paris: Petit-Montrouge, 1844–1864.
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As the final book in the biblical canon and a book filled with vivid images and symbols, Revelation is a book of mystery and majesty. From its beginning, the Apocalypse, perhaps more than any other New Testament book, enjoyed wide distribution and early acknowledgment and recognition.¹ The immediate gravitation toward the Apocalypse can be observed in part by the attention it received from scholars. Numerous commentaries on the Apocalypse were written in the early church and throughout the early and later Middle Ages by scholars from various backgrounds and widespread geographical locations: Melito of Sardis, Hippolytus, Oecumenius, Victorinus, Primasius, Tyconius, Andreas, Arethas, Venerable Bede, Alcuin, and Anselm of Laon.²

With the advent of the twenty-first century interest in the Apocalypse and biblical eschatology shows no signs of waning. To the contrary, world events in the last sixty years have caused a powerful resurgence in interest in end-times prophecy and thus in the Book of Revelation. One indication of this revival in interest, especially among

¹ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 21.

² Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary, ed. Jonathan F. Grothe (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing Company, 1999), 27–28.

biblical scholars, is the release of several substantial commentaries on Revelation just since 1997.³

Many intriguing questions surround the background and interpretation of the Apocalypse. One issue that has drawn renewed interest and investigation is its date of composition. The issue of the date of Revelation is a critical factor in establishing the historical *Sitz im Leben*.⁴ The date of Revelation can dramatically affect one's view of the audience, purpose, and message of the book. Although the date of Revelation has always been an issue in the study of New Testament introduction, the discussion has been reopened in recent years primarily by preterist interpreters who assign a Neronian date to Revelation.

Need for the Study

Two main dates for the composition of Revelation are held by scholars today.⁵ The first date is the Neronian date (A.D. 64–68). While those who hold this view are by no

³ David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Ralph P. Martin, vol. 52 (Dallas: Word Books, 1997); idem, *Revelation 6–16*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Ralph P. Martin, vol. 52B (Dallas: Word Books, 1998); idem, *Revelation 17–22*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Ralph P. Martin, vol. 52C (Dallas: Word Books, 1998); G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999); Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002); Simon J. Kistemaker, *Revelation*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001); Steve Gregg, ed., *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997); Ben Witherington III, *Revelation*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary, ed. Ben Witherington III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Brighton, *Revelation*.

⁴ Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, Biblical Resource Series, ed. Astrid B. Beck and David Noel Freedman (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1986; reprint, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 3.

⁵ There are four main dates for Revelation that have been held throughout church history, and each of these dates is tied to an early Roman emperor: (1) Claudius (A.D. 41–54), (2) Nero (54–68), (3) Domitian (81–96), and (4) Trajan (98–117). See D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2005), 707–8. A fifth view, held by many modern scholars, dates Revelation in the years immediately following Nero, about A.D. 69. See Mark Wilson, “The Early Christians in Ephesus and the Date of Revelation, Again,” *Neot* 39 (2005): 164. A sixth view of the date of Revelation is actually a combination of the two main views. David Aune holds that the first edition of Revelation was composed during the reign of Nero while the final edition was

means monolithic in their view of Revelation, the Neronic date is most strongly championed, and the Domitianic date is most vehemently criticized, by contemporary preterists who view Revelation primarily as a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70 and the forty-two months leading up to that destruction. Preterists most commonly adopt a date for Revelation of A.D. 65–66.⁶

Contemporary preterists have painted themselves in a very narrow corner for dating the book of Revelation. According to Kenneth Gentry, Revelation anticipates the destruction of Jerusalem (August, A.D. 70), the death of Nero (June, A.D. 68), and the formal imperial engagement of the Jewish War (spring, A.D. 67). He also maintains that the book was written after the initial outbreak of the tribulation, which he believes began with the Neronic persecution in November, A.D. 64. Therefore, for Gentry and other preterists the *terminus a quo* for Revelation is the beginning of the Neronic persecution in November, A.D. 64, and the *terminus ad quem* is spring, A.D. 67.⁷ If

completed toward the end of the reign of Domitian, or more likely, during the early part of the reign of Trajan (*Revelation 1-5*, lviii).

⁶ Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Atlanta: American Vision, 1998), 256, 336. The term preterism comes from a Latin word (*praeter*) that means “past.” R. C. Sproul provides this definition of preterism. “An eschatological viewpoint that places many or all eschatological events in the past, especially during the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.” See R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 228. There are three categories of preterism. The first is a literary-critical or contemporary historical wing of preterism that holds that events in John’s time can be identified in the symbols he employs. This branch of preterism is often called the “left wing” or preterism and is outside the scope of evangelicalism. See Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views*, 37. The second form of preterism, known as partial, orthodox, or moderate preterism, is the most popular form today. Partial preterists believe that most of the prophecies in the New Testament were fulfilled in the first century, but believe that there are some prophesied events that still lie in the future, such as a literal Second Coming of Christ to the earth, the resurrection, and future judgment. See Sproul, *Last Days*, 24, 228. The third type of preterism is most often called consistent, radical, or full preterism. Full preterists “assign all these events to the first century” (*ibid.*, 228). For a thorough presentation of full preterism see J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: The New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord’s Second Coming*, new ed. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999). The one common thread in every form of preterism is that the kingdom of God has already arrived and that “in a real historical sense the parousia has already occurred.” See Sproul, *Last Days*, 24. For preterists, Christ came in A.D. 70 in a “cloud coming” to bring destruction on the nation of Israel.

⁷ Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *The Beast of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2002), 106, 245.

Revelation is a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem in August, A.D. 70 and the forty-two month Tribulation that preceded it, then it had to be written by spring A.D. 67 at the very latest. The preterist interpretation, therefore, is dependent on a pre-spring A.D. 67 date for the composition, not just a pre-70 date, as is often implied.

The other main view, which has been the dominant view throughout church history, is the Domitianic date (A.D. 95–96). Throughout the dissertation, the A.D. 64–68 date for Revelation will be variously referred to as the early or Neronic date, while the A.D. 95–96 date will be termed the late or Domitianic date.

The preterist interpretation of Revelation has enjoyed a considerable rise in popularity in the last twenty years. Much of this surge can be attributed to the writing and teaching of Kenneth Gentry,⁸ Gary DeMar,⁹ R. C. Sproul,¹⁰ and most recently, Hank Hanegraaff, host of *The Bible Answer Man* radio broadcast.¹¹ Preterist websites and conferences have further fueled the spread of this system of eschatological interpretation. With the surge of preterism in the last twenty years, the date of Revelation has become a key issue in the study of Revelation in particular and biblical eschatology in general.

Gentry, a partial preterist, in his doctoral dissertation at Whitefield Theological Seminary in Lakeland, Florida, defended the Neronic date of Revelation. This work was subsequently published in 1989 under the title *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation*. A revised edition under the same title was released in 1998 by American Vision. Gentry's work has quickly become the standard for

⁸ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*.

⁹ Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: The Folly of Trying to Predict When Christ Will Return* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991); idem, *End Times Fiction* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001).

¹⁰ Sproul, *Last Days*.

¹¹ Hank Hanegraaff and Sigmund Brouwer, *The Last Disciple* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004); idem, *The Last Sacrifice* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005). These are fiction works, but they were written to teach and popularize the notion that Revelation was written in the mid-60s A.D. and that Nero was the beast of Rev 13.

proponents of the early date, especially for preterists. There have been numerous responses to parts of Gentry's work but nothing that deals with the full range of issues he raises.¹² With the rise of preterist interpretation of Revelation, and Gentry's presentation of the evidence for the Neronian date, a defense of the Domitianic date of Revelation is needed.

In the publisher's preface to the first edition of Gentry's book *The Beast of Revelation*, which also deals extensively with the date of Revelation, preterist Gary North issued this statement.

Establishing the date of John's Apocalypse and the events that followed within the few months of this revelation is what *The Beast of Revelation* is all about, as is Dr. Gentry's larger and far more detailed study, *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). If this thesis is correct, then the 'last days' are not ahead of us; they are behind us. And if the 'last days' are behind us, then all 'futurism'—dispensationalism, most contemporary non-dispensational premillennialism, and the more popular forms of amillennialism—is dead wrong. . . . If futurists prove incapable of refuting it and its larger companion volume, they have surrendered their intellectual position.

It is my opinion that they will be incapable of refuting Gentry's evidence. It is my opinion that dispensationalists will not even try; they will instead adopt the traditional academic strategy that dispensational seminary professors have used for over half a century to deal with any book that challenges their system: 'Let's keep quiet and pray that nobody in our camp finds out about this, especially our brighter students.'¹³

This dissertation is proof that North was wrong in his prediction and will demonstrate the weakness of his view of the date of Revelation as well.

Importance of the Study

The linchpin of the preterist view is the early date for the Book of Revelation.

Preterists hold that the Book of Revelation is primarily a prophecy of the Roman

¹² H. Wayne House and Thomas Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1988), 249–83. Robert L. Thomas, "Theonomy and the Dating of Revelation," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 5 (1994): 185–202.

¹³ Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *The Beast of Revelation* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), xi–xii.

persecution of Christians under Nero from late A.D. 64 to June A.D. 68 and the Roman campaign against the Jews in Israel that commenced in A.D. 67 and culminated with the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. If Revelation is a prediction of the future, as it claims to be (1:1, 3, 11, 19; 22:6–10, 16, 18–20), and if it was fulfilled by August A.D. 70, then it had to be written by A.D. 65 or 66 even to be a possibility. Preterists openly recognize the critical importance of the early date of Revelation to their position.

In a review of fellow preterist David Chilton’s commentary on Revelation entitled *The Days of Vengeance* Kenneth Gentry observes, “If it could be demonstrated that Revelation were written 25 years after the Fall of Jerusalem, Chilton’s entire labor would go up in smoke.”¹⁴ In a further comment on the importance of the date of Revelation to preterist interpretation, Gentry says,

Whether Revelation was written early or not has a tremendous bearing upon the direction interpreters may take in its exposition If the book was written two and one-half decades *after* the destruction of the Temple, however, then the prophecies are necessarily open to an extrapolation into the most distant future, and to the exclusion of the important events of A.D. 67–70. Hence, the whole bearing of Revelation on New Testament eschatology may well be altered by the determination of the matter before us.”¹⁵

In his book *The Beast of Revelation* Gentry again highlights the necessity of the early date for preterist interpretation. “If the late-date of around A.D. 95–96 is accepted, a wholly different situation would prevail. The events in the mid and late 60s of the first century would be *absolutely excluded* as possible fulfillments.”¹⁶ Another partial preterist, R. C. Sproul, observes, “If the book was written after A.D. 70, then its contents manifestly do not refer to events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem—unless the book is a wholesale fraud, having been composed after the predicted events had already

¹⁴ Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. “*The Days of Vengeance: A Review Article*,” *The Counsel of Chalcedon* (June 1987): 11.

¹⁵ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 20–21.

¹⁶ Gentry, *Beast*, 111.

occurred.”¹⁷ Over 150 years ago, E. B. Elliott, in his classic work *Horae Apocalypticae*, noted the absolute necessity of the early date for preterism. “As to the date of the Apocalypse, how unfortunate are the Christian professors and Critics . . . if this their fundamental foundation fails; and on what mere quicksand, in this respect, their structure is raised and in what mere imminent danger of being engulfed, the readers of my sketch of evidence on the Apocalyptic date will, I think, soon see.”¹⁸

The preterist dependence on the early date for Revelation is aptly stated by Howard Winters. “When the interpretation depends upon the date, the interpretation can never be more certain than the date itself—if the date is wrong, then, of necessity the interpretation is wrong. The whole business of making the interpretation depend upon the date is therefore built upon a sandy foundation. . . . But if the late date is correct, the whole approach that assigns Revelation as a prophecy fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem is false and must be totally rejected.”¹⁹

The entire preterist system, therefore, rises or falls on the early date of Revelation. Since the entire preterist system hangs precariously on the early date of Revelation, the issue of when Revelation was composed has moved front and center in the eschatological debate.

There are five basic views or approaches to Revelation: preterism (fulfillment of the events in Revelation is in the past, shortly after the time of writing), historicism (Revelation is a survey of the entire church age), idealism (the symbols represent transcendent principles without reference to single historical events), futurism (the

¹⁷ Sproul, *Last Days*, 140.

¹⁸ E. B. Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticae; or, A Commentary on the Apocalypse, Critical and Historical; Including also an Examination of the Chief Prophecies of Daniel*, 2d ed., vol. 4 (London: Seeleys, 1846), 503.

¹⁹ Howard Winters, *Commentary on Revelation* (Greenville, SC: Carolina Christian, 1989), 15–16.

prophecies in Rev 4–22 await future fulfillment), and eclecticism (a modified form of idealism).²⁰

Unlike the preterist view, the futurist, historicist, idealist, and eclectic approaches to Revelation are not date-dependent. Even if the Neronic date is correct, any of these other views of Revelation could still be correct, and the preterist view could be wrong. But the same is not true of the preterist approach. If their early-date hypothesis is discredited, then their entire system falls. This is a fundamental vulnerability of the preterist view. The absolute necessity of the early date for their entire eschatological scheme explains why they are so intent on defending an early date and highlights the critical need and importance of a defense of the Domitianic date.

Purpose of the Study

Based on this need and the importance of the issue, the purpose of the dissertation is to defend the Domitianic date (A.D. 95–96) for the composition of the book of Revelation primarily as set against the Neronic date (A.D. 65–66).

Method of the Study

Since Revelation, like the other New Testament books, does not record the date it was written, interpreters are left to look for clues as to the most likely date for its composition. When dealing with the issue of the date of a biblical book there are two main kinds of evidence: external and internal. External evidence examines material outside the Bible to gain insight into the book's date. Internal evidence considers evidence within the text of the book itself for clues that point to the time of writing.

A successful defense of the Domitianic or late date of Revelation will focus

²⁰ Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views*, 34–46. According to G. K. Beale the eclectic view is a “modified version of the idealist perspective” that finds few prophesied historical events in Revelation. However, the final coming of Christ to deliver and judge and establish the final form of the kingdom is viewed as a prophesied event that will be fulfilled at the consummation of history. For the most part, the eclectic view understands the symbols in Revelation as transtemporal (*Revelation*, 48–49).

on two key issues. First, the arguments in favor of the early or Neronic date must be presented and adequately refuted. Second, the arguments in favor of the late or Domitianic date must be presented and persuasively defended.

To address these two issues, chapters 2 and 3 will present and examine the relevant, essential body of external evidence beginning in the second century. Chapter 2 will present the testimony of two second-century witnesses, Hegesippus and Irenaeus. Chapter 3 will present the external testimony beginning in the third century. Chapter 3 will also include a brief historical overview of the date of Revelation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The next two chapters, four and five, focus on the internal evidence or self-witness in the Book of Revelation that provides clues as to the time of its composition. Chapter 4 will present and critique the nine main arguments in favor of the Neronic date. Chapter 5 will present and defend five key arguments in favor of the Domitianic date. Since Gentry's work, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, is the standard presentation of the Neronic date, this dissertation will interact extensively with his arguments in defense of the Neronic date as well as his criticisms of the evidence for the Domitianic date.²¹

Two related issues that must be addressed in any debate between two positions are what is the burden of proof for establishing the truth on the matter at hand and who carries that burden? In American criminal trials the prosecution carries the burden of proof beyond a reasonable doubt, and in civil trials the plaintiff carries the burden of proof by a preponderance of the evidence. In this case, the late date is the dominant, established view, thus, placing the burden of proof on those who seek to overthrow it and establish the early date. As R. C. Sproul, a partial preterist, admits, "The

²¹ The dissertation will also interact with Gentry's latest work, the revised edition of *The Beast of Revelation* published in 2002.

burden for preterists then is to demonstrate that Revelation was written *before* A.D. 70.”²²

It is agreed that the burden of proof rests with those who seek to prove the early date.

Concerning the level of proof that is required, preterists must at least meet the minimal, legal burden of proof by a preponderance of the evidence. Gentry’s work is the primary defense for the Neronic date that has been marshaled up to the present time. This dissertation is a defense of the Domitianic date, as well as a critique and refutation of the evidence for the early date that will demonstrate that Gentry has failed to successfully meet that burden.

Assumptions of the Study

The focus of the present study is the date of Revelation. For purposes of this study three key issues concerning the background of Revelation will be assumed: (1) the canonicity of Revelation, (2) authorship by the apostle John, and (3) unity of the book. While all three of these issues are important in the study of the Apocalypse, they are outside the scope of this dissertation and have been ably defended by many outstanding scholars.²³

²² Sproul, *Last Days*, 140. Actually, this is incorrect. The burden is on preterists to show that Revelation was written in the narrow window of time after November, A.D. 64. and before spring, A.D. 67. Any date after spring, A.D. 67 is too late for their view.

²³ Osborne, *Revelation*, 2–6, 23–4, 27–31. Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 18–26, 48–52, Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 1–19.

CHAPTER 2
AN EXAMINATION OF THE EARLIEST EXTERNAL
EVIDENCE FOR THE DATE OF REVELATION

The direct, extant, external evidence for the date of Revelation begins in the second century A.D. The first two external witnesses for the Domitianic date are Hegesippus and Irenaeus. Most presentations of the external evidence for the date of Revelation omit any mention of Hegesippus and begin with Irenaeus as the earliest witness. But as will be shown, these two men in tandem laid a solid foundation for the dominance of the Domitianic date of Revelation throughout church history.

Hegesippus (ca. A.D. 120–190)

Normally, the external evidence for the date of Revelation begins with Irenaeus. He is almost universally cited as the earliest witness for the late date of Revelation. Irenaeus is viewed as the first witness of the Domitianic date tradition. However, that title should be more appropriately reserved for Hegesippus who pre-dated Irenaeus by about thirty years. Hegesippus is an important historical source in the early church. Some writers have even given him the title “Father of Church History,” but others have thought it best to reserve that title for Eusebius.¹ Hegesippus was probably born around A.D. 110–120. He seems to have already held an important place in the church when he made his journey to Rome in A.D. 155. His best known writing is his *Memoirs* which consisted of five treatises. The *Memoirs* were an apology for the faith

¹ Hugh Jackson Lawlor, *Eusebiana: Essays on the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Bishop of Caesarea* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), B.

against unbelievers. They were written in about 180.²

An examination of the writings of Eusebius Pamphili of Caesarea (ca. 300–340) reveals that Eusebius relied heavily upon the *Memoirs* of Hegesippus for some of his historical information. Eusebius had a large library of sources available to him at the time he wrote his famous *Ecclesiastical History*.³ And he made liberal use of these sources.⁴ Eusebius says that Hegesippus, “has left behind a very full record of his own thoughts in the five books of Memoirs that have come down to us.”⁵ Eusebius then proceeded in Book 4 to quote Hegesippus three times.⁶

Hegesippus is significant to the present study because he was cited as a source by Eusebius two times in the section of Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* where the banishment of John to Patmos under Domitian was presented.⁷ This reference is germane to the issue at hand because it was while John was banished to Patmos that he received the Revelation (Rev 1:9–10).

Several references by Eusebius place Hegesippus in the middle and late second century and suggest that Hegesippus was a Jewish Christian.⁸ At the end of these quotations, Eusebius notes that he has already made use of Hegesippus in the previous books of *Ecclesiastical History*.⁹ Eusebius relied heavily upon Hegesippus especially in

² J. D. Douglas and Philip W. Comfort, ed., *Who’s Who in Christian History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992), 308.

³ Andrew James Carriker, *The Library of Eusebius of Caesarea*, Supplements to *Vigiliae christianae*, ed. J. Van Oort, J. Den Boeft, W. L. Petersen, et al., vol. 67 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1–36.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 37–74.

⁵ Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 4.22.1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.22.1–9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.19–20. In *Before Jerusalem Fell*, Gentry never mentions or discusses Eusebius’ reliance on Hegesippus.

⁸ Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 2.23.3; 3.11.1; 3.19–20; 3.32.1–7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.22.1–8.

books 2–4.¹⁰ In addition to three quotes of Hegesippus in 4.22 Eusebius quotes Hegesippus five other times (2.23.4–18; 3.19–20.1–2; 3.32.1–2, 6; 4.8.2). Carriker notes that three other times Hegesippus is named as a source without any quotation.¹¹ There are certainly other instances where Eusebius draws on Hegesippus as a source and simply does not name him.¹²

In Book 3 of *Ecclesiastical History*, after discussing the cruelty of Domitian, Eusebius is clearly referring to some source when he writes, “At this time, *as the story goes*, the Apostle and Evangelist John was still alive, and was condemned to live in the island of Patmos for his witness to the divine word.”¹³ Clearly, Eusebius had heard or read a story from some source that included this information. Then twenty-eight lines later Eusebius explicitly mentions Hegesippus by name as a source for his material.¹⁴ Another thirty-two lines later, he again refers to Hegesippus by name as a source.¹⁵ Then only six lines after that, Eusebius says, “After Domitian had reigned fifteen years, Nerva succeeded. The sentences of Domitian were annulled, and the Roman Senate decreed the return of those who had been unjustly banished and the restoration of their property. *Those who committed the story of those times to writing relate it.* At that time, too, the story of the ancient Christians relates that the apostle John, after his banishment to the island, took up his abode at Ephesus.”¹⁶

The key phrase here is “Those who committed the story of those times to

¹⁰ Carriker, *Library of Eusebius*, 264.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 265.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.18.1 (italics added).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.19.1. All the references to the number of lines in *Ecclesiastical History* are from the Greek text of Eusebius in Loeb.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.20.7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.20.8 (italics added).

writing relate it.” Obviously, at this point Eusebius is referring to a written source. But to whom is Eusebius referring? The immediate context suggests only one logical answer—Hegesippus—the man Eusebius has just referred to twice as a source for his information. Since Eusebius clearly received the information concerning John’s banishment under Domitian from a written source, and since Hegesippus is specifically mentioned twice as Eusebius’ source only a few lines later, it makes sense that he was his source concerning the banishment of John to Patmos under Domitian.

Hugh Lawlor believes that Hegesippus was in the mind of Eusebius, if the *Memoirs* were not actually open before him as he wrote chapter 17 of Book 3.¹⁷ Lawlor believes that all of *Ecclesiastical History* 3.11–20, which includes the section on John’s banishment to Patmos by Domitian, was taken from Hegesippus’ *Memoirs*.¹⁸ Lawlor says:

But chapter xii certainly, as we have seen, came ultimately from Hegesippus. And it will be remembered that Hegesippus was in the mind of Eusebius, if the *Memoirs* were not actually open before him, when he began to write chapter xvii. For chapter xvi ends with a reference to that work. And finally it may be added, by way of confirmation, that Rufinus believed that chapter xvi was a quotation from Hegesippus. . . . On that hypothesis we find ourselves able to give a reasonable account of the construction of this part of the *Ecclesiastical History*. Eusebius acted, it would seem, exactly as we might expect that a historian would act whose design was to give a narrative of a series of events, which should practically consist of extracts from earlier writers. He took as his basis Hegesippus, who had the fullest account known to him of the history of the Church during the period with which he was concerned. And here and there he added to his Hegesippean narrative illustrations from other authorities—Irenaeus, Tertullian, Brettius, and the rest. Thus . . . we have arrived once more at our former conclusion, that Eusebius drew from Hegesippus the account of Domitian in chapter xvii and the statement of chapter xviii that the Apostle St. John was banished under Domitian to Patmos; and we have extended it by tracing to the same source the further statement in chapter xx that the apostle returned to Ephesus in the reign of Nerva.¹⁹

¹⁷ Lawlor, *Eusebiana*, 52.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Putting this all together, the Hegesippian support for the banishment of John to Patmos during Domitian's reign, and thus the late date of Revelation, is compelling.

The argument unfolds in seven steps.

1. Eusebius was clearly using Hegesippus as a source for much of the material in books 2–4 of *Ecclesiastical History*. He mentions him specifically by name.
2. Eusebius mentions the banishment practices of Domitian in *Ecclesiastical History* 3:17.1 in the final sentence of that chapter.
3. In the very next line, at the beginning of 3:18.1, Eusebius makes it clear that he is using a source for his information, in that, he introduces the section with the words “At that time, as the story goes . . .”
4. Twenty-eight lines later in 3.19.1 Hegesippus is specifically identified as Eusebius' source for his information.
5. Thirty-two lines later in 3.20.7 Hegesippus is again specifically mentioned as Eusebius' source.
6. Then, only six lines later, and in 3:20.8, Eusebius relates the story of John's banishment to the island under Domitian. He says, “Those who committed the story of those times to writing relate it . . . the story of the ancient Christians relates.” Again, he plainly indicates that he is using a written, ancient Christian source for the story about John's banishment under Domitian.
7. In 4.22.1–8 Eusebius looks back and states that he has already made use of Hegesippus in the previous books of *Ecclesiastical History*. This would include Book 3 where the statements about John's banishment under Domitian occur.

Therefore, the question *is not* did Eusebius employ a source for the information in 3.20.8-9 concerning the banishment of John to Patmos under Domitian. He openly states that he employed a written source. The only question then is—who was Eusebius' source for this information? In the context there is no other plausible conclusion except that Eusebius is referring to Hegesippus, the man he mentions by name two times in the immediate context of 3.18–20. John A. T. Robinson supports the identification of Hegesippus as the source of Eusebius' information concerning the exile

of John under Domitian. Robinson says, “This is not of course to say that Eusebius was the source of his identification. Apart from quoting Irenaeus, he refers to ‘the record of our ancient men.’ (i.e., in all probability the *Memoirs* of Hegesippus) for the tradition that ‘the apostle John also took up his abode once more at Ephesus after his exile’ under Domitian’s successor Nerva.”²⁰ F. F. Bruce is less certain but notes that the statement of Eusebius “may go back to Hegesippus.”²¹

Based on the evidence in *Ecclesiastical History* 3.18–20, Lawlor concludes:

Now evidence from the second century in regard to the date and authorship of the canonical Apocalypse is both scanty and, in some respects, difficult to interpret. But if the two passages referred to are really from Hegesippus we have his testimony that St. John was banished to Patmos under Domitian, and resided at Ephesus under Nerva. That is to say, he must be added to the small band of early witnesses to the late date and apostolic authority of the Apocalypse, and this is full of significance. It is not only that Hegesippus is the earliest writer who can be quoted in favour of that view. That, indeed, we may well claim for him.²²

Hegesippus stands as the first witness for the late date of Revelation.

Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (A.D. 120–202)

While Hegesippus is the earliest Christian witness to the late date of Revelation, without question the most important ancient witness is Irenaeus. The importance of his testimony cannot be overemphasized because his credibility as a witness is outstanding.

Irenaeus is best known as a Christian heresiologist who wrote voluminously in defense of Christianity. He served as a bishop in Lyon, southern France.²³ Irenaeus spent

²⁰ John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 223.

²¹ F. F. Bruce, *Peter, Stephen, James, and John: Studies in Early Non-Pauline Christianity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 128.

²² H. J. Lawlor, “Hegesippus and the Apocalypse,” *JTS* 8 (1907): 436–44. Kistemaker agrees with Lawlor’s conclusion that Hegesippus was Eusebius’ source for the information about John’s banishment by Domitian (*Revelation*, 28).

²³ Douglas and Comfort, *Who’s Who in Christian History*, 344.

his youth in Smyrna in ancient Asia Minor where Revelation was first circulated. He also claimed that he was discipled by Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, who in turn was a student of the Apostle John.²⁴ Eusebius records a letter of Irenaeus to Florinus in which he reminds Florinus how in their youth both he and Irenaeus frequented Polycarp's house and how well Irenaeus remembered the things Polycarp taught.

In the letter to Florinus, which we have spoken of above, Irenaeus again mentions his intercourse with Polycarp, and says: 'These opinions, O Florinus, that I may speak sparingly, do not belong to sound doctrine. These opinions are inconsistent with the church, and bring those who believe them into the greatest impiety. These opinions not even the heretics outside the church ever dared to proclaim. These opinions those who were presbyters before us, they who accompanied the apostles, did not hand on to you. For while I was still a boy I knew you in lower Asia in Polycarp's house when you were a young man of rank in the royal hall and endeavouring to stand well with him. I remember the events of those days more clearly than those which happened recently, for what we learn as children grows up with the soul and is united to it, so that I can speak even of the place in which the blessed Polycarp sat and disputed, how he came in and went out, the character of his life, the appearance of this body, the discourses which he made to the people, how he reported his intercourse with John and with the others who had seen the Lord, how he remembered their words, and what were the things concerning the Lord which he had heard from them, and about their miracles, and about their teaching, and how Polycarp had received from the eyewitnesses of the word of life, and reported all things in agreement with the Scriptures. I listened eagerly even then to those things through the mercy of God which was given to me, and made notes of them, not on paper but in my heart, and ever by the grace of God do I truly ruminate on them.'²⁵

In *Against Heresies* Irenaeus again spoke of his relationship with Polycarp who was a direct link to the Apostle John. "But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, bishop of the Church in Smyrna, who I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed this life, having always taught the things which he had

²⁴ John D. Woodbridge, ed., *Great Leaders of the Christian Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 44.

²⁵ Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 5.20.4–7.

learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true.”²⁶ Thus, there is a direct geographical and personal link between the author of Revelation and Irenaeus.

Thomas Slater argues that while it is possible that Irenaeus knew Polycarp and that Polycarp knew John, “it is highly doubtful that Polycarp could have received any extensive training of any type from John or that he would have been able to pass it on to a very young Irenaeus.”²⁷ However, Slater fails to provide any real basis for this statement other than the fact that Irenaeus would have been young when Polycarp died. His main proof is that Irenaeus also stated that the Apocalypse and the Gospel of John were written by the same John the Apostle. Slater considers this conclusion by Irenaeus to be incorrect.

There are two problems with Slater’s reasoning. First, many modern scholars agree with Irenaeus’ conclusion that the Apocalypse and the Gospel of John were both written by the apostle John. Second, even if Irenaeus were incorrect about this issue, it would not necessarily mean he was wrong about his own association with Polycarp. In his own writings, Irenaeus refers to his “early youth” as the time when he heard Polycarp. There is no chronological issue that should arouse undue suspicion concerning Irenaeus’ claim. The latest that Irenaeus could have been born was A.D. 140, although it was probably earlier.²⁸ Polycarp was martyred in Smyrna in A.D. 156.²⁹ Thus, Irenaeus would have been at least 16–20 years old when Polycarp was martyred in Smyrna and would have been at least in his mid-teens when he was taught by Polycarp.³⁰ Due to

²⁶ Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 3.3.4.

²⁷ Thomas B. Slater, “Dating the Apocalypse of John,” *Bib* 84 (2003): 253.

²⁸ Bruce, *Peter, Stephen, James, and John*, 129.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

³⁰ Bruce accepts the validity of Irenaeus’ statement in his letter to Florinus and Irenaeus’ testimony that he clearly recalled what he was taught by Polycarp (*ibid.*, 129–30).

Irenaeus' contact with Polycarp, a more knowledgeable, reliable witness on the date of Revelation could hardly be imagined.³¹

Irenaeus' statement concerning the date of Revelation was originally written in Greek. However, the only extant copies of his statement in his own writings are in Latin, translated from the original Greek. The Latin version of Irenaeus is found in his comments on Rev 13:18 in his work *Against Heresies* 5.30.3, probably written about A.D. 180. Fortunately, however, in two places, the writings of Eusebius preserved a Greek version of Irenaeus' statement on the date of Revelation.³² In the context of *Ecclesiastical History* 3.18.3 where the quotation from Irenaeus occurs, Eusebius notes that Irenaeus wrote about the number of the name ascribed to the Antichrist. Eusebius then quotes from Irenaeus. The following is the quote of Irenaeus from Eusebius with an English translation by Kirsopp Lake in Loeb.

εἰ δὲ ἔδει ἀναφανδὸν ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ κηρύττεσθαι τοῦνομα αὐτοῦ, δι' ἐκείνου ἂν ἔρρέθη τοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν ἑορακότος. οὐδὲ γὰρ πρὸ πολλοῦ χρόνου ἑωράθη, ἀλλὰ σχεδὸν ἐπὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας γενεᾶς, πρὸς τῷ τέλει τῆς Δομετιανοῦ ἀρχῆς.

But if it had been necessary to announce his name plainly at the present time, it would have been spoken by him who saw the apocalypse. For it was not seen long ago, but almost in our own time, at the end of the reign of Domitian.³³

³¹ Gentry contends that the passage of many years might have diminished Irenaeus' memory. Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Atlanta: American Vision, 1998), 62–63. While this is, of course, possible, it is highly doubtful that Irenaeus would miss the date of Revelation by almost thirty years. Irenaeus states specifically in his letter to Florinus that he remembers the events surrounding his encounters with Polycarp better than recent events. Also, the fact that Irenaeus states the date of Revelation with such specificity (at the end of Domitian's reign) argues for a clear recollection of this fact. Philip Schaff strongly supports the reliability and trustworthiness of Irenaeus. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 3d ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 2:750–51. William Milligan lists four considerations that add weight to Irenaeus' testimony: (1) his nearness to the apostolic age, (2) he was a disciple and friend of Polycarp, (3) his mention of the date of Revelation is in conjunction with a section of Revelation that he approached with utmost seriousness (Rev 13:16–18), and (4) the confidence of Eusebius in the statement made by him. William Milligan, *Discussions on the Apocalypse* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1893), 78–79.

³² Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.18.3; cf. 5.8.6.

³³ *Ibid.*; cf. Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 5.30.3.

The statement appears to be straightforward and unambiguous. Irenaeus says that the “apocalyptic vision,” “revelation,” or “the apocalypse” was seen toward the end of Domitian’s reign, that is, in A.D. 95 or 96 since Domitian was assassinated in Rome on September 18, A.D. 96. In spite of the apparent clarity and lucidity of Irenaeus’ statement, three objections are raised against this compelling evidence for the late date of Revelation.

Three Objections to Irenaeus’ Statement

Recognizing the importance of Irenaeus’ words in support of the Domitianic date of Revelation, preterist early-date adherents have attacked Irenaeus’ statement, his reliability as a witness, and the discernment of those who followed him. Each of these objections will be examined.

Re-interpretation of Irenaeus’ Statement

The first objection is that there is a grammatical, translational ambiguity in Irenaeus’ statement that makes room for two possible translations.³⁴ Gentry admits that, “there are no crucial questions regarding the integrity of the text of Irenaeus’ statement raised from either camp in the debate.”³⁵ But concerning the statement of Irenaeus, Gentry says it is, “grammatically ambiguous and easily susceptible to a most reasonable re-interpretation.”³⁶

The issue in this case of re-interpretation is the subject of the Greek verb ἐωράθη. Gentry and other early-date advocates allege that Irenaeus was commenting on *how long* John lived, not on *when* he wrote Revelation. The crux of the matter is whether

³⁴ Gonzalo Rojas-Flores, “The Book of Revelation and the First Years of Nero’s Reign,” *Bib* 85 (2004): 375.

³⁵ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 108.

³⁶ *Ibid.*; Rojas-Flores, “Revelation,” 375; F. H. Chase, “The Date of the Apocalypse,” *JTS* 8 (1906–7): 431.

the translation should read “it was seen” or “he was seen.” Is the subject of the verb ἐωράθη *he* (John) or *it* (the Apocalypse)?³⁷

Three main arguments in favor of the re-interpretation of Irenaeus’ statement are set forth by early-date advocates. First, the context is used as a support for the re-interpretation. It is alleged that referring ἐωράθη to John renders the meaning plain and simple, and that in the context the mind of Irenaeus is concentrated on the seer and naturally supplies the unexpressed subject of ἐωράθη.³⁸ F. H. Chase argues that the γάρ in Irenaeus’ statement is syntactically difficult to account for.³⁹ He argues that taking John as the referent is in harmony with the “characteristic thought and phraseology of Irenaeus.” Chase says that Irenaeus was “concentrated on the seer. The thought of the seer naturally runs on into the next sentence and supplies the unexpressed subject to ἐωράθη. The context supports this interpretation.”⁴⁰ The problem with Chase’s argument is that the immediate context in Irenaeus is focused on the Apocalypse, not John. Chase is creating an issue in a statement that is not really that complicated. Taking the referent of ἐωράθη as the Apocalypse is actually much more grammatically plain and simple than John since ἀποκάλυψιν is the nearest antecedent to the verb and is the main subject in the context.

Furthermore, the context in the writings of both Irenaeus and Eusebius strongly supports the idea that both authors had Revelation in mind, not John. Irenaeus devoted an entire chapter (5.30) of *Against Heresies* to the number and name of the future Antichrist as found in Rev 13:18. And in the course of that discussion he wrote, “For that was seen not very long time since, but almost in our day, toward the end of Domitian’s

³⁷ Chase, “Date,” 431.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 432.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

reign.” The broader context of the entire chapter strongly supports the Apocalypse as the referent of ἑωράθη. The topic of chapter 30 of Book 5 in *Against Heresies* is the Apocalypse and the interpretation of a specific verse within it (Rev 13:18). The Apocalypse is mentioned specifically in *Against Heresies* 5.30.2 and again in 5.30.3.

Also, the immediate context in Eusebius points to the Apocalypse as the referent for ἑωράθη. To demonstrate the flow of the immediate context, a full section of *Ecclesiastical History* 5.8.5–7 will be cited. The references to the Apocalypse or Revelation will appear in bold and the relevant statement of Irenaeus will be italicized to more clearly relate the context.

These things were said by the writer referred to in the third book of his treatise which has been quoted before, and in the fifth book he discourses thus about **the Apocalypse** of John and the number of the name of the Antichrist. ‘Now since this is so, and since this number is found in all the good and ancient copies, and since those who have seen John face to face testify, and reason teaches us that the number of the name of the beast appears according to the numeration of the Greeks by the letters in it . . .’ And going on later he says concerning the same point, ‘We therefore will not take the risk of making any positive statement concerning the name of the Antichrist. *For if it had been necessary for his name to have been announced clearly at the present time, it would have been spoken by him who also saw **the Revelation**; for it was not even seen a long time ago, but almost in our own generation towards the end of the reign of Domitian.*’ The author quoted says this about **the Apocalypse**, and he also mentions the first Epistle of John, making many quotations from . . .⁴¹

Eusebius introduced his quotation from Irenaeus with an emphasis on the Apocalypse. In the statement of Irenaeus that is in question another reference to the book of Revelation occurs. Then in the very next line after the relevant quote from Irenaeus, Eusebius again made reference to the Apocalypse. It is clear from the immediate preceding and following contexts that Eusebius believed that Irenaeus was focused on the Apocalypse, not John. Therefore, the context of both Irenaeus and Eusebius strongly favor the traditional interpretation supporting the late date.

⁴¹ Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 5.8.5–7 [emphasis added].

Second, early-date adherents maintain that the time reference in the statement of Irenaeus provides a clue that points to John as the subject of ἑωράθη. Again, the relevant statement of Irenaeus reads: “But if it had been necessary to announce his name plainly at the present time, it would have been spoken by him who saw the apocalypse. For *it was not seen long ago, but almost in our own time*, at the end of the reign of Domitian.”⁴²

The argument goes like this: How could Irenaeus, who wrote in about A.D. 180, say that the apocalypse was “not seen long ago, but almost in our own time, at the end of the reign of Domitian” when 85 years had elapsed since its composition?⁴³ The problem with this argument for supporters of the early date is that it cuts both ways. If one takes John as the one who was seen not long ago, one could equally ask how could seeing John near the end of the reign of Domitian be seen as not long ago or “almost in our own time?” This point does not favor either referent over the other. The simple answer to this issue is that Irenaeus qualifies the time reference by saying that the apocalypse was seen “almost (σχεδόν) in our own time (γενεᾶς).” Irenaeus was born in about A.D. 120, within twenty-five years of the writing of Revelation in A.D. 95. This would certainly qualify as “almost” within his own time or generation.

Third, it is alleged that the statement of Irenaeus in support of the late date is incompatible with his other statements concerning Revelation. Eusebius quotes from Irenaeus: “These things were said by the writer referred to in the third book of his treatise which has been quoted before, and in the fifth book he discourses thus about the Apocalypse of John and the number of the name of the Antichrist. ‘Now since this is so,

⁴² Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 5.30.3 [italics added].

⁴³ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 57–58.

and since this number is found in all the good and ancient copies, and since those who have seen John face to face testify . . .”⁴⁴

On this issue, Gentry says, “Is it not remarkable that in the same breath, Irenaeus can mention ‘those who have seen John face to face’ and ‘all the good and ancient copies [of Revelation]”? It would seem that the ‘ancient’ (ἀρχαίους) character of the ‘copies’ (ἀντιγράφοις) would suggest something more ancient than the ‘end of Domitian’s reign,’ which Irenaeus speaks of as ‘almost in our own generation.’”⁴⁵ Gentry’s final conclusion on this point is that, “If Revelation were written pre-A.D. 70, then its date would be about three decades older still.”⁴⁶

But one is forced to ask, how would thirty more years really make that much difference? If Revelation were written in A.D. 95 it would have been over eighty years old when Irenaeus wrote. If it were written in A.D. 65 it would have been about one hundred ten years old. Would thirty more years really make Revelation “more ancient” as Gentry suggests? This argument carries little weight. The traditional interpretation of Irenaeus cannot be overthrown based on this tenuous argument.

Having considered the arguments in favor of re-interpreting the statement of Irenaeus, and concluded that the grammatical and contextual arguments in favor of the re-interpretation of Irenaeus are unconvincing, it is now necessary to set forth the reasons for accepting the traditional interpretation of his words. There are six simple points that render the re-interpretation of Irenaeus’ words highly suspect.

First, there is no reputable translation of Irenaeus’ statement that renders John as the subject of the verb ἐωράθη. All four standard English translations of Eusebius, who quotes Irenaeus, translate the statement in question as a reference to when the apocalyptic

⁴⁴ Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 5.8.5.

⁴⁵ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 59.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

vision was seen, not when John was seen. All read, “it was seen,” referring to the book of Revelation.⁴⁷ Moreover, none of these translations contain any footnote or reference that signals any possible alternative translation.⁴⁸ The alleged translational ambiguity is totally absent from any standard translation. If the statement of Irenaeus is ambiguous and easily susceptible to an alternate translation one would expect this to be reflected somehow in these translations.

Second, in the Greek text, preserved by Eusebius, the subject of the verb ἐωράθη is lacking and must be provided. However, the nearest grammatical antecedent to the verb is ἀποκάλυψις or “apocalyptic vision.” The only natural subject in this case is the object of the preceding clause.⁴⁹ Arthur Peake states, “In the preceding clause the object of sight is the revelation. When the same verb follows in the succeeding clause and is changed from the active to the passive, the only natural subject is the object of the clause preceding.”⁵⁰ As David Aune notes, “Further, the passive verb ἐωράθη, ‘he/she/it was seen,’ does not appear to be the most appropriate way to describe the length of a person’s life; it is much more likely that ἐωράθη means ‘it [i.e., ‘the Apocalypse’] was seen,’

⁴⁷ Eusebius, *Eusebius Pamphili: Ecclesiastical History*, Books 1–5, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, *The Fathers of the Church*, ed. Hermigild Dressler, vol. 19 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1953); Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphili*, trans. C. F. Cruse (Philadelphia: R. Davis & Brother, 1840); *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, trans. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 1 (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890); Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Kirsopp Lake, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926).

⁴⁸ The only notation in any of the standard translations of Eusebius in the relevant passages supports the Domitianic date. The translation of Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* by Roy J. Deferrari (165, n. 1) contains this footnote, “Tradition, beginning with Irenaeus, as quoted by Eusebius (5.8.30), unanimously places the banishment of John and the apocalyptic visions in the reign of Domitian. This has never been questioned until recent years, and not convincingly.”

⁴⁹ Arthur S. Peake, *The Revelation of John* (London: Holborn Publishing House, 1919), 73. John A. T. Robinson, an early date advocate, says that to make John the subject of the verb *was seen* “is very dubious” (*Redating*, 221).

⁵⁰ Peake, *Revelation*, 73.

referring to the time when the Apocalypse was ‘seen’ by John on Patmos.”⁵¹

Third, the Latin translation stands strongly against any effort to re-interpret the words of Irenaeus.⁵² The Latin translation of Irenaeus reads: *qui et Apocalypsin viderat. Neque enim ane multum temporis visum est.* In the Latin translation from the Greek, the translator made a translational decision and used the word *visum*, a neuter word, which refers to a thing, such as a book in this case, rather than *visa* which indicates a person. The Latin translator clearly understood Irenaeus’ statement as a reference to when the Apocalypse was seen, not when John was seen. This argues strongly against any alleged translational ambiguity. The statement by Irenaeus was not translated in such a way that would indicate that it was ambiguous in any way to the Latin translator.

Fourth, the verb ἐωράθη fits perfectly with the noun ἀποκάλυψις. An ἀποκάλυψις is an uncovering or revelation or disclosure often through visions.⁵³ The ἀποκάλυψις is clearly something that John saw; therefore, the verb ἐωράθη refers to what John saw (the apocalypse) rather than someone seeing John.⁵⁴ The word εἶδον (“I saw”) is used 55 times in Revelation in reference to John seeing something. In Rev 1:2, John is described as the one, “who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus

⁵¹ David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*. Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Ralph P. Martin, vol. 52 (Dallas: Word Books, 1997), lix.

⁵² Beale, *Revelation*, 20. Gentry offers two arguments against the Latin translation of Irenaeus’ statement (*Before Jerusalem*, 53–56). First, he says that the Latin translator may have mistranslated the original Greek into Latin. He cites several scholars who comment on the inferiority of the Latin translation of Irenaeus. However, he cites no specific instances of mistranslation. Second, without citing any extant textual evidence, Gentry alleges that the Latin text may be corrupt (*ibid.*, 55). Chase also argues that the Latin text may be corrupt, but he too provides no evidence to support this claim (“Date,” 435).

⁵³ BDAG, 112.

⁵⁴ H. Wayne House and Thomas Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1988), 251–52. In his critique of House and Ice, Gentry says that only the word ἀποκάλυψις occurs in Irenaeus’ statement, not “apocalyptic vision” as it is often translated into English (*Before Jerusalem*, 346). However, BDAG (112) says that in Rev 1:1 ἀποκάλυψις refers to “revelations of a particular kind, through visions.” So it is fitting to translate the word ἀποκάλυψις in Irenaeus’ statement as “apocalyptic vision” or something that John saw.

Christ, even to all that he saw.” Also, the verb in question (ὄραω) is used seven times in Revelation (1:7; 11:19; 12:1, 3; 19:10; 22:4, 9). The entire Book of Revelation “was seen.” The verb ἐωράθη is an appropriate verb to refer to the Revelation that was seen by John at the end of the reign of Domitian.

Fifth, if John were the intended subject of this statement, Irenaeus, who was trying to bring the matter as near to his own time as possible, would surely have said that John lived into the reign of Trajan (A.D. 98–117), a fact that Irenaeus knew well.⁵⁵

Sixth, the statement of Irenaeus is simply not ambiguous. The alleged ambiguity in Irenaeus’ statement has been created by modern scholars with a viewpoint that demands a pre-70 date for Revelation. In this case the maxim is true that “necessity is the mother of invention.”⁵⁶ The vast majority of scholars, ancient and modern, have accepted the fact that this statement refers to the time the Apocalypse was seen.⁵⁷ One must ask—if Irenaeus’ statement was subject to another interpretation why did none of the numerous witnesses in the early church after Irenaeus ever raise this issue? How could it be “grammatically ambiguous and easily susceptible to a most reasonable reinterpretation,” as Gentry claims, if no one in the early church interpreted it that way or even raised a question about it? Evidently, it was not quite so easy as Gentry claims to

⁵⁵ Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 2.22.5; 3.3.4; Peake, *Revelation*, 74. Both of these passages from Irenaeus are quoted in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.23.3–4. Gentry hypothesizes that John did not mention the fact that John lived until the reign of Trajan since the reigns of Domitian and Trajan were separated by only two years and that this small difference could have easily been blurred by Irenaeus (*Before Jerusalem*, 56–57). However, since Irenaeus says clearly in the two other places cited above that John lived until the reign of Trajan it is obvious that his memory on this issue was not blurred. Gentry also argues, according to his re-interpretation, that the text of Irenaeus only says that John “was seen” near the end of Domitian’s reign, not that he died then. But since Irenaeus had already said twice that John lived until the time of Trajan (A.D. 98–117), why would he need to say that John was seen near the end of Domitian’s reign (A.D. 95–96)? This obvious point would not need to be mentioned. If John lived until the reign of Trajan he had to have lived during the reign of Trajan’s predecessor, Domitian.

⁵⁶ Thomas Ice, “The Date of Revelation,” *Pre-Trib Perspectives* 8 (2005), 5.

⁵⁷ Beale, *Revelation*, 20; G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, Black’s New Testament Commentary, ed. Henry Chadwick (London: A & C Black Publishers, 1966; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 6.

arrive at this re-interpretation. The first person to suggest the re-interpretation of Irenaeus' words was Johann Jakob Wettstein in 1752.⁵⁸ Wettstein re-interpreted Irenaeus' statement as a reference to when the apostle John was seen rather than the Apocalypse. But there are two serious problems with Wettstein's re-interpretation of the words of Irenaeus. First, it occurred almost 1600 years after the fact. None of the early witnesses in the church, whose natural language was Greek, ever questioned the interpretation that Irenaeus referred to a Domitianic date for Revelation. The first mention of an alleged translational ambiguity came almost 1600 years after the fact by Wettstein.

Second, Wettstein was an early preterist whose eschatological scheme could make him predisposed to arrive at this conclusion. Wettstein's preterist interpretation would have been aided greatly by re-interpreting Irenaeus' words and eliminating his statement in support of the Domitianic date. Any new interpretation that is too far removed from the original text or too self-serving for its innovator should be received with caution. While neither of these arguments necessarily prove that Wettstein's re-interpretation was mistaken, they do cast a shadow over his conclusion that renders it highly improbable at best.

From the historical perspective, the issue involving the re-interpretation of Irenaeus' statement can be reduced to one simple question. Is it more sensible to accept the interpretation and translation by numerous early witnesses, whose natural language was Greek, and who lived within two hundred years of Irenaeus' statement and all the standard modern translations of Eusebius, or to adopt the re-interpretation by a scholar, whose native tongue was not Greek, almost 1600 years after the fact whose theological position is greatly aided by that re-interpretation? The answer is clear. The settled, traditional interpretation of Irenaeus should stand.

⁵⁸ Johann Jakob Wettstein, *Novum Testamentum Graecum*, vol. 2 (Amsterdam: Dommeriana, 1752; reprint, Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck- U. Verlagsanstalt, 1962), 746.

Moreover, most of the noted early-date advocates do not even agree with the re-interpretation of Irenaeus' statement. For example, Robinson, who dates Revelation in late 68 after the death of Nero, accepts Irenaeus' statement as a reference to the Apocalypse, not John. He says, "The translation has been disputed by a number of scholars, on the ground that it means that *he* (John) was seen; but this is very dubious. One must assume that Irenaeus believed the Apocalypse to have come from c. 95."⁵⁹ Schaff, another early date advocate, calls Irenaeus' testimony of the Domitianic date "clear and weighty testimony."⁶⁰ Moses Stuart, a preterist early-date advocate, says, "I cannot think that any other Nominative than Ἀποκάλυψις can be fairly supplied here. So most of the ancients clearly understood the matter; and we may well acquiesce in their judgment, for it is supported by the obvious principles of interpretation."⁶¹

Writing in 1888, J. Ritchie Smith, who held to the Domitianic date, concluded: "It is a sufficient answer to all these forced interpretations, that the early church always understood the words of Irenaeus in their plain and obvious meaning, nor would any other have been suggested if his testimony had not been a stumbling-block in the way of modern exposition. That Irenaeus refers the Apocalypse to the reign of Domitian is generally admitted by scholars of all shades of opinion."⁶² There is no solid exegetical, historical, or contextual basis for re-interpreting the statement of Irenaeus that stood unchallenged for 1600 years.

⁵⁹ Robinson, *Redating*, 221–22.

⁶⁰ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 3d ed., vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), 834.

⁶¹ Moses Stuart, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse* (Edinburgh: MacLachlan, Stewart, & Company, 1847), 218.

⁶² J. Ritchie Smith, "The Date of the Apocalypse," *BSac* 45 (1888): 299.

Irenaeus was mistaken

The second objection raised by opponents of the late date is an argument in the alternative. Neronic date supporters argue that even if the statement of Irenaeus does refer to the composition of Revelation during the reign of Domitian, Irenaeus himself is an unreliable witness. In other words, he was simply mistaken in what he said.⁶³ To prove this allegation, one specific inaccuracy of Irenaeus is consistently highlighted.⁶⁴ His error is found in *Against Heresies* where he states that Jesus was in his forties when he died, thus extending his earthly ministry to a period of over ten years.

For how could He have had disciples, if He did not teach? And how could He have taught, unless He had reached the age of a Master? For when He came to be baptized, He had not yet completed His thirtieth year, but was beginning to be about thirty years of age (for thus Luke, who has mentioned His years, has expressed it: ‘Now Jesus was, as it were, beginning to be thirty years old,’ when He came to receive baptism); and, [according to these men,] He preached only one year reckoning from His baptism. On completing His thirtieth year He suffered, being in fact still a young man, and who had by no means attained to advanced age. Now, that the first stage of early life embraces thirty years, and that this extends onwards to the fortieth year, every one will admit; but from the fortieth and fiftieth year a man begins to decline towards old age, which our Lord possessed while He still fulfilled the office of a Teacher, even as the Gospel and all the elders testify; those who were conversant in Asia with John, the disciple of the Lord, [affirming] that John conveyed to them that information. And he remained among them up to the times of Trajan. Some of them, moreover, saw not only John, but the other apostles also, and heard the very same account from them, and bear testimony as to the [validity of] the statement. Whom then should we rather believe? Whether such men as these, or Ptolemaeus, who never saw the

⁶³ Stuart maintains that the reason Irenaeus made this honest mistake in dating Revelation was because when he wrote his book on Heresies he was in Lyons, which is far away from the ecclesiastical traditions (*Apocalypse*, 232). But if this is true, why did others after Irenaeus who were near the ecclesiastical traditions fail to correct his supposed error?

⁶⁴ As already noted previously, some point to Irenaeus’ belief that the same person, the apostle John, wrote both the gospel of John and Revelation as another example of an error by Irenaeus. Thomas Slater, “Dating the Apocalypse to John,” *Bib* 84 (2003), 253. As stated in the introduction to this dissertation, Johannine authorship of Revelation is assumed in this dissertation; therefore, this alleged mistake by Irenaeus will not be discussed because the present author does not believe it was a mistake. Gentry agrees that the apostle John wrote both the Gospel of John and Revelation, so he does not cite this as an error by Irenaeus (*Before Jerusalem*, 22–23).

apostles, and who never even in his dreams attained to the slightest trace of an apostle?⁶⁵

As Gentry correctly observes, Irenaeus was clearly mistaken at this point. No credible modern scholar would accept this view of the duration of Christ's earthly ministry. Some early-date advocates seize this error of Irenaeus and use it to suggest that this undermines confidence in his reliability about the date of Revelation. However, those who point to this error rarely go on in the context to discover Irenaeus' basis for reaching this conclusion. Irenaeus plainly states, in the very next section of *Against Heresies*, the biblical reasoning behind his conclusion that Jesus lived into His forties. Irenaeus based this belief on his interpretation of John 8:52–59.

But besides this, those very Jews who disputed with the Lord Jesus Christ have most clearly indicated the same thing. For when the Lord said to them, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it, and was glad,' they answered Him, 'Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham?' Now, such language is fittingly applied to one who had already passed the age of forty, without having as yet reached his fiftieth year, yet is not far from this latter period. But to one who is only thirty years old it would unquestionably be said, 'Thou art not yet forty years old,' For those who wished to convict Him of falsehood would certainly not extend the number of His years far beyond the age which they saw He had attained; but they mentioned a period near His real age, whether they had truly ascertained this out of the entry in the public register, or simply made a conjecture from what they observed that He was above forty years old, and that He certainly was not one of only thirty years of age. For it is altogether unreasonable to suppose that they were mistaken by twenty years, when they wished to prove Him younger than the times of Abraham. For what they saw, that they also expressed; and He whom they beheld was not a mere phantasm, but an actual being of flesh and blood. He did not then want much of being fifty years old; and, in accordance with that fact, they said to Him, 'Thou art not yet fifty years old, and has Thou seen Abraham?' He did not therefore preach only for one year, nor did He suffer in the twelfth month of the year.⁶⁶

Again, while virtually no one today would agree with Irenaeus' understanding of John 8 about the age of Jesus and the length of His earthly ministry, it is critical to note that Irenaeus did not pull this idea out of thin air as is sometimes implied by early-date

⁶⁵ Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 2.22.5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.22.6.

advocates. He was not recklessly inventing a chronology based on speculation. His conclusion was based on an attempted Scriptural interpretation, albeit an incorrect one.

Gentry questions the credibility of Irenaeus and then notes, “Additional insights into obvious errors could be cited from Irenaeus. But the one cited should demonstrate clearly that he could (he did at least once!) err on matters of historical detail—even when he claimed the authority of eyewitness accounts.”⁶⁷ However, Gentry fails to provide even one other specific example of Irenaeus’ “obvious errors.” This kind of argument is neither helpful nor fair to the reputation of Irenaeus.

No one alleges that Irenaeus was perfect. Like all scholars he was subject to misinterpretations of particular biblical texts. But there is no evidence that he was mistake-prone or unreliable in his testimony. Irenaeus even gave the scriptural basis for his notion that Jesus lived into his forties. Gentry, who on the one hand undermines the reliability of Irenaeus concerning the date of Revelation, nevertheless notes that his “stature in the early church caused many later Church fathers to depend—sometimes too uncritically—upon his witness alone to conclude many matters”⁶⁸ But if Irenaeus was so error-prone and unreliable how did he gain such stature in the early church? His overall reliability and trustworthiness is the reason he has enjoyed such stature in the church.

Again, no one would argue that Irenaeus was without error on every conclusion concerning every matter he addressed. The same could be said of all the witnesses in the church both ancient and contemporary. However, Irenaeus’ conclusion concerning the date of Revelation should be accepted as reliable for four reasons. First, it is clear that he had made special study of the Apocalypse, as indicated by his reference to different manuscripts that had come to his notice and by his exposition of various

⁶⁷ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 64.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

passages in Revelation.⁶⁹ The entire thirtieth chapter of Book 5 of *Against Heresies*, where Irenaeus' statement about the date of the Apocalypse is found, is devoted to a careful study of Rev 13:18.

Second, the precision of Irenaeus' statement concerning the date of Revelation inspires confidence. Irenaeus not only says in whose reign the Revelation was seen, but fixes the precise period of his reign.⁷⁰ He asserts that the Revelation was seen "at the end of Domitian's reign." This specific dating of Revelation suggests that Irenaeus possessed special, intimate knowledge of the timing and conditions under which Revelation was written.

Third, Irenaeus was a native of Asia and a disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of John. Irenaeus was part of the "Asia Minor School" of early church witnesses.⁷¹ Irenaeus, who was from the very area where Revelation first circulated, would have been in the most ideal position possible for knowing the tradition of the origin of Revelation.⁷² It is unlikely that Polycarp would not have known the true date of Revelation or that Irenaeus would have misrepresented or mistakenly related his information.⁷³ Irenaeus' mistake about the length of Jesus' earthly ministry, as discussed previously, was based on his misinterpretation of a particular biblical text; whereas, his information about the date of Revelation was evidently received directly from Polycarp. It is much easier to misinterpret a biblical text than to misunderstand direct verbal testimony from someone as respected as Polycarp. And it is clear from the writings of

⁶⁹ Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 5.30.1; Smith, "Date," 300.

⁷⁰ Peake, *Revelation*, 72

⁷¹ F. L. Cross, *The Early Christian Fathers* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1960), 110.

⁷² Ibid.; E. W. Hengstenberg, *The Revelation of St. John*, trans. Patrick Fairbairn, vol. 1 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1852), viii-ix.

⁷³ F. J. A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John, I-III* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1908), xv; John T. Hinds, *A Commentary on the Revelation* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1937), 1.

Irenaeus that he held Polycarp in high esteem. The nature of Irenaeus' source for the date of Revelation makes it unlikely that he was mistaken. The testimony of Irenaeus concerning the date of Revelation is of the highest caliber.

Added to these points is the fact that the reliability of Irenaeus has been consistently validated by scholars of church history. Schaff, an early-date proponent, spoke glowingly of the reliability of Irenaeus.

Irenaeus is the leading representative of Catholic Christianity in the last quarter of the second century, the champion of orthodoxy against Gnostic heresy, and the mediator between the Eastern and Western churches. He united a learned Greek education and philosophical penetration with practical wisdom and moderation. He is neither very original nor brilliant, but eminently sound and judicious He is perfectly at home in the Greek Bible and in the early Christian writers. . . . His position gives him additional weight, for he is linked by two long lives, that of his teacher and grand teacher, to the fountain-head of Christianity.⁷⁴

Schaff also refers to “the clear and weighty testimony of Irenaeus.”⁷⁵

According to F. L. Cross, Irenaeus was “the most considerable Christian theologian of the 2nd century.”⁷⁶ Certainly he did not garner this sterling reputation by being known as error-prone and unreliable. Therefore, not only is there no valid reason to suspect that Irenaeus was mistaken in his statement about the date of Revelation, but due to the specificity of his date for Revelation and his link with the apostle John through Polycarp, there is every reason to consider it as testimony of the highest class.

Irenaeus Parroted by Others

As has already been noted, one common argument from early-date scholars is that Irenaeus' statement did not refer to the time the apocalypse “was seen.” However, after making this argument, supporters of the Neronic date argue in the alternative that all

⁷⁴ Schaff, *History*, 2:750–51; Robinson also commends Irenaeus as a reliable witness (*Redating*, 221).

⁷⁵ Schaff, *History*, 1:834.

⁷⁶ Cross, *Early Christian Fathers*, 110.

the other witnesses in the early church who adopted the Domitianic date for Revelation are of minimal and negative value because all they do is simply parrot Irenaeus.⁷⁷ They contend that none of the witnesses after Irenaeus add any weight, since they all derive from him and simply echo what he said. He is viewed as “the fountain of tradition” that those after him simply repeated.⁷⁸ As Stuart says, “But a careful examination of this matter shews, that the whole concatenation of witnesses in favour of this position [the Domitianic date] hangs upon the testimony of Irenaeus, and their evidence is little more than a mere repetition of what he has said. . . . In such a case, the concatenation of witnesses goes to prove how widely the tradition mentioned by Irenaeus had spread, rather than to establish the degree of credit which it deserved”⁷⁹

There are four major weaknesses with this reasoning. First, if it were true that the late-date support could be traced back to a single source this would not be an insurmountable problem, since the truth of a matter is often traced back to a single source. Every tradition has a beginning point. This is inherent in the nature of historical evidence. However, as has been shown, the testimony of Hegesippus, who was a contemporary of Irenaeus, pre-dates Irenaeus, so Irenaeus is not the single source of this information. Since Eusebius had access to the writings of Hegesippus and used them extensively, one can assume that others knew of his statements about John’s banishment. Therefore, Hegesippus and Irenaeus in tandem were the solid foundation for the late date.

⁷⁷ Albert A. Bell Jr., “The Date of John’s Apocalypse: The Evidence of Some Roman Historians Reconsidered,” *NTS* 25 (1978–79): 93; Barclay Newman, “The Fallacy of the Domitian Hypothesis: Critique of the Irenaeus Source as a Witness for the Contemporary-Historical Approach to the Interpretation of the Apocalypse,” *NTS* 10 (1963–64): 138; William Henry Simcox, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, ed. J. J. S. Perowne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), xlii; Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1883), 237; Charles Cutler Torrey, *The Apocalypse of John* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), 78; Rojas-Flores, “Revelation,” 376.

⁷⁸ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 64.

⁷⁹ Stuart, *Apocalypse*, 221–22.

Second, even if the subsequent witnesses did parrot or echo Irenaeus there is no one in the early church more qualified to provide the date of Revelation. As has already been noted, Irenaeus was from Asia, where Revelation was first circulated, and he was a student of Polycarp who in turn was a disciple of the apostle John. As J. Ritchie Smith notes, “But if it is alleged that the tradition rests upon the testimony of Irenaeus alone, so that we have not many witnesses, but one. If that were true, the single word of Irenaeus would far outweigh all the contrary evidence that is adduced. There is no man in the early church upon whose word we should more confidently rest than upon the word of Irenaeus, no one better qualified to speak with authority here.”⁸⁰

Third, there is strong evidence that Eusebius did not undiscerningly, slavishly follow Irenaeus. Eusebius disagreed with Irenaeus concerning authorship of Revelation.⁸¹ While the present author disagrees with Eusebius’ rejection of Johannine authorship of Revelation, Eusebius’ willingness to part with Irenaeus on this issue shows that he was quite willing to disagree with Irenaeus. Eusebius was no parrot of Irenaeus. Clearly, Eusebius’ agreement with Irenaeus on the matter of the date of Revelation was the result of a reasoned conclusion after weighing all the substantial, relevant data at his disposal including the *Memoirs* of Hegesippus as discussed previously.

Fourth, arguing that all the late-date witnesses after Irenaeus simply repeated what he said in support of the Domitianic date of Revelation is an admission that all the witnesses in the early church understood Irenaeus’ statement as referring to Revelation, not John. The obvious problem for early-date advocates at this point is that one cannot have it both ways. One cannot argue on the one hand that Irenaeus’ statement was ambiguous and easily susceptible to re-interpretation and then argue on the other hand that everyone after him in the early church adopted the Domitianic date because of his

⁸⁰ Smith, “Date,” 305.

⁸¹ Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.38.5; 3.29.1, 2, 5, 6.

statement. This is internally contradictory. If all the witnesses after Irenaeus consistently parroted what he said, then his statement in support of the Domitianic date of Revelation must have been crystal clear to everyone who read it.

Conclusion

The two earliest witnesses to the Domitianic date of Revelation were Hegesippus and Irenaeus. The context of Eusebius' statements about the banishment of John to Patmos by Domitian clearly states that he employed a written source for his information. The only source he names in the context is Hegesippus and his *Memoirs*. Hegesippus is mentioned by name two times. Therefore, Hegesippus is the earliest Christian witness for the late date of Revelation.

The most important early witness for the Domitianic date of Revelation is Irenaeus. He was from the very geographical area where the Apocalypse first circulated. He was directly linked to the apostle John through Polycarp. He was in the best position possible to know the date of Revelation. And Irenaeus was very specific about the date of Revelation. He precisely narrowed the date of Revelation down to a period "at the end of the reign of Domitian." All of these factors point to his testimony as credible and reliable. None of the exegetical, contextual, or historical arguments against the validity and reliability of Irenaeus' statement have any merit. His clear, unambiguous statement of the Domitianic date of Revelation stands secure.

As William Milligan concludes, "It is unnecessary to say more. There need be no hesitation in asserting that in regard to few facts of early Christian antiquity have we a statement more positively or clearly given than that of Irenaeus, that the Seer beheld the visions of his book at the end of Domitian's reign, that is, about A.D. 96."⁸²

Nevertheless, as convincing as the testimony of Hegesippus and Irenaeus

⁸² Milligan, *Discussions*, 79.

remains, the dating of the Apocalypse does not rest upon their testimony alone. There are numerous other strong witnesses from church history for the Domitianic date of Revelation.

CHAPTER 3

EXTERNAL EVIDENCE FROM ADDITIONAL WITNESSES

In this chapter, the earliest, foundational evidence for the date of Revelation will be followed up with twenty additional witnesses whose testimony has bearing on the date of Revelation. The main criterion for the selection of these twenty witnesses is their repeated appearance in the scholarly literature that addresses the date of Revelation. Each of these twenty witnesses will be presented and considered individually. After these witnesses have been examined, a brief historical overview of the date of Revelation by scholars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries will be presented.

Publius Papinius Statius (A.D. 92)¹

Publius Papinius Statius was a Roman poet born in Naples around A.D. 40.² Beginning in A.D. 92 five books he authored were published. This collection of poems is called Statius' *Silvae*.³ This five-volume work contains thirty-two poems addressed to friends as they celebrated various events in life.

One key poem in Statius' *Silvae* is an adulation of the emperor Domitian. Deane James Woods has demonstrated that Statius' *Silvae* and John's Apocalypse

¹ While the testimony of Statius pre-dates that of Hegesippus, he is placed after him because Statius does not deal directly with the date of Revelation. Statius' testimony is corroborative in nature rather than direct.

² Deane James Woods, "Statius' *Silvae* and John's Apocalypse: Some Parallel and Contrastive Motifs" (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1990), 31.

³ *Ibid.*, 31–40. The word *Silvae* is from the Latin *silva* which means "pieces of raw material"; thus, it is a raw material of literary work.

contain numerous parallels.⁴ Woods' thesis is that, "In Statius' *Silvae* and John's Apocalypse, eleven common, yet parallel contrastive motifs are discernable, and which, on inherent, circumstantial grounds, suggest that John may have written his distinctive apocalyptic work with purposive resolve in the light of Statius' 'adulatio' emphases of Domitian in his *Silvae*."⁵

Woods rejects the idea that the correspondence between the *Silvae* and the Apocalypse is coincidental or based on mere perception.⁶ But he also rejects the notion that there is an interdependence or "definite, direct correspondence between the two," that is, that the *Silvae* served as some type of model for John.⁷ As Woods correctly notes, there is no evidence that John had access to any of Statius' *Silvae* while banished to Patmos.⁸ The direct correspondence view also tends to distort John's purpose in writing as well as the prophetic nature of the Apocalypse.⁹

Instead, Woods adopts a circumstantial view to explain the apparent interrelationship between the two sources. He believes that both texts originated from the same context or circumstances arising from the emperor cult in Asia during the reign of Domitian. Thus, he concludes:

John's treatment was selectively purposive in setting forth a theological perspective of divine sovereignty. The 'circumstantial view' therefore proposes

⁴ Woods, "Statius' *Silvae* and John's Apocalypse." W. M. Ramsay in his classic work on the seven churches of Asia Minor also noted the parallels between Statius' *Silvae* and Revelation. W. M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, updated ed., ed. Mark W. Wilson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 49.

⁵ *Ibid.*, i. Woods notes that Statius' *Silvae* and the Apocalypse are from "two diametrically-opposed literary genres" (*ibid.*, 322).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 321.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 321, 324. One other possible explanation of the apparent interrelationship between these sources is that Statius used the Apocalypse. While this is possible, it seems highly unlikely that a Roman poet providing adulation for Domitian would employ a Christian apocalypse.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 324-25.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 325.

the possibility of John ‘using’ Statius’ *Silvae*, and that such a thesis is not only feasible, but one [*sic*] the circumstantial evidence, is most likely probable. . . . Yet in advocating this position, the ‘circumstantial’ view also acknowledges that the circumstantial evidence is *non probare*. It admits that the circumstantial evidence does not ‘prove’ the case, *ipso facto*. Hence, in stating its case, this second thesis is prepared to consider any further evidence which may, at some future time, be marshaled with a view to settling the issue conclusively one way or the other.¹⁰

While the interrelationship between certain themes and motifs and Statius’ *Silvae* and John’s Apocalypse is in no way determinative of the date of Revelation, this evidence does tend to corroborate the A.D. 95 date for Revelation. Woods believes that his research and conclusions add support to the traditional date of Revelation. He notes, “The third significant observation relates to the dating of John’s Apocalypse and a novel approach in studying this, the last book in the canon. This investigation provides supportive evidence for the traditional dating of Revelation: around A.D. 95. . . . Thus, the comparison of the eleven, common yet parallel and contrastive motifs ensconced in Statius’ *Silvae* and John’s Apocalypse has provided a novel, yet legitimate means of gaining significant insights into the truths of part of God’s Word.”¹¹

Clement of Alexandria (ca. 155–220)

Titus Flavius Clemens or Clement of Alexandria is known as the Father of Alexandrian Christianity. He was the head of the Catechetical School of Alexandria but had no great influence on the course of theological development other than his personal influence on Origen. Athens is often regarded as the starting place of his extensive journeys and is therefore usually considered to be his birthplace. His exact date of birth is unknown, but it is generally believed that he was born about A.D. 155 of pagan parents. After traveling to the great centers of learning in the Greek-speaking East, he joined the school of Pantaenus in Alexandria. Clement succeeded Pantaenus as head of the school in

¹⁰ Ibid., 323.

¹¹ Ibid., 319.

about A.D. 190. He fled Alexandria during the persecution under Septimius Severus in about A.D. 202. It is generally agreed that he died about A.D. 215–20 in Asia Minor.¹²

His primary, pertinent testimony concerning the date of Revelation is in his *Quis dives salvetur?* or *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* which is an attractive homily or exposition of Mark 10:17–31 that argues that wealth if used rightly is not un-Christian. The following is Clement’s statement concerning the date of Revelation.

And to give you confidence, when you have thus truly repented, that there remains for you a trustworthy hope for salvation, hear a story that is no mere story, but a true account of John the apostle that has been handed down and preserved in memory. When after the death of the tyrant he removed from the island of Patmos to Ephesus, he used to journey by request to the neighboring districts of the Gentiles, in some places to appoint bishops, in others to regulate whole churches, in others to set among the clergy some one man, it may be, of those indicated by the Spirit.¹³

The key phrase in this section is the chronological indicator that John returned from Patmos to Ephesus “after the death of the tyrant.” Since both Nero and Domitian were tyrants during the later half of the first century, the word “tyrant” could reasonably refer to either of them. Gentry, citing several ancient sources, goes to great lengths to prove that Nero was a terrible tyrant, thereby attempting to demonstrate that he must be the tyrant in this context.¹⁴ However, all agree with this characterization of Nero. The tyranny of Nero is not in question. Yet Domitian too was given the title “tyrant” or described as “tyrannical” by the Roman historians Suetonius and Dio Cassius.¹⁵ Both Nero and Domitian were terrible tyrants.

¹² J. D. Douglas and Philip W. Comfort, eds., *Who’s Who in Christian History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992), 163–64.

¹³ Clement of Alexandria *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 42.

¹⁴ Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Atlanta: American Vision, 1998), 69–83; Gonzalo Rojas-Flores, “The *Book of Revelation* and the First Years of Nero’s Reign,” *Bib* 85 (2004): 377.

¹⁵ Suetonius *Domitian* 1.3; Dio *Roman History* 67.12.5.

Domitian's reign was so cruel and tyrannical that at his death the Roman Senate immediately brought in ladders and tore down Domitian's shields and images before their eyes and dashed them on the ground.¹⁶ They then passed a decree that every inscription of Domitian throughout the Roman Empire should be erased and every record of him obliterated.¹⁷ The issue is not who was more tyrannical, Nero or Domitian, but rather which of these tyrants did Clement have in mind when he wrote these words.

Three key points strongly favor Domitian as the tyrant in this context. First, Clement references a "true account of John the apostle that has been handed down and preserved in memory." He is clearly referring to some well-known tradition in the church. The only extant tradition that had been handed down and preserved at that time was the Domitianic tradition. Had Clement intended someone other than Domitian he no doubt would have named that person specifically in light of the established Hegesippian-Irenaeus tradition of John's banishment under Domitian. Clement's reference to "the tyrant" without any further designation implies that there was a generally known tradition concerning the identity of this Roman emperor.¹⁸ Since the Hegesippian-Irenaeus tradition is apparently the only tradition that existed at that time, one can logically conclude that Clement's designation "the tyrant" without any further description points to Domitian.¹⁹

Second, Eusebius understood that Clement meant Domitian when he referred to the tyrant citing him along with Irenaeus as a witness.²⁰ Eusebius said, "At this time

¹⁶ Suetonius *Domitian* 23.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ E. W. Hengstenberg, *The Revelation of St. John*, trans. Patrick Fairbairn, vol. 1 (New York: Robert Carter and Sons, 1852), ix.

¹⁹ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2005), 708. R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, International Critical Commentary, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), xciii.

²⁰ Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.23.2–19.

that very disciple whom Jesus loved, John, at once Apostle and Evangelist, still remained alive in Asia and administered the churches there, for after the death of Domitian, he had returned from his banishment on the island. And that he remained alive until this very time may fully be confirmed by two witnesses, and these ought to be trustworthy for they represent the orthodoxy of the church, no less persons than Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria.”²¹

Third, later in section 42 of *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* Clement tells a story that corroborates the identity of the tyrant as Domitian. In this account, the apostle John, on horseback, chases a young church leader who has forsaken the faith. The relevant portion says, “But when he recognized John as he advanced, he turned, ashamed, to flight. The other followed with all his might, forgetting his age, crying, ‘Why, my son, dost thou flee from me, thy father, unarmed, old? Son, pity me’”²²

Gentry says this strenuous activity is much more believable activity for a man in his 60s, thus, supporting the Neronian date for John’s exile.²³ He notes that Paul referred to himself as “aged” (Phlm 9) when he was in his late fifties. However, the key issue is what does the text say? The text says that when John gave chase to the young man he forgot his age and appealed to the young man to have pity on him since he was old. A man of sixty, who lived to be about 100, would not have to forget his age to jump on a horse and chase someone down. And a healthy sixty-year-old man is hardly old enough to ask for a favor based on pity. E. B. Elliott agrees: “And Nero it can scarcely be: since at the time of Nero’s persecution, St. John was by no means an infirm old man; being probably not much above, if indeed so much as, sixty years of age. Thus it must rather

²¹ Ibid., 3.23.1–2.

²² Clement of Alexandria *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 42.

²³ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 83–84; idem, *The Beast of Revelation* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), 161–62.

have been the tyrant *Domitian*.²⁴ Moreover, the word Paul used of himself of in Phlm 9 (“aged”) is the word *πρεσβύτης*; whereas in Clement the word John used to describe his age is *γέρων*. While the age parameters for these different words are not precise, *πρεσβύτης* was normally used for a man between the age of fifty to fifty-six who was a senior or aged,²⁵ while *γέρων* was the term for an “elderly/old man” between 60–80 years old (John 3:4).²⁶ Therefore, the word *γέρων* could be used by John to describe himself during the reign of Nero or Domitian. However, the fact that he asks the young man to have pity or mercy on him strongly suggests that he was very advanced in years when this event transpired. The wording of the text supports the thesis that “the tyrant” is Domitian, not Nero. These statements are further evidence for Clement as a late-date advocate.

Gentry raises a final argument in an attempt to prove that Clement’s reference to the tyrant was a reference to Nero. He notes that in his *Miscellanies* or *Stromata*²⁷ Clement makes a statement about the chronology of apostolic revelation. In the relevant text, Clement said: “For the teaching of our Lord at His advent, beginning with Augustus and Tiberius, was completed in the middle of the times of Tiberius. And that of the apostles, embracing the ministry of Paul, ends with Nero.”²⁸

Concerning this statement by Clement, Gentry says, “It is patently clear in the

²⁴ E. B. Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticæ; or a Commentary on the Apocalypse, Critical and Historical; Including Also an Examination of the Chief Prophecies of Daniel*, 4th ed., vol. 1 (London: Seeleys, 1851), 33.

²⁵ BDAG, 863.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 195.

²⁷ The word *Stromata* or *Stromateis* (Στρωματεῖς) was a common title in that day for writings without any clear order and containing varied subject matter. John Baillie, John T. McNeill, and Henry P. Van Dusen, eds., *Alexandrian Christianity*. Library of Christian Classics, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 17. The *Stromata*, which was written in about A.D. 190, contains eight books and is a collection of undigested literary material on a variety of topics. It was never completed by Clement.

²⁸ Clement of Alexandria *Miscellanies* 7.17.

very text originally under question (*Who is the Rich Man?* 42), as well as in other places (*Miscellanies* 6:13), that Clement considers the Apostle John as the author of Revelation. And here at *Miscellanies* 7:17 it is equally plain that he also holds that all revelation given through the apostles ceased under Nero. How could he have made this statement if John's Revelation had been written about 25 years after Nero?"²⁹

In the context of *Miscellanies* 7.17, Clement's purpose was to show that the tradition of Jesus and the apostles preceded the heresies and false teachers Clement was combating. He was demonstrating that the teachings of the heretics were new inventions that came much later when compared with the apostolic tradition. The serious problem with using this statement of Clement to prove that all apostolic revelation ceased during the reign of Nero is that in the very immediate context of this statement Clement made two other historical statements that are erroneous at worst and imprecise at best.

First, in the statement that is used to prove that the apostolic revelation ceased with Nero, Clement said that the ministry of Jesus began with Augustus and Tiberias. However, the earthly ministry of Christ did not begin during the reign of Augustus, but in the reign of Tiberias. Clement also said that the ministry of Jesus was completed in the middle of the times of Tiberius. But Tiberius Caesar reigned from A.D. 14–37. The earthly ministry of Jesus extended to at least A.D. 30 and probably to A.D. 33.³⁰ Four years before the end of Tiberius' reign, assuming the A.D. 33 date, is hardly in the middle of his times.

Second, in the very next paragraph of *Miscellanies* 7.17, in discussing various heretics, Clement said, "Likewise they allege that Valentius was a hearer of Theudas.

²⁹ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 84–85.

³⁰ Clement placed the death of Jesus forty-two years and three months before the destruction of Jerusalem in August A.D. 70 which would be the spring of A.D. 28. Clement of Alexandria *Miscellanies* 1.21. This date is too early under any calculation of the time of Jesus' death. See Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), 45–63.

And he was a pupil of Paul. For Marcion, who arose in the same age with them, lived as an old man with the younger [heretics]. And after him Simon heard for a little the preaching of Peter.” Clement appears to say that Marcion was an old man while these other heretics were young men. But this is not historically accurate. Marcion was not born until about A.D. 110, while Valentius flourished in the first half of the second century. Clement also placed Simon Magus *after* Marcion who was not born until A.D. 110 in Pontus. Yet, Simon Magus is mentioned in Acts 8 in a setting which probably occurred about seventy-five years earlier in the mid-A.D. 30s. In one translation of Clement, the editor includes a footnote that attempts to explain this error by alleging that Clement was speaking of these heretics in ascending order, but this is not at all clear from the text.³¹ It appears that Clement was simply grouping people together without any attempt to be chronologically exact or precise.

Third, earlier in his *Miscellanies*, Clement said that the earthly ministry of Jesus lasted for only one year, that is, He was crucified in the same year He was baptized.³² Clement based this conclusion on Jesus’ reference to His ministry when He quoted Isa 61:2 in Luke 4:18–19. Jesus said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.” Clement believed that Jesus’ reference to “the favorable year of the Lord” indicated that His earthly ministry was limited to one year. Concerning the length of Jesus’ ministry, Clement said:

And our Lord was born in the twenty-eighth year, when first the census was ordered to be taken in the reign of Augustus. And to prove that this is true, it is written in the Gospel by Luke as follows: ‘And in the fifteenth year, in the reign

³¹ Clement of Alexandria, *The Writings of Clement of Alexandria*, trans. William Wilson, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1869), 486–87, n. 3.

³² Clement of Alexandria *Miscellanies* 1.21.146.

of Tiberius Caesar, the word of the Lord came to John, the son of Zacharias.’ And again in the same book: ‘And Jesus was coming to His baptism, being about thirty years old,’ and so on. And that it was necessary for Him to preach only a year, this also is written: ‘He hath sent Me to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.’ This both the prophet spake, and the Gospel. Accordingly, in fifteen years of Tiberius and fifteen years of Augustus; so were completed the thirty years till the time He suffered. And from the time that He suffered till the destruction of Jerusalem are forty-two years and three months.³³

There are few New Testament scholars today who would agree with this time frame for the ministry of Jesus.³⁴ Clement was clearly in error on this matter. Gentry is quick to point out the singular error of Irenaeus concerning the age of Jesus and the duration of His earthly ministry, and therefore completely discount his testimony about the date of Revelation.³⁵ However, he makes no mention of the fact that Clement too erred in the matter of the duration of Christ’s earthly ministry. If such an error discounts the testimony of Irenaeus for Gentry should it not have the same impact on his acceptance of the testimony of Clement? Moreover, in the context of *Miscellanies* 7:17 which Gentry uses to support the early date, Clement made numerous historical errors and/or imprecise chronological statements.

What emerges from this brief summary is that Clement often made statements about the timing of persons or events that are contrary to the known facts of history and other statements that betray a great deal of historical imprecision. In reference to the statement in *Miscellanies* 7.17, Clement certainly had to know that John and many of the other disciples lived beyond the time of Nero and continued to teach and preach. Did he intend to say categorically that all the teaching of the apostles ended with Nero? If so, this was an error. For we know that John continued to teach in the area in and around Ephesus till the time of Trajan.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects*, 46–48.

³⁵ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 63–64.

However, it is much more likely that in the context, where Clement is obviously imprecise on other chronological matters and where he was trying to push the apostolic tradition as far back as he could to contrast it with the new inventions of the heretics, that in a broad statement he pointed to Nero's reign as the general time of the completion of the apostles' teaching. In this context, where other matters of timing are very fluid, to take his words as a rigid, precise statement of the time when all apostolic revelation ceased is giving this statement much more precision than the context allows. In the context of *Miscellanies* 7.17, where Clement's statement is surrounded by other imprecise and even erroneous statements it would be unwise to insist from this one statement that he believed that Revelation was written during the reign of Nero.

In spite of Gentry's claim that Clement supported the early date for Revelation, Clement's statement from *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* stands as his clearest indication of what he believed about the date of Revelation. And for that reason he remains on the list of supporters for the late date of Revelation.

Tertullian (ca. 150–212)

Tertullian, or Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, was born near the middle of the second century at Carthage. He was probably from a middle class family and received a good education. He practiced law at some time and was a Latin scholar with equal skill in Greek. Tertullian converted to Christianity in his late thirties. With the exception of Augustine, he is the most important ecclesiastical author in Latin. He is known as the "founder of Latin Christian doctrine."³⁶

While Tertullian does not specifically say that John was banished to Patmos

³⁶ Douglas and Comfort, *Who's Who in Christian History*, 665–66; John D. Woodbridge, ed., *Great Leaders of the Christian Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 50–54; Tertullian, *Apology, De Spectaculis*, trans. T. R. Glover, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), xiv–xx.

during the reign of Domitian, he is credited by Jerome with doing so.³⁷ Also, Eusebius quotes Tertullian's *Apology* 5, which was written in A.D. 197, and then follows with his own statements that reveal that he interpreted Tertullian as following the prevailing tradition of exile under Domitian.³⁸

Tertullian does mention the liberation of those who were banished by Domitian.³⁹ While he does not mention John, the connection of Domitian with banishment corroborates the exile of John to Patmos. The Latin word Tertullian used for banishment is *relegaverat*, and the verb *relego* is used elsewhere by Tertullian of John's banishment to Patmos.⁴⁰

Early-date advocates seize upon another statement by Tertullian that they believe supports their view. "But if thou art near to Italy, thou hast Rome, where we also have an authority close at hand. What an happy Church is that! on which the Apostles poured out all their doctrine, with their blood: where Peter had a like Passion with the Lord; where Paul hath for his crown the same death with John; where the Apostle John was plunged into burning oil, and suffered nothing, and was afterwards banished to an island."⁴¹

Gentry cites this statement as evidence that John's banishment occurred at the same time as the martyrdom of Peter and Paul.⁴² But this is making the statement say more than was intended. The temporal proximity of these events to one another is not the

³⁷ Jerome *Against Jovinianus* 1.26.

³⁸ Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.20.7–8; 3.32.1.

³⁹ Tertullian *Apology* 5.4.

⁴⁰ Elliott, *Horae*, 1:33, n. 1; Tertullian *Prescription Against Heretics* 36.

⁴¹ Tertullian *Prescription Against Heretics* 36.

⁴² Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 95. Jerome cites Tertullian and the story about the boiling oil and then immediately follows the story with a statement that John wrote the Apocalypse on Patmos where he had been banished by Domitian (*Against Jovinianus* 1.26). Clearly, Jerome made no chronological connection between the martyrdom of Peter and Paul and the banishment of John.

issue. The focus in these words is that all three events involving Peter, Paul, and John occurred in the same place (locality) not on when they occurred (chronology). In the context, the focus is on the city of Rome. As J. Ritchie Smith notes, “The words obviously contain no indication that the martyrdom of Peter and Paul and the persecution of John occurred at the same time, but only that they occurred as the same place.”⁴³

The Muratorian Canon (ca. 170)

The Muratorian Fragment or Canon as it came to be known was discovered in 1740 by Ludavico Antonio Muratori in the Ambrosian Library in Milan. The Muratorian Fragment is important in establishing the canon of New Testament Scripture since it contains the oldest known list of the New Testament books.

The manuscript states in lines 47–59,

. . . since the blessed Apostle Paul himself—following the pattern of his predecessor John—writes, giving their names, to not more than seven churches, in this order: To the Corinthians a first; to the Ephesians a second; to the Philippians a third; to the Colossians a fourth; to the Galatians a fifth; to the Thessalonians a sixth; to the Romans a seventh. But although there is one more each to the Corinthians and to the Thessalonians, for the sake of reproof, nevertheless it is obvious that one church is dispersed over the whole globe of the earth. For also John, in his Apocalypse, while writing to seven churches, yet speaks to all (lines 47–59).⁴⁴

Gentry asserts that this means that John wrote to the seven churches in Asia before Paul wrote to the seven churches he addressed. He says this manuscript “virtually demands the early date for Revelation.”⁴⁵ Gentry follows the Muratorian Fragment and lists the seven churches addressed by Paul as Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi,

⁴³ J. Ritchie Smith, “The Date of the Apocalypse,” *BSac* 45 (1988): 301.

⁴⁴ Krister Stendahl, “The Apocalypse of John and the Epistles of Paul in the Muratorian Fragment,” in *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation*, ed. W. Klassen and G. F. Snyder (Snyder, NY: Harper Publishers, 1962), 239. The translation of the Muratorian Fragment is from Stendahl.

⁴⁵ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 94.

Colossae, and Thessalonica.⁴⁶ However, following Gentry's argument would mean that Revelation must have been written earlier than the last of these seven Pauline epistles, which would be the epistle to the Philippians, which is normally dated near the end of Paul's two-year period of house arrest in Rome in A.D. 61–62.⁴⁷ Therefore, Revelation would have to have been written in A.D. 62 at the latest. Yet, Gentry contends that Revelation was not written earlier than November, A.D. 64, which marked the outbreak of the Neronian persecution.⁴⁸ Moreover, this understanding of the Muratorian Fragment is fatal to the view that John was banished by Nero since Nero's persecution did not begin until A.D. 64. Gentry's own argument here goes against him. The obvious point of the Muratorian Canon in referring to John as Paul's predecessor is not that John wrote before Paul but simply that John was called to the apostleship earlier than Paul (Gal 1:17).⁴⁹

Origen (ca. 185–254)

Origenes Adamantius was a disciple of Clement of Alexandria. He is recognized as the best Christian scholar in the first half of the third century. He was born in Alexandria in 185 and died in Tyre about 254. He assumed leadership of the catechetical school in Alexandria as the successor to Clement. In A.D. 232 he was expelled from Alexandria and took up residence at Caesarea in Israel, founding a school there and resuming his writing.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 555.

⁴⁸ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 336.

⁴⁹ Smith, "Date," 302; William Milligan, *Discussions on the Apocalypse* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1893), 87.

⁵⁰ Woodbridge, *Great Leaders*, 56.

Origen's relevant statement on the date of Revelation came from comments he made on Matt 16:6. In those comments he said, "The King of the Romans, as tradition teaches, condemned John, who bore testimony, on account of the word of truth, to the isle of Patmos."⁵¹ The difficulty in this statement, as with Clement of Alexandria, is that Origen does not identify who he means by "The King of the Romans." However, the phrase "as tradition teaches" points to Domitian as the King of the Romans because the tradition to which Origen alludes must have been handed down from Hegesippus and Irenaeus because at this time there was no other settled tradition in the church.⁵² Knowing this tradition, had Origen intended someone other than Domitian he most likely would have named that person to correct any perceived mistake.

William Henry Simcox, an early-date proponent, notes: "But, if Origen knew a tradition on this subject, he does not give it: and in default of evidence to the contrary, it is presumable that the tradition was the usual or Irenaeian one—that if it named anybody it named Domitian."⁵³ Hengstenberg says, "Origen is silent respecting the name, because he was generally known, and the blank was easily supplied from the tradition, to which he refers."⁵⁴ R. H. Charles follows this same line of logical reasoning: "Neither in Clement nor Origen is Domitian's name given, but it may be presumed that it was in the mind of these writers."⁵⁵ For this reason Origen can reasonably be included in the list of late-date supporters.

⁵¹ Origen *Commentary on Matthew 16:6* [PG 13:1385–86].

⁵² Smith, "Date," 302.

⁵³ William Henry Simcox, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, ed. J. J. S. Perowne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), xxxvi.

⁵⁴ Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, 1:x; cf. Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes and Indices*, 3d ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1909), xcvi.

⁵⁵ R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, International Critical Commentary, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), xciii; Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 708.

Dio Cassius (ca. 155–235)

Cassius Dio Cocceianus was a native of Bithynia. He was a near relative, possibly a grandson, of the famous orator, Dio Chrysostom, after whom he received the names Dio and Cocceianus. His father was a Roman senator and served as governor of Cilicia and Dalmatia. Few details are known concerning Dio's life. The date of his birth is usually placed about A.D. 155. After his father's death he came to Rome about the year 180 and was admitted to the Senate. He was placed over the Asian cities of Pergamum and Smyrna, became proconsul of Africa, and later served successively as governor of the imperial provinces of Dalmatia and Upper Pannonia.⁵⁶

Dio Cassius is best known as a Roman historian. His most famous work is his *Roman History*, which originally appeared in eighty books. While Dio does not specifically mention John's banishment during the reign of Domitian he does refer three times to Domitian's practice of banishment.⁵⁷ Dio even notes the release of exiles immediately after Domitian's death. This secular testimony solidly corroborates the ecclesiastical tradition of John's banishment under Domitian and liberation when Domitian died.

Victorinus (d. A.D. 304)

Victorinus was the bishop of Pettau in Pannonia. He wrote the earliest known Latin commentary on Revelation. He is widely recognized as the first great exegete of the Western church. Victorinus suffered martyrdom under Diocletian. His commentary on the Apocalypse holds the honor of being the oldest extant commentary on Revelation. As a commentator on the Apocalypse, one can assume that he took a great interest in the date the book was written.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Dio, *Roman History*, trans. Earnest Cary, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914–27), vii–x.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.12.3–4; 67.12.5; 67.14.1–3.

⁵⁸ Milligan, *Discussions*, 81.

Victorinus made two statements in his commentary in support of the Domitianic date of Revelation. First, in his *Commentary on the Apocalypse* at Revelation 10:11, he noted: “He says this, because when John said these things he was in the island of Patmos, condemned to the labor of the mines by Caesar Domitian. There, therefore, he saw the Apocalypse; and when grown old, he thought that he should at length receive his quittance by suffering, Domitian being killed, all his judgments were discharged. And John being dismissed from the mines, thus subsequently delivered the same Apocalypse which he had received from God.”⁵⁹

Second, commenting further upon Rev 17:10, Victorinus states, “The time must be understood in which the written Apocalypse was published, since then reigned Caesar Domitian; but before him had been Titus his brother, and Vespasian, Otho, Vitellius, and Galba. These are the five who have fallen. One remains, under whom the Apocalypse was written—Domitian, to wit.”⁶⁰ Concerning the testimony of Victorinus, Hengstenberg says, “But in this work the composition of the Apoclaypse under Domitian, during the exile in Patmos, is spoken of as a matter of undoubted certainty.”⁶¹ The plain, uncontroverted testimony of Victorinus adds another strong plank of support to the Domitianic date of Revelation.

Eusebius Pamphili (ca. 260–340)

Eusebius was Bishop of Caesarea in Israel, and is known as “the Father of Church History” due to his classic work *Ecclesiastical History*. Several times in his

⁵⁹ Victorinus *Apocalypse* 10:11 [PL 5:333]. Gentry questions the credibility of the clear statement of Victorinus because Victorinus says that John, who would have been in his 90s at the time, was working the mines on Patmos. Concerning this statement by Victorinus, Gentry says, “Such difficulties tax to the very limit the credulity of the reference” (*Before Jerusalem*, 100). But nine pages later, Gentry says that Victorinus “is a sure witness” who gave “unambiguous testimony” concerning the late date (*ibid.*, 109).

⁶⁰ Victorinus *Apocalypse* 17:10.

⁶¹ Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, 1:xiii.

writings he expressly dated the Apocalypse to the reign of Domitian. His witness is especially weighty because he had much of the early Christian literature at his disposal.⁶² Apparently, he was not even aware of a contrary tradition to the Domitianic date.⁶³

Hengstenberg observes: “Never once does Eusebius point, by so much as a single syllable, to any other view regarding the author of John’s exile, and the time of the composition of the Apocalypse. So that there must then in this respect have been perfect unanimity in the church.”⁶⁴ Eusebius’ total silence about any view other than the late date is significant.

Concerning Domitian’s cruelty, Eusebius wrote: “At this time, the story goes, the Apostle and Evangelist John was still alive, and was condemned to live on the island of Patmos for his witness to the divine word.”⁶⁵ Eusebius wrote about Revelation as follows:

After Domitian had reigned fifteen years, Nerva succeeded. The sentences of Domitian were annulled, and the Roman Senate decreed the return of those who had been unjustly banished and restoration of their property. Those who committed the story of those times to writing relate it. At that time, too, the story of the ancient Christians relates that the Apostle John, after his banishment to the island, took up his abode at Ephesus.⁶⁶

In another section he continues:

At this time that very disciple whom Jesus loved, John, at once Apostle and Evangelist, still remained alive in Asia and administered the churches there, for after the death of Domitian, he had returned from his banishment on the island. And that he remained alive until this very time may fully be confirmed by two

⁶² Douglas and Comfort, *Who’s Who in Christian History*, 239.

⁶³ Smith, “Date,” 303. As was noted earlier, Eusebius had access to an extensive library of many of the key witnesses in the early church. Carriker, *Library of Eusebius*, 1–36. This makes him an especially important and reliable witness.

⁶⁴ Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, 1:xii.

⁶⁵ Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.18.1.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.20.8–9.

witnesses, and these ought to be trustworthy for they represent the orthodoxy of the church, no less persons than Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria.⁶⁷

In the *Chronicle* (*Chronicorum liber primus*), Eusebius lists these events in the fourteenth year of Domitian: “Persecution of Christians and under him the apostle John is banished to Patmos and sees his Apocalypse, as Irenaeus mentions.”⁶⁸ The fourteenth year of Domitian would be either A.D. 94 or 95. The specificity of the date to this particular year strongly supports the reliability of Eusebius’ testimony. Eusebius also appealed to Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and “the story of the ancient Christians” to prove that John returned from Patmos after the death of Domitian.⁶⁹

Proponents of the Neronic date raise three counter arguments to the clear testimony of Eusebius. First, they point out that Eusebius maintained doubts concerning Johannine authorship of Revelation. This is often used in an attempt to undermine his credibility about the date of Revelation. Concerning Eusebius’ statements about the authorship and date of Revelation, Gentry says, “If Eusebius believed one report, why not the other? The two issues—(1) that the Apostle John wrote Revelation (2) during Domitian’s reign—are bound up together in Irenaeus. To doubt one necessarily would seem to entail the doubting of the other.”⁷⁰ However, this in no way impairs Eusebius’ ability to accurately reflect the traditions of the church on the date of its composition.

Many in the early church held that the apostle John wrote Revelation.⁷¹ But

⁶⁷ Ibid., 3.23.1–2.

⁶⁸ Eusebius, PG 68:551–52.

⁶⁹ Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.20.7–9; 3.23.1–6. The two earliest known commentaries on Revelation are by Melito, bishop of Sardis, who died about A.D. 190, and Hippolytus. Both commentaries, which were originally written in Greek, are lost. Eusebius, however, made reference to the commentary on Revelation by Melito of Sardis (ibid., 4.26.2). While there is no way of knowing if Melito addressed the issue of the date of Revelation, if he did, one could assume that he favored the late date since Eusebius cites no other view.

⁷⁰ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 103.

⁷¹ Justin Martyr *Dialogue with Trypho* 81.4; Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 4.20.11; Tertullian *Against Marcion* 3.14.3.

there were other traditions in the early church about the authorship of Revelation. Marcion, the second-century Gnostic was the first to reject apostolic authorship of the Apocalypse. Dionysius the Great, bishop of Alexandria in the mid-third century, also believed that another John, not the apostle, wrote Revelation.⁷² Against this background of divergent opinion, Eusebius too rejected apostolic authorship of the Apocalypse.⁷³

However, the issue of the date of Revelation was much different than the issue of authorship in the early church. Concerning the date of Revelation, the Domitianic date was apparently the only tradition Eusebius knew. There was no reason for him to even consider doubting this universal tradition?

Second, proponents of the Neronic date argue that Eusebius, and all the other Domitianic witnesses after Irenaeus, are irrelevant because they are simply mimicking Irenaeus' view without any critical testing of his statement.⁷⁴ However, as was noted in chapter one of this dissertation, Eusebius relied upon the testimony of Hegesippus, Irenaeus, and Clement of Alexandria for the date of Revelation, not Irenaeus alone. Eusebius adopted the Domitianic date of Revelation based on what he considered orthodox, reliable testimony from his predecessors. Eusebius specifically said, "At this time that very disciple whom Jesus loved, John, at once Apostle and Evangelist, still remained alive in Asia and administered the churches there, for after the death of Domitian, he had returned from his banishment on the island. And that he remained alive until this very time may fully be confirmed by two witnesses, and *these ought to be*

⁷² The view of Dionysius is presented in Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 7.25.

⁷³ Osborne provides an excellent discussion of the issues surrounding the authorship of the Apocalypse (*Revelation*, 2–6).

⁷⁴ David Chilton, *Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), 4; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 64–67.

*trustworthy for they represent the orthodoxy of the church, no less persons than Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria.*⁷⁵

Eusebius accepted the testimony of Hegesippus, Irenaeus, and Clement of Alexandria because he considered them to be trustworthy witnesses and since he was completely unaware of any other view of the date of Revelation. Rather than being a weakness for the Domitianic date, Eusebius' statement points strongly in the direction of unanimity in the early church for the late date of Revelation.

Third, Gentry, after admitting that Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* clearly believed John was banished under Domitian, points out that in his *The Proof of the Gospel* Eusebius speaks of the martyrdom of Peter and Paul in the same sentence with the banishment of John.⁷⁶ He contends that this means that Eusebius believed these events were contemporaneous, thus demonstrating that Eusebius later held to a Neronic date for John's banishment.⁷⁷

The full context of the statement in *The Proof of the Gospel* reveals that Eusebius did not believe that John was banished in the late 60s. In the relevant section of *The Proof of the Gospel*, Eusebius is chronicling the martyrdom and mistreatment of the early leaders of the church as an apologetic for Christianity. After recounting the martyrdom of Stephen and James, the brother of John, Eusebius said: "Afterwards James, the Lord's brother, whom of old the people of Jerusalem called 'the Just' for his extraordinary virtue, being asked by the chief priests, and teachers of the Jews what he thought about Christ, and answering that He was the Son of God, was also stoned by

⁷⁵ Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.23.1–2 [italics added].

⁷⁶ *The Proof of the Gospel* is sometimes referred to as *Evangelical Demonstrations* (*Demonstratio Evangelica*). It was probably written in A.D. 314–18 and originally consisted of twenty books but only ten are extant. It was written as an apologetic to answer reasonable questions by Jews and Greeks about Christianity. Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel*, ed. W. J. Ferrar, trans. W. J. Ferrar (New York: Macmillan, 1920; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), ix.

⁷⁷ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 103–4.

them. Peter was crucified head downwards at Rome, Paul beheaded, and John exiled to an island.⁷⁸

Gentry claims that this text indicates that John was exiled at the same time Paul and Peter were martyred. But since the martyrdom of James is mentioned in the previous sentence does he also believe that James died at the same time as Peter and Paul? James, the Lord's brother, was martyred in Jerusalem in about A.D. 62.⁷⁹ Peter and John were killed in Rome in about A.D. 67 or 68. John was banished to Patmos in the early-mid A.D. 90s. This statement by Eusebius was not intended to say that all these events occurred contemporaneously. History tells us that they did not.

Eusebius' statement does not say or even imply that John was banished at the same time Peter and Paul were martyred. Rather, it points in the opposite direction. The fact that Peter and Paul were martyred and John was banished argues for their sentencing and punishment at different times. In *The Proof of the Gospel*, it appears that Eusebius was simply stating in one sentence the fact of the suffering of these three great apostles. He never says that the events were contemporaneous.⁸⁰ Gentry has taken the text out of its immediate context and attempted to make it say something different than what was originally intended by Eusebius.

Moreover, even if Gentry's interpretation of this statement were accepted, it would undermine his own view of when Revelation was written. According to church tradition, Peter and Paul were both martyred in Rome in A.D. 67 or 68.⁸¹ If the

⁷⁸ Eusebius *Proof of the Gospel* 3.5.116.

⁷⁹ Josephus *Antiquities* 20.9.1.

⁸⁰ Elliott, *Horae*, 1:40, n. 1.

⁸¹ Some argue for a date as early as A.D. 64 for the martyrdom of Paul, but Peter's death is usually placed in 68. Guthrie, *Introduction*, 665, 850. But since Paul and Peter suffered martyrdom near the same time in Rome (*1 Clement* 5–6), and Peter's martyrdom is generally dated in 68, the 68 date is preferred for the death of both apostles.

martyrdom of Peter and Paul and the banishment of John were contemporaneous as Gentry alleges, then John would have been banished to Patmos in A.D. 67 or 68. But this is two or three years too late for Gentry's position since he believes that John wrote Revelation on the island of Patmos in A.D. 65–66. How could John have written Revelation in A.D. 65–66 on the island of Patmos if he was not exiled there until A.D. 67 or 68?

In light of Eusebius' numerous, clear, unambiguous statements in his *Ecclesiastical History* of John's banishment under Domitian, and his entry in the *Chronicon* to the same effect, it is clear that he is a solid witness for the Domitianic date of Revelation. Using this statement from *The Proof of the Gospel* as a basis for the notion that Eusebius later changed his mind about the date of Revelation is weak at best.

Epiphanius (ca. 315-403)

The first break in the prevailing Domitianic tradition came from Epiphanius, a friend of Jerome, who was appointed Metropolitan bishop of Salamis in Cyprus in A.D. 367.⁸² Twice in his writings Epiphanius asserts that John was banished under the Roman emperor Claudius who reigned from A.D. 41–54.⁸³ In an effort to gain external support, early-date advocates speculate that when Epiphanius wrote "Claudius" he actually meant "Nero" since Nero was part of Claudius's name and Claudius was part of Nero's name.⁸⁴ On the other hand, some late-date advocates have suggested that Epiphanius actually meant "Domitian" when he referred to "Claudius."⁸⁵ The problem with both of these arguments is that there is simply no evidence to support them.

⁸² Douglas and Comfort, *Who's Who in Christian History*, 232.

⁸³ Epiphanius *Heresies* 51.13, 33 [PG 41:909–10, 949–50].

⁸⁴ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 104.

⁸⁵ B. W. Johnson, *A Vision of the Ages*, 6th ed. (Dallas: Eugene S. Smith, n.d.), 18.

Assuming that Epiphanius meant Claudius, there are three significant problems with this identification. First, Epiphanius was frequently inaccurate.⁸⁶ Almost no one today gives any credence to his identification. Hort refers to Epiphanius as “a careless and confused writer.”⁸⁷ Second, Claudius reigned from A.D. 41–54. At this time probably only one of the seven churches of Asia Minor listed in Rev 1:11 even existed, and there is no evidence that John was in Asia Minor that early.⁸⁸ Third, during the reign of Claudius there was no imperial persecution. Therefore, the testimony of Epiphanius carries no weight and should be completely rejected as an anomaly from a confused writer.

Jerome (ca. 331–420)

Jerome was a giant of the ancient church. He is recognized as the most learned man in the Latin-speaking church of the late fourth century.⁸⁹ He was born at Stridon in Dalmatia and Pannonia about A.D. 331. Jerome was proficient in several languages. His literary accomplishments were prolific. At the direction of Pope Damasus, he translated the Scripture into Latin (the Vulgate). In 386 he settled in Bethlehem where he died on September 30, 420.⁹⁰

In two places Jerome stated clearly that John was banished to the island of Patmos under Domitian. First, in his *Against Jovinianus* (A.D. 393), Jerome wrote, “John is both an Apostle and an Evangelist, and a prophet. An Apostle, because he wrote to the Churches as a master; and Evangelist, because he composed a Gospel, a thing which

⁸⁶ Smith, “Date,” 303.

⁸⁷ F. J. A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John, I–III* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1908), xviii; Elliott, *Horae*, 1:37.

⁸⁸ Elliott, *Horae*, 1:37–38; Johnson, *Vision*, 18–19.

⁸⁹ Woodbridge, *Great Leaders*, 77.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 78–80.

no other of the Apostles, excepting Matthew, did; a prophet, for he saw in the island of Patmos, to which he had been banished by the Emperor Domitian as a martyr for the Lord, an Apocalypse containing boundless mysteries of the future.”⁹¹

Second, Jerome’s most specific statement is found in his *Lives of Illustrious Men*, where he writes about John’s banishment.

In the fourteenth year then after Nero, Domitian having raised a second persecution, he was banished to the island of Patmos, and wrote the Apocalypse, on which Justin Martyr and Irenaeus afterwards wrote commentaries. But Domitian having been put to death and his acts, on account of his excessive cruelty, having been annulled by the senate, he returned to Ephesus under Pertinax and continuing there until the time of the emperor Trajan, founded and built churches throughout all Asia, and, worn out by old age, died in the sixty-eighth year after our Lord’s passion and was buried near the same city.⁹²

Jerome is another strong link in the steady chain of late-date supporters for Revelation.

Sulpicius Severus (ca. 400)

Sulpicius Severus was a historian and hagiographer. He was born of noble parents in Aquitaine about A.D. 360 and died about 420–25. He was an eloquent lawyer, but after the death of his wife in 390 he renounced his career and withdrew to monastic seclusion.⁹³ His best-known writing was *The Chronicle* (*Chronicorum libri duo*) or *Sacred History* (*Historia sacra*), in which he traced historical events from creation to A.D. 400.

In the *Sacred History* at the appropriate place, Severus stated, “Then, after an interval, Domitian, the son of Vespasian, persecuted the Christians. At this time, he

⁹¹ Jerome *Against Jovinianus* 1:26.

⁹² Jerome *Lives of Illustrious Men* 9.6–7. In *Illustrious Men* 61, Jerome mentions a commentary by Hippolytus, which is no longer extant, that is one of the two oldest commentaries on Revelation. While there is no way of knowing if Hippolytus discussed the date of Revelation, if he did, one can assume he accepted the Domitianic date since Jerome fails to mention any other date.

⁹³ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, ed., *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, trans. Alexander Roberts, vol. 11 (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1887–94; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955), 1.

banished John the Apostle and Evangelist to the island of Patmos. There he, secret mysteries having been revealed to him, wrote and published his book of the holy Revelation, which indeed is either foolishly or impiously not accepted by many.”⁹⁴ Sulpicius Severus is another strong witness to buttress the late date for Revelation.

Paulus Orosius (early 5th century)

Paulus Orosius was born in Spain about A.D. 390 and died some time after A.D. 418. Orosius was a Latin apologist, who first appeared in history at Hippo in North Africa in 414 as a young priest consulting Augustine.⁹⁵ In about 415 he lived with Jerome having been sent to him from Augustine. Thus, he had strong connections to two of the giants in the early history of the church. Orosius’ work, *Seven Books of History against the Pagans* is considered the first universal chronicle by a Christian scholar.⁹⁶

Orosius in his work, *Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, plainly supports the late date of Revelation.

In the eight hundred and thirtieth year after the founding of the City, Domitian, the ninth emperor after Augustus, succeeded his brother, Titus, to the throne. . . . But Domitian, elated by the most distorted form of vanity, held a triumph nominally over the enemy who had been overcome, but actually over the loss of his legions. This same emperor, crazed by his pride because of which he wished to be worshiped as a god, was the first emperor after Nero to order a persecution against the Christians to be carried on. Also at this time, the most blessed Apostle John was banished to the island of Patmos. Also among the Jews, an order was given that the race of David be searched out and killed by cruel tortures and bloody inquisitions, since the holy prophets were both hated and

⁹⁴ Sulpicius Severus *Sacred History* 2.31. Gentry notes that in *Sacred History* 2.28–29 Sulpicius Severus stated that Rev 13 related to Nero (*Before Jerusalem*, 79). However, Severus’ point in this section was that Nero, who committed suicide, would be healed from his mortal wound and come back to life before the Antichrist appeared. His view expressed the *Nero Redivivus* myth. Severus’ statement in *Sacred History* 2.31 in support of the late date was clearly his view on the date of Revelation.

⁹⁵ Douglas and Comfort, *Who’s Who in Christian History*, 522.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

believed, as if some day there would be One from the seed of David who could acquire the throne.⁹⁷

Paulus Orosius, a close companion of both Augustine and Jerome, is another name that can be added to the external evidence for the Domitianic date of Revelation.⁹⁸

Primasius, Bishop of Hadrumentum (ca. 540)

Primasius was bishop of Hadrumentum in North Africa until his death about A.D. 560. After Victorinus, his commentary on Revelation is the next oldest, extant Latin commentary. The commentary is largely based on an earlier commentary that is no longer extant, by Tyconius, a Donatist scholar who died about A.D. 400.⁹⁹ In the preface to his commentary on the Apocalypse, Primasius states that John received his apocalyptic visions while he was banished and imprisoned in the mines on the island of Patmos under Caesar Domitian.¹⁰⁰

Syriac Witnesses (6th and 7th centuries)

A superscription in two Syriac versions of Revelation state that John was exiled by Nero. It is generally agreed that they belong to the sixth century and seventh century, respectively, but were first published in 1627.¹⁰¹ The Peshitta or Syrian Vulgate from the fifth century did not contain Revelation.¹⁰² However, later editions in the sixth

⁹⁷ Paulus Orosius *The Seven Books of History against the Pagans* 7.10.

⁹⁸ Guthrie notes that Orosius tended at times to make extravagant statements (*Introduction*, 952). However, in light of the established tradition of the Domitianic date of Revelation, Orosius' testimony on this subject should not be considered suspect.

⁹⁹ Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary, ed. Jonathan F. Grothe (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing Company, 1999), 28. This suggests that Tyconius also held to the late date for Revelation.

¹⁰⁰ Primasius, PL 68:551–52.

¹⁰¹ Milligan, *Discussions*, 90.

¹⁰² Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 98.

and seventh centuries did include it. One version is generally believed to be that of Thomas of Harkel (A.D. 616), and the second is most likely the edition from A.D. 508 by Polycarpus which is known as the Philoxenian version.¹⁰³ The relevant superscription in these texts reads: “The Revelation which was made by God to John the Evangelist in the island of Patmos, whither he was banished by the Emperor Nero.”¹⁰⁴

Some scholars maintain that the mention of Nero is actually a reference to Domitian since he sometimes had the title Nero given to him.¹⁰⁵ While this is possible, there is no solid evidence to substantiate this claim. However, even granting that this superscription contains a reference to the exile of John by Nero, it is of paramount importance to note that this one sentence is the first unambiguous testimony that supports a Neronian date for Revelation, and it appears at least 400 years after the Apocalypse. This point must not be overlooked. As William Milligan notes, “The singular point to be noticed is that here, *for the first time*, we have the banishment of St. John assigned to Nero. An allegation of this kind so late as the sixth century is of little moment.”¹⁰⁶ It is of little moment indeed when compared with the heavy chain of late date supporters that is forged with the names of Hegesippus, Irenaeus, Eusebius, Jerome, Victorinus, and Primasius.

Andreas of Cappadocia (ca. 600)

Andreas or Andrew was a bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia. He is known as both Andrew of Caesarea and Andreas of Cappadocian Caesarea. He authored a commentary on Revelation about A.D. 600 that all agree adopts a futurist interpretation

¹⁰³ Ibid., 99.

¹⁰⁴ John Gwynn, ed., *The Apocalypse of St. John, in a Syriac Version Hitherto Unknown* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, and Co., 1897). The English translation is from Elliott, *Horae*, 1:38–39.

¹⁰⁵ Elliott, *Horae*, 1:39, n. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Milligan, *Discussions*, 90–91.

of Revelation and favors a Domitianic date.¹⁰⁷

Isidore of Seville (ca. 560–636)

Isidore of Seville was born at Cartagena, Spain about A.D. 560. At the death of his brother, archbishop Leander, in 600, he was appointed See of Seville and enjoyed a lengthy incumbency. He is recognized as a versatile and prolific writer. He died on April 4 in A.D. 636.¹⁰⁸ Relevant to the date of Revelation, in his *Chronica*, Isidore lists the banishment of John during the sixteenth year of the reign of Domitian or A.D. 96.¹⁰⁹ Isidore adds his testimony to the Domitianic date and also shows that this view was geographically widespread in the early church.

The Acts of John (ca. 650)

The *Acts of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian* is an apocryphal work of the fifth or sixth century A.D. attributed to a man named Prochorus. This New Testament apocryphal work supports the Domitianic exile of John. The entire work assumes John's exile under Domitian.

And the fame of the teaching of John was spread abroad in Rome; and it came to the ears of Domitian that there was a certain Hebrew in Ephesus, John by name, who spread a report about the seat of empire [*sic*] of the Romans, saying that it would quickly be rooted out, and that the kingdom of the Romans would be given over to another. And Domitian, troubled by what was said, sent a centurion

¹⁰⁷ Andreas, PG 106:207–458. Gentry agrees that Andreas held to the late date but notes that Andreas references some in his day who applied Rev 6:12 and 7:1–2 to the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem (*Before Jerusalem*, 106–7). Gentry views this as evidence, “that there were several . . . noted commentators who flourished in the sixth century (or before!) who necessarily held to a pre-A.D. 70 date for Revelation. The fact that at least some held the early date by the time of the Syriac texts of the New Testament (6th century) is admitted by all.” However, this testimony is late and anonymous, and when measured against the testimony of witnesses like Irenaeus, Victorinus, Eusebius, and Jerome it carries little weight.

¹⁰⁸ *Catholic Encyclopedia*. 2003. Accessed October 17, 2005. Internet. www.newadvent.org/cathen/08186a.htm.

¹⁰⁹ Isidori, *Isidori Hispalensis Opera*, Corpus christianorum, Series Latina, vol. 112 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2003), 126.

with soldiers to seize John, and bring him. . . . And Domitian, astonished at all the wonders, sent him away to an island, appointing for him a set time. And straightway John sailed to Patmos, where also he was deemed worthy to see the revelation of the end. And when Domitian was dead, Nerva succeeded to the kingdom, and recalled all who had been banished . . . ¹¹⁰

Gentry admits that this text establishes the Domitianic exile of John, but argues that it suggests the publication of Revelation prior to that time and the banishment of John to Patmos twice, once under Nero and then again under Domitian.¹¹¹ Gentry further argues that the only Johannine work that could be interpreted to indicate the overthrow of Rome is Revelation and that this had to be written before John's banishment by Domitian. He therefore turns this witness for the Domitianic date around to marshal support for the Neronic date.

However, there are two problems with Gentry's view. First, even if this text could be used to prove that Revelation was written before John's banishment by Domitian, there is no evidence in this text to confirm that it was written during the time of Nero. If this were the intent of the text one would expect the author to give some indication since Nero's reign was twenty-seven years in the past.

Second, the text does not say that John had written about the destruction of Rome, but that he was "teaching" it and "spread a report" about it. This language suggests that John's oral teaching about the coming destruction of Rome was what raised the ire of Domitian. Moreover, there is nothing in *The Acts of John* or in any other writing of antiquity to reasonably support a dual banishment of John as Gentry hypothesizes. In spite of Gentry's arguments, *The Acts of John* stands as another witness for the Domitianic date of Revelation.

¹¹⁰ *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 8 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1867–72; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1951), 560, 62.

¹¹¹ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 100.

Venerable Bede (ca. 672–735)

Bedae Bede, known as Bede the Venerable, or the Venerable Bede, was a famous church leader (A.D. 672–735) considered to be the “Father of English History.” He was born in Northumbria (the far north of England today) in about A.D. 672. He is often recognized as “the most important Christian scholar, teacher, and writer between the age of the church Fathers and the Carolingian revival of learning.”¹¹² His contributions were so significant that the period 600–800 is often called the Age of Bede.¹¹³ His *Homilies on the Gospels* are considered one of the masterpieces of monastic literature. They were probably written late in his career sometime in the 720s.

In his *Homilies* he wrote concerning the time of John’s banishment to Patmos and the date of Revelation:

And it is told in church history how he was put by the emperor Domitian into a tub of boiling oil, from which, since divine grace shielded him, he came out untouched, just as he had been a stranger to the corruption of fleshly concupiscence. And not much after, on account of his unconquerable constancy in bringing the good news, he was banished in exile by the same prince to the island of Patmos, where although he was deprived of human comfort, he nevertheless merited to be relieved by the frequent consolation of the divine vision and spoken message. Accordingly, in that very place he composed with his own hand the Apocalypse, which the Lord revealed to him concerning the present and future state of the Church.¹¹⁴

Additionally, in his exposition of the Apocalypse at 1:9, Venerable Bede supports the banishment of John to Patmos by the emperor Domitian.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Woodbridge, *Great Leaders*, 111.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Bede the Venerable, *Homilies on the Gospels*, trans. Lawrence T. Martin and David Hurst, Cistercian Studies Series: no. 110 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1991), 89–90.

¹¹⁵ Bedae Presbyteri, “Expositio Apocalypseos,” in *Corpus Christianorum*, Series Latina, vol. 121A (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publisher, 2001), 241.

Arethas (ca. 850–944)

Arethas, a native of the Peloponnesus in Greece, was born about A.D. 860.¹¹⁶ He became the Archbishop of Caesarea in 902. The latest known date for his life is 932. He wrote a commentary on Revelation that was a revision of the commentary of Andreas of Caesarea.

In his comments on Rev 1:9 Arethas notes Eusebius' view that John was banished under Domitian.¹¹⁷ He states no opinion about Eusebius' view at this point which seems to indicate his acceptance of the late date. However, later in his comments Arethas either rejects the testimony of Eusebius, or changes his mind about it, because at Rev 6:12 and 7:1-8, Arethas supports a pre-70 date for the composition of Revelation.¹¹⁸ In his comments on Rev 7:4, he says that the destruction by the Romans had not yet overwhelmed the Jews when John received the Revelation. While Arethas may have been in some confusion about the date, his statement at Rev 7:4 is probably the clearest statement of his belief about the date of Revelation. However, his ninth-century testimony for the early date lacks force when weighed against the early, weighty witnesses for the late date.

Theophylact (d. 1107)

Theophylact was bishop of Achrida during the eleventh century A.D. In the preface to his commentary on the Gospel of John he places John's exile during the reign of Nero.¹¹⁹ However, in his commentary on Matt 20:22–23 he references John's

¹¹⁶ Gentry, following A. R. Fausset, dates Arethas in the sixth century (*Before Jerusalem*, 107). However, Elliott notes that in his comments on Rev 13:2 Arethas mentions the Saracen capital of Baghdad near Babylon which was not built until A.D. 762. Elliott, *Horae*, 1:39, n. 2. As Elliott correctly observes this means that the earliest date for Arethas would be about 800.

¹¹⁷ Arethas, PG 106:513–14.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 597–98, 603–6. It is important once again to note that the preterist view of Gentry is dependent on a date between A.D. 64–67. Arethas supports a pre-70 date, but this could be in A.D. 68 or 69. Thus, his date is not necessarily early enough to help Gentry's preterist view of Revelation.

¹¹⁹ Theophylact, PG 123:1133–34.

banishment under Trajan.¹²⁰ His late, inconsistent testimony is of little value to the Neronian view.

The Nineteenth Century

From the second century until the middle of the nineteenth century, Revelation was considered to belong to the close of Domitian's reign.¹²¹ However, for a brief period in church history a date before A.D. 70 held sway. According to most scholars who lived in the nineteenth century, the majority view during the last half of that century dated Revelation before A.D. 70. J. Ritchie Smith, a late-date supporter, noted in 1888 that a majority of scholars at that time assigned the date of Revelation to a time period in 68–70, shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem, in the reign of Nero, Galba or Vespasian.¹²² Writing in 1891, Paton J. Gloag noted: "The most prevalent opinion among theologians and biblical critics in the present day is that the Apocalypse was composed shortly after the death of Nero. The most learned modern critics, belonging to different schools of religious thought, with few exceptions, have embraced this opinion."¹²³

Contemporary preterists consistently point to this time period from 1850–1900 when the pre-70 date was the majority view to demonstrate that the late date has not enjoyed uninterrupted unanimity in the church.¹²⁴ While it is agreed that the late date did give way to a pre-70 dating for a few decades, it is critical to note that the majority view

¹²⁰ Ibid., 363–64.

¹²¹ David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Ralph P. Martin, vol. 52 (Dallas: Word Books, 1997), lvii.

¹²² Smith, "Date," 298.

¹²³ Paton J. Gloag, *Introduction to the Johannine Writings* (London: James Nisbet, 1891), 316. Gloag went against the prevailing opinion of his day and dated Revelation in A.D. 96.

¹²⁴ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 27–38.

from 1850–1900 was a date for Revelation of somewhere in A.D. 68–70, with most scholars dating it after the death of Nero.¹²⁵ This point is important because Gentry’s eschatological scheme, as noted previously, demands not just a pre-70 date for Revelation, but a Neronic date between A.D. 64 and 67. And this particular, narrow time frame for the composition of Revelation has never been recognized as the majority view at any time in church history. In fact, it has never been close. The Domitianic date in A.D. 95, on the other hand, has dominated from the second century up to the present, except for a narrow fifty-year period from 1850–1900.

Therefore, the prevailing scholarly opinion concerning the date of Revelation from 1850–1900 does show that there was a brief break in the dominance of the Domitianic date, but it does little or nothing to provide support for the A.D. 64–67 view. While this by itself certainly does not dismantle the preterist date for Revelation, it does reveal that any effort by preterists to show any degree of broad historical support for the A.D. 64–67 date of Revelation is without merit.

The Twentieth Century

Near the end of the nineteenth century and into the beginning of the twentieth century, majority opinion began to return to the traditional view of the church that Revelation was written during the end of Domitian’s reign.¹²⁶ Writing in 1917, D. A. Hayes acknowledged that, “The present tendency is to go back to the date set by Irenaeus and the other church fathers, somewhat between A.D. 90 and 96, in the reign of

¹²⁵ Gloag, *Johannine Writings*, 361. Hengstenberg, writing in 1852, noted that the general consent at time was that, “the Apocalypse was composed under Galba” (*Revelation*, 1:viii).

¹²⁶ Peake, *Revelation*, 70. Gentry refers to “the ebb and flow of scholarly opinion on the matter of the chronology of all the New Testament books. This ebb and flow quite naturally had its effect on Revelation dating” (*Before Jerusalem*, 27). Gentry also says, “And the passage of time has witnessed a frequent shifting back and forth on the answer to this question” (*ibid.*, 333). It is true that for the only time in church history the majority view of the date of Revelation did switch to the A.D. 68–70 view for a brief fifty-year window. However, it quickly shifted back to the Domitianic view. This one-time shift could hardly be legitimately described as an “ebb and flow” or “frequent shifting back and forth.”

Domitian.¹²⁷ Since that time, up to the present day, the Domitianic date has remained the dominant view.¹²⁸

Most recently, in 1995, on the island of Patmos a celebration was held honoring the 1900th anniversary of the apocalyptic vision of John. This anniversary celebration clearly indicates the acceptance of the A.D. 95 date for Revelation at the location of its origin up to the present day.

A Summary of the External Evidence

Having presented and weighed the relevant external witnesses on the date of Revelation, the evidence will now be set side by side for comparison. Only the witnesses that are clear and unambiguous for each date are presented.

Witnesses for the Domitianic Date

Irenaeus (ca. 180)
 Victorinus (ca. 300)
 Eusebius (ca. 300)
 Jerome (ca. 400)
 Sulpicius Severus (ca. 400)
 Primasius (ca. 540)
 Isidore of Seville (ca. 600)
 The Acts of John (ca. 650)
 Orosius (ca. 600)
 Andreas (ca. 600)
 Venerable Bede (ca. 700)

Witnesses for the Neronic Date

Syriac witnesses (6th and 7th centuries)

Arethas (ca. 900)

Theophylact (d. 1107)

¹²⁷ D. A. Hayes, *John and His Writings* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1917), 246.

¹²⁸ Gentry, *Beast*, 4.

Placing the evidence side by side, the first clear, accepted, unambiguous witness to the Neronic date is a one-line superscription in two Syriac versions of the New Testament in the sixth and seventh centuries. If the Neronic date were the original date of Revelation, one would expect a witness to this fact in Asia Minor, where the book of Revelation originated, and a witness much earlier than the sixth century. There are only two other unambiguous, external witnesses to the early date: Arethas (ca. 900) and Theophylact (d. 1107). The only time in church history that the early date was the majority view was a brief period at the end of the nineteenth century. And the common date assigned to Revelation at that time was A.D. 68–69, after the death of Nero.

The late date, on the other hand, has a solid line of support from some of the greatest, most reliable names in church history beginning in A.D. 180: Irenaeus, Victorinus, Eusebius, Jerome, Sulpicius Severus, Orosius, Primasius, Venerable Bede, Isidore of Seville, Andreas, and Prochorus (*The Acts of John*). These witnesses came from different and widespread geographical regions of the church. They are heresiologists, apologists, historians, and commentators. Irenaeus was from Asia Minor, where the Apocalypse first circulated and was linked to the apostle John through Polycarp. Victorinus authored the oldest extant Latin commentary on Revelation. Primasius wrote the second oldest extant Latin commentary. Eusebius has been dubbed “The Father of Church History.” He had an extensive library at his disposal. Jerome was a recognized giant of the early church.

Moreover, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen all support the late date. However, they are not included in the chart since they do not specifically say that John was banished by Domitian. Also, Hegesippus was almost certainly Eusebius’ source for the date of John’s banishment to Patmos, making him the earliest extant witness for the late date in about A.D. 150. Except for a brief period from 1850–1900, the late date has remained the majority view from the early days of church history to the present.

Amazingly, in light of this overwhelming external evidence in favor of the

late date, Gentry says, “The above survey shows that the Domitianic date cannot be certainly established from the external evidence. Indeed, when carefully scrutinized the evidence even tilts in the opposite direction. . . . Obviously, then, there was no sure, uniform, and certain tradition in the early centuries of the Church on this matter.”¹²⁹ In light of the external evidence and testimony that has been presented, it stretches the limits of credulity for early-date supporters to assert that the external evidence actually favors the early date. To any unbiased mind, the external evidence overwhelmingly favors the A.D. 95 date for Revelation. Gentry further states, “There simply is no ‘voice [singular] of church tradition concerning the late date of Revelation.’ It is time for late date advocates to admit this. Neither is there an ‘overwhelming voice of the early church’ in this regard.”¹³⁰

It is no surprise that few scholars agree with Gentry’s analysis of the external evidence. The following is a small sample of what other scholars of various backgrounds and eschatological viewpoints have to say about the external evidence of the date of Revelation.

Philip Schaff, who dates Revelation in A.D. 68–69, admits that the external evidence points to the reign of Domitian. He said, “The prevailing, we may say the only distinct tradition, beginning with so respectable a witness as Irenaeus, about 170, assigns the exile to the end of the reign of Domitian, who ruled from 81 to 96.”¹³¹

Paton Gloag addresses the external evidence for the Neronic date. “The external evidence in favour of this view is acknowledged by all to be weak; indeed it is scarcely worth mentioning. There is not the slightest trace of it in the writings of the

¹²⁹ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 108–9.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 344.

¹³¹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 3d ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910; reprint, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 1:427.

Fathers. The earliest direct statement to this effect is a subscription attached to a manuscript of a Syrian version of the sixth century.”¹³² G. K. Beale, who adopts an eclectic view of Revelation, refers to “the firm tradition stemming from Irenaeus.”¹³³

William Hendriksen, an amillennialist who takes an idealist view of Revelation, says flatly, “One cannot find a single really cogent argument in support of the earlier date. The arguments produced are based on late and unreliable testimonies.”¹³⁴ Referring to the apostle John, W. M. Ramsay states, “The tradition that connects his punishment with Domitian is too strong.”¹³⁵ R. H. Charles states: “The earliest authorities are practically unanimous in assigning the Apocalypse to the last years of Domitian. . . . The external evidence is, as we have already seen, unanimous in favour of the latter [the late date] as against the former [the early date].”¹³⁶

Arthur Peake, who dated Revelation in the reign of Vespasian, observes: “And on the other side we have the external evidence which is almost all in favour of the later date.”¹³⁷ Henry Barclay Swete notes: “Early Christian tradition is almost unanimous in assigning the Apocalypse to the last years of Domitian.”¹³⁸ James Moffatt states, “So far as the early church had any tradition on the subject, it referred the banishment to Domitian’s reign.”¹³⁹ G. B. Caird says, “The only early evidence comes from Irenaeus, who assigns John’s visions to the closing years of the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81–96).

¹³² Gloag, *Johannine Writings*, 317.

¹³³ Beale, *Revelation*, 27.

¹³⁴ William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1939), 14.

¹³⁵ Ramsay, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 61.

¹³⁶ Charles, *Revelation*, xcii, xciv.

¹³⁷ Peake, *Revelation*, 96.

¹³⁸ Swete, *Apocalypse*, xcvix.

¹³⁹ James Moffatt, *An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*, 3d ed., International Theological Library (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1918), 505.

The majority of scholars, ancient and modern, have been prepared to accept this statement.”¹⁴⁰ Barclay Newman, who rejects the Domitianic date says: “The earliest authorities are almost unanimous in dating the Apocalypse during the last years of Domitian.”¹⁴¹

William Milligan concludes: “From the first witness who speaks upon this point in the latter half of the second century down to the first half of the fifth we have a succession of Fathers bearing testimony with one accord, and in language which admits of no misunderstanding, to the fact that St. John was banished to Patmos under the reign of Domitian, and that there he beheld those visions of the Apocalypse which he afterward committed to writing.”¹⁴²

D. A. Hayes opines: “The external evidence for the late date of the Apocalypse is stronger than for any other book in the New Testament. . . . Here are the ancient authorities. No one contradicts them in the first three centuries of church history. They all agree that the Apocalypse was written during the reign of Domitian, some time in the last decade of the first century. Can there be any good reason for contradicting a tradition guaranteed by such names and such unanimity?”¹⁴³

Referring to the early tradition of the church, Hengstenberg says, “They declare with perfect unanimity that John was banished by Domitian to Patmos, and there wrote the Apocalypse.”¹⁴⁴ B. W. Johnson states plainly: “It is thus seen that the array of

¹⁴⁰ G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John*, Black’s New Testament Commentary, ed. Henry Chadwick (London: A & C Black Publishers, 1966; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 6.

¹⁴¹ Barclay Newman, “The Fallacy of the Domitian Hypothesis: Critique of the Irenaeus Source as a Witness for the Contemporary-Historical Approach to the Interpretation of the Apocalypse,” *NTS* 10 (1963–64): 135.

¹⁴² Milligan, *Discussions*, 83.

¹⁴³ Hayes, *John and His Writings*, 245–46.

¹⁴⁴ Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, 1:xii.

testimony to the date of Domitian's reign is so strong as to leave no doubt, except where persons are compelled by their theories of interpretation to assume that John wrote in the reign of Nero."¹⁴⁵ R. C. H. Lenski upholds the strong tradition for the late date and notes the serious weakness of the early date. "When at this late date some discredit Irenaeus and the ancient tradition that supports his testimony, they are able to offer as a substitute nothing that is in any way comparable to this patristic evidence for trustworthiness."¹⁴⁶

F. J. A. Hort, one of the most eminent supporters for an early date, calls the external evidence for the late date "undoubtedly weighty." He concludes: "On the one hand the tradition as to Domitian is not unanimous; on the other it is the prevalent tradition, and goes back to an author likely to be the recipient of a true tradition on the matter . . . If external evidence alone could decide, there would be a clear preponderance for Domitian."¹⁴⁷

Commenting on the total absence of any witness for the early date before the sixth century, Elliott notes, "And their total silence respecting it is only explicable on one of two suppositions; —viz, either that it did not exist; or that they deemed it undeserving of credit, and not even worth the notice."¹⁴⁸

Based on the clear witness of the early church in favor of the Domitianiic date of Revelation, one is forced to consider—if the Neronic date is the actual date for Revelation that means it had a thirty-year head start on the Domitianic date to establish itself within the early tradition of the church. However, that is not what occurred. Rather, the exact opposite transpired. The Domitianic date became the accepted date in the early

¹⁴⁵ Johnson, *Vision*, 19.

¹⁴⁶ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1935; reprint, Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1963), 7.

¹⁴⁷ Hort, *Apocalypse*, xx.

¹⁴⁸ Elliott, *Horae*, 1:37.

church. But how could the Domitianic date have overcome the Neronic date so overwhelmingly if the Neronic date had a thirty-year advantage?¹⁴⁹ Why is the Domitianic date the only date clearly attested in the early church until the beginning of the sixth century? The external evidence argues strongly against the early date and emphatically supports the late date.

¹⁴⁹ Thomas Ice, "The Date of Revelation," *Pre-Trib Perspectives* 8 (2005), 4.

CHAPTER 4

A PRESENTATION AND CRITIQUE OF THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE FOR THE NERONIC DATE OF REVELATION

As noted in the conclusion to chapter 3, even most early-date supporters admit that the external evidence favors the late date. However, the external evidence for the late date can only be accepted if it is in harmony with the internal evidence found within Revelation itself. The next two chapters focus on the internal evidence that provides clues to the date of Revelation. Early-date advocates maintain that the internal evidence supports their position and overrides the external evidence. They commonly utilize nine main internal arguments in support of their position. In this chapter these nine internal arguments for the early date will be presented and critiqued.

The Thematic Focus of Revelation 1:7

Preterist interpreters focus on the thematic emphasis of Rev 1:7 as internal evidence for the early date. There is almost universal agreement that Rev 1:7 is the theme verse of the book. Rev 1:7 refers to Jesus, “coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him.” Gentry contends that this verse refers to the “cloud coming” of Christ in A.D. 70 in judgment upon Israel with the Romans as the instrument of that judgment.¹ Thus, for preterists Rev 1:7 refers to the local event in A.D. 70 not a global event in conjunction with the Second Coming of Christ. With this as the theme of the book, Gentry concludes,

¹ Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Atlanta: American Vision, 1998), 123. The preterist notion of a “cloud coming” of Christ in judgment in A.D. 70 is derived from Matt 24:30. Cf. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), 64–67.

“Such being the case, only a pre-A.D. 70 date could be expected, for what event subsequent to the A.D. 70 destruction of the Temple parallels the magnitude and covenantal significance of this event? Surely the destruction of the Jewish Temple (accomplished now for over 1900 years) and the gruesome Jewish War with Rome *must* be in view here.”²

To arrive at this conclusion Gentry focuses on three phrases or terms that identify the objects of Christ’s wrath: (1) “those who pierced Him, (2) “the tribes of the earth, and (3) “the land.” There is general agreement that Rev 1:7 alludes to Dan 7:13 and Zech 12:10. Zech 12:10 refers to those who pierced the Messiah and mourn as “the house of David” and “the inhabitants of Jerusalem.” In the original context of Zech 12 these phrases clearly refer to the Jewish people. Based on this allusion, Gentry concludes that “earth” in Revelation 1:7 refers to the land of Israel and that the “tribes” must be the literal twelve tribes of Israel who are judged by Christ in A.D. 70. Seven main difficulties render this view unlikely.

First, citing BAGD, Gentry notes that γῆ can mean “land.”³ In BDAG this meaning is given as “dry land as opposed to sea, *land*.”⁴ Γῆ can also refer to “portions or regions of the earth, region, country.”⁵ But when γῆ is used to refer to Israel geographically in the New Testament it is normally expressed “the land of Israel” or some other equivalent identifying statement to indicate that a specific land or region is being referenced (Matt 2:6; 2:21; 4:15; 14:34; Mark 6:53; John 3:22). The word γῆ is found eighty-two times in Revelation. Some of the uses of γῆ in Revelation refer to the

² Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 131–32.

³ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁴ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 196.

⁵ *Ibid.*

whole earth. For instance, the use of $\gamma\eta$ in Rev 21:1 is a reference to the entire earth.⁶ Only two verses before Rev 1:7 in 1:5 the use of $\gamma\eta$ refers to the entire earth. Rev 1:5 says, “And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.” The point of the final phrase in Rev 1:5 is that Jesus is sovereign over all the kings of the earth. To limit this reference just to the kings of the land of Israel would appear to be contrary to the main point of the text. Since $\gamma\eta$ in Rev 1:5 means “earth,” it should be given the same meaning in 1:7 since there is nothing to indicate that a more limited scope is intended.

Second, Gentry’s view of the “cloud coming” fails to deal adequately with Christ’s promise to “come” and deliver His people from time of persecution. According to Gentry, the repeated mention of Christ’s coming in Revelation is a reference to the “cloud coming” in judgment in A.D. 70 on the generation of Jews who crucified him. However, in Rev 3:10–11 Jesus directed these words to the church of Philadelphia concerning his coming. “Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth. I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown.” One must ask, in what sense did the alleged “coming” of Christ in A.D. 70 in judgment bring deliverance for the church from the time of persecution? The preterist view of the theme of Revelation seems unable to adequately answer this question.

Thomas summarizes this objection to Gentry’s thesis.

He also leaves other unanswered questions regarding this ‘cloud coming’ in the sixties. He identifies the cloud coming against the Jews as judgment against Judea in 67–70. Against the church that coming was persecution by the Romans from 64–68. The cloud coming for Rome was her internal strife in 68–69. But nowhere does he tell what the promised deliverance of the church is (e.g., 3:11). It appears

⁶ Ibid.

to be a question without a clear-cut answer as to how this ‘cloud coming’ could be a promise of imminent deliverance for God’s people. All he can see in it is judgment against them and the ‘privilege’ of being clearly distinguished from Judaism forever. He finds covenantal and redemptive import for Christianity in the collapse of the Jewish order, but this falls short of a personal appearance of Christ to take the faithful away from their persecution.⁷

Third, the context of both Zech 12 and Dan 7:13 focuses on the eschatological redemption and deliverance of Israel, not her judgment.⁸ Zechariah 9–14 consists of two prophetic oracles that set forth the long-awaited Messianic future of Israel. The first oracle in Zech 9–11 focuses primarily on the events of Messiah’s first advent while the second oracle in Zech 12–14 focuses the spotlight on the second advent and acceptance of Messiah, the King by the Jewish people.⁹ In Zech 12:10, God pours out the Spirit of grace on the Jewish people and they turn to the Messiah with bitter weeping. Zechariah 13:1–6 follows with a description of God’s provision for spiritual cleansing for the people. Dan 7:13 points to the ultimate enthronement of the Son of Man over all the nations of the world after God has judged the four wicked empires.¹⁰ Gentry’s response to this argument is that John is not prophetically interpreting this prophecy but “adapting and applying it—according to his own requirements.”¹¹ It is true that Old Testament prophecies can be adapted and applied, but the essential meaning cannot be changed.

⁷ Robert L. Thomas, “Theonomy and the Dating of Revelation,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 5 (1994): 192.

⁸ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 26. There is disagreement concerning the response of the nations in Rev 1:7 to Christ’s coming. In keeping with the Old Testament redemption context of Zech 12, Beale sees the response in Rev 1:7 as positive grief and repentance (ibid., 197). Others, such as Thomas, see the mourning as the grief and remorse of the nations over the severity of their impending judgment in conjunction with Christ’s return. Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 78–79.

⁹ Merrill F. Unger, *Zechariah: Prophet of God’s Glory* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963), 207.

¹⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 196.

¹¹ Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *The Beast of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2002), 124.

Fourth, Gentry interprets the phrase *πάσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς* in Rev 1:7 as a reference to the land of Israel and the twelve tribes (“all the tribes of the land of Israel”).¹² He argues that elsewhere in Revelation where the term *φυλή* appears John expands the concept by adding “every tongue, people, and nation,” thus, distinguishing the other references from 1:7.¹³ However, Beale has demonstrated that the phrase *πάσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς* should not be understood as a limited reference to the land of Israel. He notes that the phrase never refers to the tribes of Israel but has a universal scope, referring to all the nations in every one of its occurrences in the Septuagint (Gen 12:3; 28:14; Ps 71 [72]:17; Zech 14:17).¹⁴

Gentry’s response to Beale is to point out that even Beale recognizes that sometimes John’s use of the Old Testament transports the original contextual meaning into Revelation and sometimes it does not.¹⁵ Gentry also argues that John is not quoting the Old Testament in Rev 1:7, so the phrase does not have to carry the contextual meaning in Zechariah into Revelation.¹⁶ However, when an exact phrase is used in Revelation that has an established meaning in the Old Testament, it seems odd that the meaning would be altered without some clear indication. In Rev 1:7 there is no indication that *πάσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς* is being given a more limited meaning than it had in its corresponding Old Testament phrase. Moreover, the words “every eye” seem to substantiate the universal meaning of the phrase.

¹² Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 127–31.

¹³ *Ibid.*, lvi.

¹⁴ Beale, *Revelation*, 26. The corresponding Hebrew phrase is *כָּל מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאָרֶץ*. In Zech 14:17 *מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאָרֶץ* is used.

¹⁵ Gentry, *Beast*, 125.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Fifth, as just noted, the words “every eye” further universalize the scope in Rev 1:7. The verse points to an event that will draw the attention of the entire world, not the localized events of A.D. 70. In the context it is not logical to view the words “every eye” as a limited reference to Israel. As Ice notes,

If the larger group of ‘every eye’ refers to the Jewish nation, then it does not make sense that the smaller group ‘even those who pierced Him,’ would be a reference to the same exact people, as preterists contend. Their reading of the passage would be as follows: ‘every eye [Israel] will see Him, even those who pierced Him [Israel].’ There would be no need to have a subgroup if both ‘every eye’ and ‘even those who pierced Him’ mean the same thing. If ‘every eye’ refers to all the peoples of the world as the larger group, then the qualifying phrase ‘even those who pierced Him’ would be emphasizing the Jewish element as the smaller subgroup. Thus, it is not surprising that virtually everyone except preterists interpret this part of the passage in a global sense. It is obvious that bias, not the clear meaning of the text, is the only reason preterists interpret this part of the passage in a restricted manner.¹⁷

Sixth, the alleged “coming” of Christ in A.D. 70 was really not a “coming” of Christ at all. Christ did not “come” in A.D. 70.¹⁸ Gentry defends his view of a “cloud coming” of Christ in judgment A.D. 70 by noting that God did “come” against Egypt in judgment “riding on a swift cloud” (Isa 19:1).¹⁹ However, the difference between these two texts is that Rev 1:7 specifically says that when He comes “every eye will see Him.” This denotes a personal, visible coming, not a coming in judgment by means of the Roman army in A.D. 70.

Seventh, the universal, futurist interpretation of Rev 1:7 is confirmed by the worldwide scope and focus of the rest of the Apocalypse (3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10 [twice]; 13:8, 12, 14 [twice]; 14:6; 15:4; 17:2, 8). In the context of each of these passages it is

¹⁷ Thomas Ice, “Preterist ‘Time Texts’,” in *The End Times Controversy*, ed. Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers), 98–99.

¹⁸ Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 20.

¹⁹ Gentry, *Beast*, 126.

difficult to fit the described events into the local judgment of A.D. 70. For these reasons, the preterist, thematic argument for the early date based on Rev 1:7 must be rejected.

The Temporal Expectation of the Author

Another internal clue that preterist early-date supporters rely on is the contemporary expectation of the author concerning the fulfillment of the prophecies.²⁰ Preterists maintain that the fulfillment of the events prophesied in Revelation, and most of the other prophecies in the New Testament, were chronologically very near to the time they were written. Their starting point to substantiate this view is three “time texts” in Matthew (10:23; 16:28; 24:34). While all three of these texts are emphasized by preterists, Matt 24:34 is the classic text for their eschatological approach. “Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” Preterists contend that “all these things,” that is, all the things predicted in Matt 24:4–31, were fulfilled in A.D. 70 within the present generation that heard the words of Jesus.²¹ With this understanding of the Olivet Discourse, preterists carry their interpretation forward into Revelation. They believe that John clearly expected his prophecy to be fulfilled soon, that is, within a few years.²² Support for this position is drawn primarily from three “timing terms” in Revelation: *τάχος*, *ἐγγύς*, and *μέλλω*.

²⁰ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 133.

²¹ For a critique of the preterist interpretation of the Olivet Discourse, see Thomas Ice, “Preterist ‘Time Texts,’” 83–97; idem, “The Olivet Discourse,” in *The End Times Controversy*, ed. Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2003), 151–200; Stanley D. Toussaint, “A Critique of the Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse,” *BSac* 161 (2004): 469–90; J. Randall Price, “Historical Problems with a First-Century Fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse,” in *The End Times Controversy*, ed. Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2003), 377–98; idem, “Historical Problems with Preterism’s Interpretation of Events in A.D. 70,” in *The End Times Controversy*, ed. Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2003), 355–75; John F. MacArthur, *The Second Coming* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 9–134.

²² Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 133.

The noun *τάχος* and the adverb *ταχύς* appear eight times in the Apocalypse (Rev 1:1; 2:16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:6, 7, 12, 20). According to BDAG, both words refer to “a very brief period of time, with focus on speed of an activity or event, speed, quickness, swiftness, haste.”²³ The adverbial unit *ἐν τάχει* which appears in Rev 1:1 and 22:6 is defined as “soon, in a short time.”²⁴

Ἐγγύς occurs two times (Rev 1:3; 22:10) and is usually translated “near” or “at hand.” It means “close proximity spatially” or “being close in point of time.”²⁵ *Μέλλω* occurs thirteen times (Rev 1:19; 2:10 [2x]; 3:2, 10, 16; 6:11; 8:13; 10:4, 7; 12:4, 5; 17:8). Gentry focuses on two specific occurrences of *μέλλω* in Revelation (1:19; 3:10).²⁶ In BDAG, one lexical meanings of *μέλλω* is “to take place at a future point of time and so to be subsequent to another event.”²⁷ According to BDAG, the meaning of *μέλλω* in Rev 1:19 is “to be inevitable, be destined.”²⁸ From its field of meaning and usage in Revelation the temporal force of *μέλλω* appears to be much weaker than *τάχος* or *ἐγγύς*.

From the usage and lexical meaning of these three terms, Gentry builds his case. He argues that the events in Revelation must have been fulfilled within a short time or “soon,” that is, within a few years after the book was written. With this foundation and starting point, Gentry asks, “What historical era best accounts for events of the magnitude expected by John in Revelation? A magnitude that is so covenantally and redemptively

²³ BDAG, 992–93.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 993.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 271.

²⁶ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 141–42.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 627.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 628. Citing BAGD, 501, Gentry says that *μέλλω* with the aorist infinitive in Rev 1:19 means “be on the point of, be about to” (*Before Jerusalem*, 141–42). However, the more recent BDAG includes *μέλλω* in Rev 1:19 under the meaning “be destined, inevitable” which seems to greatly diminish the temporal force (628).

significant as to be, in an important and dramatic sense, a ‘coming’ of Christ. . . . Is there an era that could represent such a ‘coming’ and that lies *before* the late date and *after* the early date? If so, then, in light of the clear imminent expectation of Revelation, evangelical scholarship . . . should be compelled to accept an early date on the basis of Revelation’s integrity and self-witness.”²⁹

Gentry answers his question by pointing to the events immediately leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem. He concludes that the decade of the A.D. 60s meets the requirements presented in Revelation.³⁰ He states, “But if the expected events were to occur within a period of from one to five years—as in the case with Revelation if the book were written prior to A.D. 70—then all becomes clear.”³¹ Gentry concludes his argument by stating that the temporal expectation of the author seems to demand a preterist approach to Revelation.³²

There are two main problems with this understanding of *τάχος* and *έγγύς* in Revelation. First, these timing statements are strategically located to frame the entire content of Revelation. Both *τάχος* and *έγγύς* occur at the very beginning of Revelation and again at the very end. The following chart depicts the strategic location of these terms in Revelation.

Beginning of Revelation (Rev 1:1–8 is the Introduction)		End of Revelation (Rev 22:6–21 is the Conclusion)	
<i>τάχος</i>	1:1	22:6 (<i>τάχος</i>)	22:7, 12, 20 (<i>τάχως</i>)
<i>έγγύς</i>	1:3	22:10	

²⁹ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 142.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 141.

³² *Ibid.*, 145.

These timing terms are also emphasized by their repetition. They occur a total of seven times in the opening and closing chapters of Revelation. Gentry notes that the temporal expectation of the author is emphasized, “by strategic placement, frequent repetition, and careful variation.”³³ In noting the strategic placement and concentration of the timing terms, he states, “Its appearance in both of these chapters is significant because these chapters bracket the highly wrought drama of the prophetic body of the book contained in the section from Rev 4:1 through 22:6.”³⁴

Gentry is correct in his observation; however, it appears that he fails to appreciate the implications of the location of these timing terms for his view. With these statements serving as bookends for the entire prophetic content of Revelation, whatever meaning one gives to these timing terms must be applied to all the events in the book. Vern Poythress notes, “But 1:3 and 22:10 are like bookends enclosing the whole prophecy of Revelation. The fulfillment of everything, not just a part, is near.”³⁵ Thus, the preterist interpretation of these timing terms would require an A.D. 70 fulfillment of the entire Apocalypse, including 20:7–22:21, which partial preterists, such as Gentry, interpret as referring to eschatological events.³⁶ Their own argument here works against them. Thomas Ice notes this contradiction:

Revelation 22:6 is passage #6 on DeMar’s list of ‘time indicators’ in Revelation: ‘And he said to me, ‘These words are faithful and true’; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon (*tachos*) take place.’ In contrast, Gentry cites Revelation 20:7–9 as a reference to a yet future second coming. This creates a contradiction within Gentry’s brand of preterism. Since Revelation 22:6 refers to the whole book of

³³ Ibid., 133.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2000), 34.

³⁶ Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), 254, 276, 418.

Revelation, it would be impossible to take *tachos* as a reference to A.D. 70 (as Gentry does) and at the same time hold that Revelation 20:7–9 teaches the second coming. Gentry must either adopt a view similar to futurism or shift to the extreme preterist view that understands the entire book of Revelation as past history and thus eliminates any future second coming and resurrection.³⁷

Ice is correct in noting that a consistent interpretation of these timing terms demands either a futurist or full preterist approach to Revelation. And since full or radical preterism denies a literal second coming of Christ and the future bodily resurrection, this view is outside the pale of orthodoxy and is not a legitimate option. Thus, one is left with futurism as the only credible, consistent option. In short, the inconsistency of the partial preterist approach to the timing texts undermines the validity of this view.

Gentry does not deal with this argument directly, but he does note that, “The New Creation/Jerusalem of Rev 21–22 began in the first century, although it stretches out into eternity in its ultimate consummation.”³⁸ Thus, Gentry attempts to establish a soon beginning to the eschatological events in Revelation. But one cannot establish a beginning of all the events in Revelation within a few years of its writing. For instance, in what sense did the final release of Satan (Rev 20:7–9) and the final judgment (Rev 20:11–15) begin soon after Revelation was composed? They did not. They are removed from A.D. 95 by over 1,900 years. The failure of this view of the timing texts to account for all the events in Revelation within a chronological nearness renders this view invalid.

Second, the Apocalypse is described as a prophecy in 1:3 and 22:7. Yet, if Revelation was written in A.D. 65–66 and Rev 1:1–20:6 was fulfilled “soon” in the events of A.D. 64–70 as partial preterists maintain, then the bulk of the book was already fulfilled before most Christians ever heard or read its contents. By the time the book was written by John on Patmos in A.D. 65–66, copied, and carried by the messengers of the seven churches, and then re-copied and widely disseminated, the prophesied events

³⁷ Ice, “Preterist ‘Time Texts’,” 105.

³⁸ Gentry, *Dominion*, 418–19.

would have already occurred. The powerful prophetic message of the Apocalypse would have been one great anti-climax. By the time most people heard the message of the book, the “soon” events of A.D. 70 would have already occurred. Revelation would have had one of the shortest shelf-lives of any book in history.

Therefore, the preterist view of the timing terms in Revelation should be rejected. But if this interpretation of the timing texts is invalid, how should they be understood? If one adopts a futurist view of Rev 4–22 how could events so remotely future be legitimately described as “soon” or “at hand”?³⁹ There are five main views of the timing texts among late-date supporters.⁴⁰

Persecution of the Church

G. B. Caird views the coming crisis in Revelation not as the consummation of history but as the persecution of the church by the Roman Empire; thus, he believes it was fulfilled “soon” in its entirety.⁴¹ The problem with this interpretation is that, as already noted, whatever meaning one gives to the timing statements in Revelation, all the events in the book must occur within that time frame. The timing statements frame the content of the entire book (1:1, 3; 22:6, 7, 10, 12, 20). Caird holds that Rev 1:1–20:6 was fulfilled “soon” in the persecution of the church. However, he views Rev 20:7–22:21 futuristically. Caird’s failure to deal with all the material in Revelation within a chronological “nearness” is problematic for his view.

³⁹ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 141.

⁴⁰ A sixth view that is rarely mentioned is that ἐν τάχει may refer to the certainty of fulfillment of the events in Revelation. See Leon Morris, *Revelation*, rev. ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 46. While the notion of certainty may be part of the meaning, this view does not seem to give due consideration to the temporal connotation.

⁴¹ G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black’s New Testament Commentary, ed. Henry Chadwick (London: A & C Black Publishers, 1966; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 12.

Beginning of Fulfillment in John's Day

G. K. Beale believes that ἐν τάχει in Rev 1:1 is derived from Dan 2:28–29, 45 (ἐπ' ἐσχάτων ἡμερῶν) and denotes, “the definite, imminent time of fulfillment, which likely has already begun in the present.”⁴² He contends that John understood the tribulation, defeat of evil, and establishment of the kingdom that Daniel expected to occur in the distant future would commence in his own generation.⁴³ The problem with this view is that for the most part it requires a highly idealized, non-literal interpretation for the material in Revelation that fails to give any concrete meaning to the referents of the symbols and figures.

Qualitative Indicators

Some maintain that τάχος in Revelation denotes the manner or qualitative nature of Christ's coming, not its timing, and should therefore be translated “quickly” or “suddenly.”⁴⁴ In other words, the events will come “suddenly,” “quickly,” or without delay once the appointed time arrives, and they will rapidly run their course once they commence.⁴⁵ This understanding of τάχος or ἐν τάχει is within the field of meaning for these terms.⁴⁶ However, there are two points that favor assigning a temporal meaning to

⁴² Beale, *Revelation*, 181–82.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 182. Beale adopts an eclectic (primarily idealist) approach to Revelation. While he holds that the events in Revelation began in John's generation, he supports the late date of Revelation (*ibid.*, 27).

⁴⁴ Ice, “Preterist ‘Time Texts’,” 102–5; John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 35.

⁴⁵ Walvoord, *Revelation*, 35. Both Ice and Walvoord interpret ἐν τάχει as primarily indicative of the manner (suddenness or swiftness) of the events in Revelation once they begin. Ice, “Preterist ‘Time Texts’,” 102–8; Walvoord, *Revelation*, 35–37. However, they both interpret ἐγγύς as primarily indicative of imminency or nearness from the standpoint of prophetic revelation.

⁴⁶ BDAG states that τάχος can mean, “speed, quickness, swiftness, haste” (992) and that ταχύς can mean “quick, swift, speedy, without delay” (993). Ice presents further lexical and grammatical support for this interpretation (“Preterist ‘Time Texts’,” 102–5).

ἐν τάχει in Rev 1:1. First, from the lexical standpoint, BDAG cites a temporal meaning (“soon, in a short time”) for the adverbial unit ἐν τάχει in Rev 1:1 and 22:6.⁴⁷

Second, the temporal meaning of ἐν τάχει in Rev 1:1 is reinforced in the immediate context by the appearance of the words ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς (“for the time is near”) only two verses later in Rev 1:3.⁴⁸ According to BDAG, ἐγγύς in Rev 1:3 denotes “being close in point of time, *near*.”⁴⁹ Since ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς in Rev 1:3 carries a temporal meaning, it seems more contextually consistent to translate ἐν τάχει in Rev 1:1 temporally as well.⁵⁰

Time from God’s Viewpoint

A common understanding of the timing statements in Revelation is that the author is presenting time according to God’s timetable, not man’s.⁵¹ Support for this view is drawn from 2 Pet 3:8 which says, “But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” Proponents of this view note that God is not limited in His consideration of time the way man is.⁵² While this view could be part of the meaning that was intended, it does not seem to be a satisfactory explanation by itself of the terms used in Revelation. It seems doubtful that a reader would naturally make a connection between these timing terms and a passage like 2 Pet 3:8. There is a fifth approach that is better.

⁴⁷ BDAG, 993.

⁴⁸ Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 55.

⁴⁹ BDAG, 271.

⁵⁰ Alan F. Johnson, “Revelation,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 416; Ben Witherington III, *Revelation*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary, ed. Ben Witherington III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 66.

⁵¹ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 16.

⁵² Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 55–56. Morris, *Revelation*, 47.

Imminency

The fifth view, and the one that is adopted in this dissertation, is that the timing terms in Revelation assume the prophetic viewpoint of the author and do not necessarily mean that the events had to occur within a few years of the time Revelation was written. The New Testament authors consistently describe this present age, or the time between the two comings, as the “last days” or “latter days.”⁵³ This attitude is expressed in 1 John 2:18 where the present age is even designated as the “last hour.”⁵⁴ This means that the “last days” and even the “last hour” have been ongoing for over 1,900 years. The phrase in 1 John 2:18 is especially significant because it originated from the same author as Revelation and provides further insight into the apostle John’s prophetic viewpoint.

The phrases “last days” and “last hour” both carry an eschatological dimension. Every generation of believers, including the present one, have lived in times that strongly cry out the sense of impending and overhanging destiny.⁵⁵ The last of these last days is always imminent or impending.⁵⁶ Since no man knows God’s time schedule, the time of fulfillment is always “at hand.” These events are near, in that, they are the next events on God’s prophetic calendar. There is a nearness, next-ness, or at-hand-ness

⁵³ G. K. Beale, “Eschatology,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Development*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 331.

⁵⁴ W. Hall Harris notes that the phrase “last hour” can refer to a period of time, since Jesus used it to refer to the entire period just prior to his crucifixion until his return to the Father (John 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 12:27; 13:1; 17:1). Harris refers this time to the final stage of history between the two advents of Christ. W. Hall Harris III, *1, 2, 3 John: Comfort and Counsel for a Church in Crisis* (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2003), 104–5.

⁵⁵ D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1991), 107–8. Marshall supports this same idea. He says that John used the reference to the “last hour” to stress the imminency of the *parousia* and the urgency of being ready for the Lord’s coming at any time. I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 148–51.

⁵⁶ Hughes, *Revelation*, 16.

of the time.⁵⁷ As Thomas notes, “The purpose of *en tachei* is to teach the imminence of the events foretold, not to set a time limit in which they must occur.”⁵⁸ The imminency of these events, emphasized in Revelation from its commencement to its close, calls each generation to an attitude of expectancy and readiness.⁵⁹

The imminent expectancy and the necessity of readiness is expressed by Jesus repeatedly in the Olivet Discourse (Matt 24:36, 42, 44; 25:10–13). Poythress concludes, “Moreover, neither Old Testament prophecy nor New Testament prophecy is preoccupied with lengths of time as measured by the clock. They focus more on the character of the times. Jesus’ exhortations to watch (Mark 13:32–37) do not depend on whether the Second Coming is five days away or five millennia away, but on the responsibility of the disciples after he, the master, ‘leaves his house.’”⁶⁰

Robert Mounce favors the imminency view of the timing statements in Revelation: “The most satisfying solution is to take the expression ‘must soon take place’ in a straightforward sense, remembering that in the prophetic outlook the end is always imminent. Time as chronological sequence is of secondary concern in prophecy. This perspective is common to the entire NT. Jesus taught that God would vindicate his elect without delay (Luke 18:8), and Paul wrote to the Romans that God would ‘soon’ crush Satan under their feet (Rom 16:20).”⁶¹ First Peter 4:7, which says, “The end of all things

⁵⁷ William R. Newell, *The Book of the Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1935), 362.

⁵⁸ Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 56.

⁵⁹ J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (New York: Charles C. Cook Publishers, 1900; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), 23; Hughes, *Revelation*, 237, 241.

⁶⁰ Poythress, *Returning King*, 35.

⁶¹ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 41; cf. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 55, 59; Hughes, *Revelation*, 241; Thomas, “Dating Revelation,” 198.

is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer,” is another New Testament text that uses the language of imminence to draw the reader into a sense of expectation, motivation, and responsibility.⁶²

Alan Johnson agrees with Mounce: “In eschatology and apocalyptic, the future is always viewed as imminent without the necessity of intervening time (cf. Luke 18:8). . . . Therefore, ‘soonness’ means imminency in eschatological terms. The church in every age has always lived with the expectancy of the consummation of all things in its day. Imminency describes an event possible any day, impossible no day. If this sense is followed, we are neither forced to accept a ‘mistaken apocalyptic’ view as Schweitzer advocated nor a preterist interpretation.”⁶³

George Ladd also supports this view:

The problem is raised by the fact that the prophets were little interested in chronology, and the future was always viewed as imminent. Biblical prophecy is not primarily three-dimensional but two; it has height and breadth but is little concerned about depth, i.e., the chronology of future events. There is in biblical prophecy a tension between the immediate and distant future; the distant is viewed through the transparency of the immediate. It is true that the early church lived in expectancy of the return of the Lord, and it is the nature of biblical prophecy to make it possible for every generation to live in expectancy of the end. To relax and say ‘where is the promise of his coming?’ is to become a scoffer of divine truth. The ‘biblical’ attitude is ‘take heed, for you do not know when the time will come’ (Mark 13:33).⁶⁴

When the time texts of Revelation are understood in light of the prophetic viewpoint of the author, the nature of the entire church age in the New Testament as the “last hour,” and the imminency of the end times, the timing texts in Revelation provide no support for the early date of Revelation.

⁶² Osborne, *Revelation*, 55.

⁶³ Johnson, “Revelation,” 416–17.

⁶⁴ George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 22.

The Looming Jewish War

Another argument for the early date that is proffered by preterists is that the prophecies of specific events and time frames in Revelation are consistent with the Neronian era.⁶⁵ Gentry first points to the correspondence of events in Revelation that he believes “fit hand-in-glove with the historical records of the Jewish War.”⁶⁶

Alleged Correspondence of Events

After listing a few general historical correspondences, Gentry provides seven alleged specific, historical traces of evidence between Revelation and the Jewish War.⁶⁷

Rev 6:3–4	The disruption of “ <i>the</i> ” peace is viewed as the breach of the famed <i>Pax Romana</i> .
Rev 6:4	The reference to peace being taken from the earth is viewed as civil war in the “land” of Israel.
Rev 6:5–6	The rider on the black horse, which is clearly a symbol of famine, is interpreted as a reference to the famine that resulted from the Jewish Revolt.
Rev 7:1–7	The reference to the 144,000 who are sealed by God is seen as divine protection of Jewish Christians in Jerusalem who escaped to a town in Perea called Pella before it was too late.
Rev 11:1–2	As already noted, this is taken by preterists as a reference to the Herodian temple that was destroyed in A.D. 70.
Rev 14:19–20	The bridle-deep blood is viewed in light of Josephus’ description of the carnage of the Jewish War (<i>War</i> 3.10.9; 4.7.5–6; 6.8.5)

⁶⁵ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 256.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 238–41.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 241–46.

Rev 16:21

The 100 pound hailstones are seen as the Roman catapult missiles that were white in color and weighed about one talent (Josephus *War* 5.6.3).

If one follows Gentry's view of the judgments in Revelation, then they all must have been fulfilled in the events surrounding A.D. 70—the seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls. But this raises several serious questions for preterist interpreters. Each of Gentry's alleged correspondences between Revelation and the First Jewish Revolt will be briefly considered.

Gentry believes that the four horsemen of the Apocalypse in Rev 6:1–8 apply to the rupture of the *Pax Romana* and its aftermath in the first Jewish war. But can Gentry or others prove that one-fourth of the Jews were killed by the sword, famine, disease, and the wild beasts of the earth as required by Rev 6:8 and that another one-third were killed at some later point in the Jewish war (Rev 9:15)?

Gentry cites Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* (3.5.3) to support his notion that the 144,000 in Rev 7:1–7 were Jewish Christians who escaped Jerusalem before it was too late.⁶⁸ However, the differences between Eusebius' account and Rev 7:1–7 are significant. First, in Eusebius' account, the people of Jerusalem are commanded by some form of revelation from God to leave the city, but in Rev 7 there is no mention of any revelation commanding the 144,000 to leave. Second, in Rev 7 there is no mention of a city, while Eusebius mentions both Jerusalem and Pella. Third, the preservation in Rev 7 is accomplished by means of a divine suspension of judgment until the sealing of the 144,000 is complete, not in a miraculous flight from the city.⁶⁹ Fourth, Eusebius, the source for Gentry's alleged correspondence of events, never gives any hint that he believed the flight to Pella was a fulfillment of Rev 7.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 245

⁶⁹ Larry Spargimino, "How Preterists Misuse History to Advance Their View of Prophecy," in *The End Times Controversy*, ed. Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2003), 214-15.

Gentry's contention that the bridle-deep blood in Rev 14:19–20 corresponds to Josephus' description of the carnage of the Jewish war (*War* 3.10.9; 4.7.5–6; 6.8.5) is refuted by a simple reading of Josephus' description and the text of Rev 14:19–20⁷⁰ Josephus' account simply does not do justice to the description in Rev 14:19–20.

Gentry also sees a correspondence between the second Jewish temple before A.D. 70 and the temple mentioned in Rev 11:1–2. The identity of the temple in Rev 11:1–2 will be considered in detail later in this chapter.

Based on Rev 16:21, Gentry states that the one-talent hailstones that rain down from heaven were white (limestone) Roman ballista stones shot from catapults against the Jewish defenders of Jerusalem.⁷¹ Revelation 16:21 says, "And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe." Gentry categorically denies that the hailstones in Rev 16:21 are literal hailstones. He says, "It is quite impossible that such gargantuan hailstones can be accounted for under the most aggravated of meteorological conditions."⁷² There are three main problems with Gentry's view of Rev 16:21. First, the Bible contains historical and prophetic parallels of God's use of huge hailstones from heaven as a means of judgment (Exod 9:22–26; Josh 10:11; Job 38:22–23; Ezek 38:22).

Second, it is true that Josephus mentions 160 artillery engines employed by the Roman legions against Jerusalem, that each ballista stone weighed one talent, and that in the early stages of the assault the stones were white in color.⁷³ However, there are critical differences between the hailstones in Rev 16:21 and Roman ballista missiles.

⁷⁰ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 245.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 245–46.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 246.

⁷³ Josephus *War* 3.7.9; 5.6.3.

Hailstones are made of ice while ballista missiles are made of stone, and in Jerusalem they would be limestone. Hailstones of this magnitude are supernatural air-to-surface projectiles, while ballista stones are surface-to-surface man-made artillery shot by the Romans.⁷⁴ Furthermore, Josephus states that after the initial stages of the assault the Romans blackened the ballista stones. Apparently, when the stones were left white the Jews were able to see them coming and were able to avoid their impact. So, according to Josephus, the Romans blackened the stones in order to inflict more damage. Josephus relates the account,

As for the Jews, they at first watched the coming of the stone, for it was of a white colour, and could therefore not only be perceived by the great noise it made, but could be seen also before it came, by its brightness; accordingly, the watchmen that sat upon the towers gave them notice when the engine was let go, and the stone came from it, and cried out aloud, in their own country language, ‘the stone cometh;’ so those that were in the its way stood off, and threw themselves down upon the ground; by which means, and by their thus guarding themselves, the stone fell down and did them no harm. But the Romans contrived how to prevent that, by blacking the stone, who then could aim at them with success, when the stone was not discerned beforehand, as it had been till then; and so they destroyed many of them at one blow.⁷⁵

Josephus’ description clearly establishes that in the effective and later use of the ballista stones by the Romans, the stones did not resemble white hailstones as Gentry maintains.⁷⁶ Therefore, the only similarity between the hailstone in Rev 16:21 and the Roman ballista stones is that they each weighed one talent. This single point of similarity is insufficient to establish a correspondence between Rev 16:21 and the Roman siege of Jerusalem.

Third, in Rev 16:18–19, just before the mention of the hailstones in 16:21, the text refers to the greatest earthquake in human history that splits the city of Jerusalem into three parts. “And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder;

⁷⁴ Gordon Franz, “Was ‘Babylon’ Destroyed When Jerusalem Fell in A.D. 70?” in *The End Times Controversy*, ed. Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2003), 234.

⁷⁵ Josephus *War* 5.6.3.

⁷⁶ Spargimino, “How Preterists Misuse History,” 216.

and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty. And the great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell.” However, since apparently no earthquakes occurred during the time of the Jewish revolt, Gentry interprets this devastating, world-record earthquake figuratively as the division of Jerusalem “into three bickering factions” during the conquest of the city.⁷⁷ This again exposes Gentry’s inconsistent hermeneutic. Under his view, the earthquake is figurative in 16:18–19, but the one-talent hailstones in 16:21 are literal Roman ballista stones. Yet, there is nothing in the context to signal this hermeneutical shift. For these reasons, Gentry’s attempt to provide correspondences between the judgments of Revelation and the events of the Jewish War is unsuccessful.

Alleged Correspondence of Time Frames

Gentry also cites three specific time frames in Revelation that he alleges are consistent with the Neronian era. These time frames are found in Rev 9:5; 11:1–2; and 13:5–7

Revelation 9:5

First, he appeals to Rev 9:5, which says, “And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man.” The context in Rev 9:1–11 is a demonic invasion of earth as the abyss is opened. The demons are graphically described using the imagery of locusts and scorpions. Gentry claims that Rev 9:5 describes the five-month period from April-August A.D. 70 when Titus laid siege to Jerusalem.⁷⁸ He holds that the locust-like

⁷⁷ Gentry, *Dominion*, 412. Franz states that there were only three documented earthquakes in first century Israel: one in conjunction with the death and resurrection of Jesus (Matt 27:51–54; 28:2), one in A.D. 33 that caused slight damage to the temple (this could be the same earthquake that is described in Matt. 27:51–54 if one holds to an A.D. 33 date for the death of Christ), and one in A.D. 48 (“Was ‘Babylon’ Destroyed When Jerusalem Fell in A.D. 70?” 232).

⁷⁸ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 248.

creatures are not the Roman army, but demons who afflicted and possessed the Jewish people for the period of the final siege of Jerusalem.⁷⁹ For biblical support of this view, he cites Matt 12:38–45.⁸⁰ Gentry concludes, “So here we have in Revelation a time period of five months that is of demonic character. The striking applicability of Revelation 9 to the five-month siege of Jerusalem by Titus is surely confirmatory of the identifying of the Revelational prophecies with the events of the Jewish War.”⁸¹

There are two principal difficulties with this view. First, Gentry points to the five months in Rev 9:5 as the time of the Roman siege of Jerusalem from April-August A.D. 70, which according to Gentry’s calculations totaled 134 days.⁸² However, in Revelation the author employs a 30-day per month calendar (42 months=1260 days). Thus, five months would be 150 days. Even assuming that Gentry’s exact dates for the official beginning and end of the siege are correct, the prophecy is off by at least sixteen days. Gentry’s time period for the siege is actually closer to four prophetic months (120 days) than five months (150 days), but in either case it is imprecise. The problem with Gentry’s calculations is that when it comes to biblical prophecy, “almost” or “just about” is insufficient (Deut 18:21–22). The sovereignty of God is proved by His ability to declare the future with complete accuracy (Isa 41:21–23; 44:7).

Second, there is no evidence from Josephus or anyone else that a great horde of demons was loosed from the abyss during the siege of Jerusalem. Something of this magnitude would have been observable and would have been mentioned by Josephus. Gentry admits the strange silence of Josephus concerning this matter but points to the

⁷⁹ Ibid., 247.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 250.

⁸² Ibid., 248.

barbaric conduct of the Jews during the siege as evidence of demon affliction.⁸³ However, the Jews resorted to the same barbaric conduct and atrocities in the past when under siege, and there is no record of demonic affliction during those times (2 Kgs 6:24–33; Lam 4:10). Gentry’s view of Rev 9:5 is not supported by the evidence.⁸⁴

Revelation 11:1–2

Gentry next refers to the forty-two month period in Rev 11:1–2. He equates this period with the Roman invasion and conquest of Israel and Jerusalem (First Jewish Revolt) from “early spring, A.D. 67 to early September, A.D. 70.”⁸⁵ Gentry says, “And the fact is that it took *almost exactly* forty-two months for Rome to get into a position to destroy the Temple in the Jewish War of A.D. 67–70.”⁸⁶ There are two problems with this view.

First, Gentry admits that the Jewish war actually began in A.D. 66, but he does not begin the forty-two month period until “early Spring, A.D. 67.” His reason for omitting all of A.D. 66 is that, “this period should not be considered a judgment against the Jews . . . because the Jewish forces actually (and mysteriously) gained the upper hand against the troops of the governor of Syria.”⁸⁷ However, there is nearly universal agreement that the First Jewish Revolt began in May, A.D. 66.⁸⁸ Josephus says explicitly that the First Jewish Revolt began in A.D. 66. “Now this war began in the second year of

⁸³ Ibid., 248–49.

⁸⁴ Spargimino, “How Preterists Misuse History,” 206–11.

⁸⁵ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 253.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 250 [italics added].

⁸⁷ Ibid., 251.

⁸⁸ Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.–A.D. 135)*, rev. and ed. Geza Vermes and Fergus Millar, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973), 485–513. Schürer also dates the official end of the Jewish War in April, A.D. 73 with the fall of Masada.

the government of Florus, and the twelfth year of the reign of Nero.”⁸⁹ Since the War began in A.D. 66, one cannot subjectively move the date forward one year to achieve a predetermined outcome. Second, even assuming the correctness of Gentry’s time frame, he admits that the time is only close, or “almost” but not exact.⁹⁰ Therefore, this alleged time-frame correspondence fails.

Revelation 13:5–7

For his third alleged time-frame correspondence, Gentry appeals to Rev 13:5–7 which says,

And there was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies; and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven. And it was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them; and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him.

Gentry contends that the “war” of the Beast against the saints in this passage refers to the Neronic persecution of Christianity.⁹¹ He further notes that the Beast’s persecution lasts forty-two months and then alleges that, “the Neronic persecution lasted *just about* that very length of time.”⁹² Gentry claims that the Neronic persecution against Christians began in the middle or late fall (November) of A.D. 64 and continued up to Nero’s death on June 9, A.D. 68.⁹³ There are two problems with this view. First, as noted by the emphasis in Gentry’s own statement, the time period Gentry gives for the length of the

⁸⁹ Josephus *Antiquities* 20.11.1.

⁹⁰ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 251.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 254.

⁹² *Ibid.* [italics added]. Both Rev 11:1–2 and 13:5–7 refer to a forty-two month time period. Gentry views these as two different periods based on the fact that Rev. 11:1–2 is Jewish; whereas 13:5–7 mentions persecution of the “saints” which he assumes are Christians (*Before Jerusalem*, 253–54). He does not address why the “saints” could not also be a reference to Jewish believers. See Dan 7:21, 22, 25, 27.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 254.

Neronic persecution is not forty-two months (1260 days). It is “just about” that length of time. This alleged time-frame correspondence with Revelation suffers from the same inexactness as the others. The specificity of the prophecy requires a literal, exact fulfillment. The best view is that this prophecy will be literally, precisely fulfilled in the end-times during the forty-two month reign of the Antichrist.⁹⁴

The second flaw in Gentry’s view of Rev 13:5–7 is that it appears to militate against his own position on the date of Revelation. Gentry explicitly states several times that Revelation had to be written sometime between November, A.D. 64 (the beginning of the Neronic persecution) and spring A.D. 67 (Gentry’s date for the formal imperial engagement of the Jewish War).⁹⁵ He believes Revelation was written in A.D. 65–66 or the mid-sixties.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, Gentry also states that Rev 13:5–7 is a prophecy of the Neronic persecution of Christians that lasted from November A.D. 64 until the death of Nero. But if Revelation 13:5–7 is a prophecy of the Neronic persecution and its forty-two month duration, how could Revelation be written after this event had already commenced? Revelation is described as a prophecy (1:3; 22:7), and Gentry agrees that Revelation is “a real prophecy.”⁹⁷ But how can Revelation be a real prophecy of events that are “soon” to be fulfilled, as Gentry alleges, if some of the events in the book have already begun to be fulfilled?

If Gentry’s date of A.D. 65 or early 66 for Revelation is accepted, then the Neronic persecution of Christians would have been ongoing for at least two to fourteen months when Revelation was written. Gentry’s view of Rev 13:5–7 and his A.D. 65–66

⁹⁴ The repeated mention of forty-two months or 1260 days in Revelation harks back to Daniel 9:27 and the last half of Daniel’s seventieth week.

⁹⁵ Gentry, *Beast*, 245.

⁹⁶ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 256, 336.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

date for Revelation requires that John “predicted” a forty-two month period of time of which as much as one-third had already passed when he wrote. One could argue that John was simply predicting the duration of the persecution, not its beginning. However, it would seem strange to predict the duration of a time period when up to one-third of the time period had already passed.

The Contemporary Integrity of the Temple in Revelation 11:1–2

Another principal internal argument for the Neronic date from Revelation is the mention of the temple in Rev 11:1–2. For many early-date advocates, this is the decisive piece of internal evidence for their position. Referring to Rev 11:1–2, Torrey says that it is “a most important passage, truly decisive in view of all the other evidence” in establishing the date of the Apocalypse.”⁹⁸ Robert A. Briggs says, “Nonetheless, the apparent existence of the Jerusalem temple in Rev. 11:1–2 is a paramount feature in support of the argument that the book was actually written during Nero’s earlier reign.”⁹⁹

In Rev 11:1–2 John is told to measure the temple, the altar, and the people worshipping there. “And there was given to me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, ‘Rise and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and those who worship in it. And leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months.’” While there are numerous issues within this text, the *crux interpretum* in this text is the nature of the temple described in these verses. There are four main views of the identify of the temple in Rev 11:1–2.

⁹⁸ Charles Cutler Torrey, *The Apocalypse of John* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), 87.

⁹⁹ Robert A. Briggs, *Jewish Temple Imagery in the Book of Revelation*, Studies in Biblical Literature, ed. Hemchand Gossai, vol. 10 (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999), 24.

Symbolic of the Church

The majority view is that the temple in Rev 11 is symbolic. While there are slight variations within this view, the basic idea is that the temple in Rev 11:1–2 represents the church and the “court” represents the world and all who have compromised with it.¹⁰⁰ Some view the temple as the Christian community while the court outside refers to the outer life of the church in its vulnerability to suffering and death.¹⁰¹ It is true that the church is often referred to as a temple in the New Testament (1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21; 1 Pet 3:5). And the specific term *ναός* fits well with this figurative meaning.¹⁰² Beale notes that the five-fold figurative presentation of the church in 11:1–2 is similar to the five images that are figuratively applied to overcomers in Rev 3:12: pillar, temple, God’s name, the name of the city of Jerusalem, and Christ’s new name.¹⁰³ The difference, however, between 3:12 and 11:1–2 is that in 3:12 the figures are explicitly stated to refer to the overcomers; whereas, in 11:1–2 there is no stated correlation between the temple and the church.

There are two central problems with the symbolic view of the temple in Rev 11:1–2. First, the nature of the temple in this context is Jewish. The mention of the sanctuary, the altar, the court of the Gentiles, and the holy city places this text on Jewish ground.¹⁰⁴ As Ladd notes, “However, here the temple is not represented primarily

¹⁰⁰ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1935; reprint, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 328–31. Many view the temple here as figurative of the church in the final days of persecution or great tribulation. Johnson, “Revelation,” 500–1; Ladd, *Revelation*, 151–53; Mounce, *Revelation*, 213–14; David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Ralph P. Martin, vol. 52B (Dallas: Word Books, 1998), 597–98. Others view the temple in Revelation 11:1–2 as symbolic of the church throughout church history. Caird, *Revelation*, 130–32; Beale, *Revelation*, 557–61. Osborne identifies the temple as “the church, primarily the saints of this final period but secondarily the church of all ages” (*Revelation*, 410).

¹⁰¹ Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 597.

¹⁰² Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 81.

¹⁰³ Beale, *Revelation*, 571.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 81; cf. Seiss, *Apocalypse*, 236.

as the dwelling place of God but as the Jewish temple in Jerusalem.”¹⁰⁵ Additionally, the trampling of the outer court and entire city of Jerusalem by the Gentiles indicates that the temple and court picture something that contrasts with the Gentiles, that is, something Jewish.¹⁰⁶

Second, the figurative view is unacceptable because the imagery fails to adequately account for the different elements in the text. Revelation 11:1–2 makes a distinction between the temple itself and those who worship in it. The symbolic view interprets the temple as the church. But if the sanctuary represents the church, then who are favored worshipers who are measured?¹⁰⁷ Osborne argues that the temple is the church while the worshipers in it are “the individual believers in the church” since they are described as “in it” and therefore under its protection.¹⁰⁸ However, the church by definition includes those who worship in it. The figurative view seems to merge the two symbols.¹⁰⁹ For these reasons, the symbolic view is not a satisfactory interpretation

Heavenly Temple

Recognizing the problems in interpreting Rev 11:1–2 as a reference to the temple in Jerusalem that was destroyed in A.D. 70, some scholars view the temple as a heavenly temple.¹¹⁰ Simon Kistemaker notes that the word *ναός* appears in Revelation a

¹⁰⁵ George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 152.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. Cf. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 81. BDAG states that *ναός* in Rev 11:1 refers to “the temple at Jerusalem” (665–66).

¹⁰⁷ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 81

¹⁰⁸ Osborne, *Revelation*, 411.

¹⁰⁹ Randall Price also provides several excellent arguments in favor of the literal interpretation of the temple and against the symbolic view. See Randall Price, *The Coming Last Days Temple* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1999), 317–21.

¹¹⁰ C. H. Giblin, “Revelation 11:1–13: Its Form, Function and Contextual Integration,” *NTS* 30 (1984): 438–40.

total of sixteen times and then surveys its meaning in several texts (Rev 3:12; 7:15; 11:1, 2; 11:19; 15:5; 16:1, 17; 21:22).¹¹¹ He concludes that in Revelation *ναός* points to a celestial temple symbolizing the very presence of God.¹¹²

While it is agreed that *ναός* does normally refer to a celestial temple in Revelation, there are four difficulties with this view for Rev 11:1–2. First, later in the same context, in Rev 11:19, John sees “the temple of God which is in heaven” and the “ark of the covenant in His temple.” The temple in 11:19 is specifically designated as “in heaven” and mentions the presence of the ark of the covenant in the temple. Also, from the heavenly temple in Rev 11:19 there issues forth, “flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.” However, Rev 11:1–2 makes no mention of the temple being in heaven and omits any mention of the presence of the ark of the covenant or the sights and sound that come from the throne. These differences appear to distinguish the heavenly temple in 11:19 from the earthly temple in 11:1–2.

Second, in Rev 7:15 and 15:5, 6 the temple is not only present, but the tabernacle as well, since the heavenly pattern was the same for both.¹¹³ Third, in what sense could a heavenly temple be trodden under foot by the Gentile nations for forty-two months? This suits an earthly temple much better than a heavenly one.¹¹⁴ Fourth, as already noted, BDAG states that *ναός* in Rev 11:1 refers to “the temple at Jerusalem.”¹¹⁵ For these reasons, this view must be rejected.

¹¹¹ Simon J. Kistemaker, “The Temple in the Apocalypse,” *JETS* 43 (2000): 433–41.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 441.

¹¹³ Price, *Temple*, 321.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 317.

¹¹⁵ BDAG, 665–66.

Second (Herodian) Temple

The preterist view is that the temple in Rev 11:1–2 is the Herodian or second Jewish temple in Jerusalem that was still standing at the time John received the Revelation. Gentry points to the similarity between Luke 21:24 and Rev 11:2 as describing the same events, that is, the literal occurrences in Jerusalem in A.D. 70.¹¹⁶ Therefore, preterists conclude that Revelation must have been written before the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70.¹¹⁷ There are four principal problems with this view.

The Date of First Clement

First, Clement of Rome, who most scholars believe wrote in the mid A.D. 90s, refers to the second temple as though it were still standing.

Let each of you, brothers, in his proper order give thanks to God, maintaining a good conscience, not overstepping the designated rule of his ministry, but acting with reverence. Not just anywhere, brothers, are the continual daily sacrifices offered, or the freewill offerings, or the offerings for sin and trespasses, but only in Jerusalem. And even there the offering is not made in every place, but in front of the sanctuary at the altar, the offering having been first inspected for blemishes by the high priest and the previously mentioned ministers.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 175–76.

¹¹⁷ J. Ritchie Smith, who was not certain if the temple should be taken literally or not, notes that if the temple in Rev 11:1–2 was the literal temple, John may have simply been looking back to it. Ritchie observes: “But even if it be the literal temple that appears, does the conclusion follow? If the vision of the temple proves that the book was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, does the vision of the woman and the child in chapter xii. prove that it was written before the birth of Christ? Evidently the seer is looking backward in the one instance; why not in the other? By what right is it assumed that the date of any particular vision gives the date of the book?” J. Ritchie Smith, “The Date of the Apocalypse,” *BSac* 45 (1888): 308. The problem with Smith’s statement is that in Rev 11:2 the treading of the temple is future as indicated by the future tense of the verb *πατήσουσιν*. Richard Bauckham points to Rev 8:1 in support of the notion that the literal temple had to be standing in Jerusalem when John wrote Revelation. He maintains that the 30-minute silence in Rev 8:1 parallels the morning ritual of burning the incense in the temple after the lamb had been sacrificed. Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), 70–83.

¹¹⁸ *1 Clement* 41.1–2.

If Clement could write in the mid A.D. 90s as if the temple were still standing in Jerusalem, what prevents John from doing the same thing?¹¹⁹

Gentry's response to this argument is to assign a pre-A.D. 70 date to Clement as well.¹²⁰ But again to make his case he must swim upstream against the convincing majority of scholars who date Clement in A.D. 95–97.¹²¹ L. L. Welborn, who rejects the mid-nineties date for Clement acknowledges the “nearly unanimous assent” to this date.¹²² Gentry notes that Clement was appointed bishop of Rome in A.D. 90 and that his letter makes no mention of this. However, the office of monarchical bishop, in the sense denoted by later tradition, does not appear to have existed in Rome at that time.¹²³ Gentry also argues that Clement's letter reflects a more primitive Christian era.¹²⁴ But there is nothing in the letter along this line that excludes a date in the 90s. Gentry's final argument for a pre-70 date for *1 Clement* is from 5.1–3, which reads, “But to pass from the examples of ancient times, let us come to those champions who lived nearest to our time. Let us set before us the noble examples which belong to our own generation. By reason of jealousy and envy the greatest and most righteous pillars were persecuted and fought to the death. Let us set before our eyes the good apostles.” Gentry says that Clement's reference to the

¹¹⁹ The view adopted in this dissertation is that in Rev 11:1–2 John was looking forward to a future, or third, Jewish temple that will exist in Jerusalem during the seventieth week of Daniel. He was not referring back to the second temple before A.D. 70. However, the point being made here is simply that the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 does not preclude a reference back to it after that time.

¹²⁰ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 176–81.

¹²¹ Most scholars date *1 Clement* ca. 95–97. M. W. Holmes, “Clement of Rome,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 234; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 961.

¹²² L. L. Welborn, “On the Date of First Clement,” *BR 29* (1984): 36–38, 49. Beale provides a critique of Welborn's reasoning (*Revelation*, 16).

¹²³ *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, ed. and rev. Michael W. Holmes, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989), 24.

¹²⁴ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 178–79.

martyrdom of Peter and Paul in “our own generation” suggests a recent event and is compatible with a date in 69 or 70.¹²⁵ However, Gentry admits that if *1 Clement* was written in A.D. 95 then only about 27 years would have elapsed since the martyrdom of Peter and Paul and this would certainly fit well within that generation.¹²⁶

Notwithstanding Gentry’s objections, there are five main reasons for dating *1 Clement* in A.D. 95 or 96.¹²⁷ First, in *1 Clement* the Neronian persecution is an event of the past.¹²⁸ Second, the martyrdom of Peter and Paul are past.¹²⁹ Since they were martyred in Rome about A.D. 67 or 68, this means that the earliest possible date one could assign to *1 Clement* would be A.D. 69. Third, there is a reference in *1 Clement* to emissaries from Rome to the Corinthian church “who from youth to old age have lived blameless among us.”¹³⁰ For believers from Rome to have lived as Christians from youth to old age requires a date after the late 60s. Fourth, the church at Corinth is called “ancient.”¹³¹ If *1 Clement* was written before A.D. 70, the church at Corinth would not have reached its twentieth anniversary by the time *1 Clement* was composed. A period of less than twenty years hardly fits the adjective “ancient.” However, if *1 Clement* was written in the late 90s the church would have been almost fifty years old and would fit this description much better. Fifth, the external evidence from Hegesippus and Irenaeus is consistent with a date in A.D. 95 or 96.¹³² Gentry puts himself in the unenviable position of trying to

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Apostolic Fathers*, 25.

¹²⁸ *1 Clement* 5–6.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.3–6.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.3.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 47.6.

¹³² *Apostolic Fathers*, 25.

prove that Revelation was written before A.D. 70 (against the prevailing view) by proving that 1 Clement was written before A.D. 70 (a position that is also against the widely accepted view). It appears that he is mistaken on both points.

Luke 21:24 and Revelation 11:1–2

Second, Gentry argues that Luke 21:24 prophesies the destruction of the second Jewish temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70. He notes that the reference to the temple in Rev 11:1–2 uses language that is reflective of Luke 21:24. He observes that both texts refer to the Gentiles or nations, the city of Jerusalem, and a trampling of Jerusalem under foot. Gentry says, “In Luke 21:24 we read: ‘and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and *Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles* until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.’ Revelation 11:2b reads: ‘it [i.e., the holy city, Rev. 11:1] has been given to the *nations*; and they will *tread under foot* the *holy city* for forty-two months.’ Here the correspondences are so strong, they bespeak historical identity rather than mere accidental similarity.”¹³³ Therefore, for Gentry, both Luke 21:24 and Rev 11:1–2 refer to the events of A.D. 70. and prophesy the destruction of Jerusalem and the second Jewish temple.

It is true that Luke 21:24 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 by the Romans and that there are three linguistic parallels between Luke 21:24 and Rev 11:1–2. However, similarity between two texts does not necessarily denote identity. There are three significant differences between these two texts and their contexts that indicate they are not referring to the same event. First, in Luke 21:24, the entire city of Jerusalem is trampled under foot by the Gentiles. In A.D. 70 the entire city was judged by God and reduced to rubble for her unfaithfulness (Luke 21:6). But, in Rev 11:1, the sanctuary, altar, and approved worshipers are measured as a sign of God’s approval.

¹³³ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 175–76.

Second, in the remainder of Rev 11 the context indicates that Jerusalem will not be totally destroyed during its forty-two months of treading mentioned in Rev 11:2. Rev 11:8 cites Jerusalem as the place where the bodies of the two witnesses lie in the street for three and a half days. And in Rev 11:13 a great earthquake in Jerusalem kills seven thousand people. If Rev 11:1–2 refers to A.D. 70 and the total destruction of Jerusalem how can the bodies of the two witnesses lie in the street of Jerusalem and how can seven thousand people in Jerusalem be killed if the city no longer exists?

Third, Rev 11:2 provides a specific, brief time limit for the trampling of the city (“forty-two months”); whereas, Luke 21:24 leaves the time of trampling open-ended and implies that it will endure for quite some time (“until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled”). The linguistic parallels between the two texts indicate that the two events they describe will be similar, in that, Gentiles will come against the city of Jerusalem in conquest. However, the contrasts between Luke 21:24 and Rev 11:1–2 demonstrate that they refer to two different acts of judgment by God against Jerusalem, and thus, two different Jewish temples. Luke 21:24 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem and the second temple in A.D. 70 while Rev 11:1–2 prophesies Gentile conquest and domination of Jerusalem in the future seventieth week of Daniel.

Mixed Hermeneutic

A third reason for rejecting Gentry’s view of Rev 11:1–2 is that it involves an unwarranted, confusing mixture of literal-historical and figurative-symbolic interpretation.¹³⁴ Gentry interprets Rev 11:1 figuratively and 11:2 literally. Gentry interprets the innermost aspects, the *ναός*, altar, and worshipers, which are measured, as symbolic of the true Temple, the church, which will be preserved. But he views the “outer court” of the Temple complex, which is not measured, as the literal Herodian

¹³⁴ Ibid., 174.

Temple and the Israelites who refuse the new priesthood and baptism and are thus destined for destruction in A.D. 70.¹³⁵ In other words, he takes a description that is clearly on Jewish ground and interprets it part Jewish and part Christian.¹³⁶

Gentry justifies this radical shift in hermeneutic by appealing to several other Scriptures. He points to Rev 11:8 in the same context where Jerusalem is “mystically called Sodom and Egypt.”¹³⁷ However, in this verse the text explicitly indicates that these names are symbolic of Jerusalem, while there is no such textual indicator in 11:1. Gentry also appeals for support to Jesus’ words in John 6:49–50 where there is a mixing of spiritual and literal realities.¹³⁸ In John 6:48–51, Jesus said,

‘I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh.’

In these verses it is obvious from the context that Jesus is speaking symbolically of Himself as bread and literally of death. Jesus says plainly, “I am the bread of life.” There is no such clear signal in Rev 11:1–2 of a radical switch in hermeneutical approaches.¹³⁹ Additionally, Gentry points to Heb 8:5 where the literal temple and the heavenly temple are both mentioned. But in the verse it is clearly stated that that one is the earthly copy and the other is the heavenly reality. There is no such distinction stated in Rev 11:1–2.

Next, Gentry states that one symbol may have a two-fold referent because the seven heads on the beast represent both seven mountains and seven kings (Rev 17:9–10).

¹³⁵ Ibid., 174–75.

¹³⁶ Thomas, “Dating Revelation,” 197.

¹³⁷ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 170, 174–75.

¹³⁸ Ibid., xlviii.

¹³⁹ Thomas, “Dating Revelation,” 195–96.

But again, the way the reader knows that the seven heads have a double referent is because the text specifically says so. The reader does not have license to create a dual referent or mixed hermeneutic on his own. And there is nothing in Rev 11:1–2 to signal Gentry’s hermeneutical shift. Gentry also appeals to the apocalyptic genre of Revelation as allowing a greater flexibility in its exegesis, but he provides no examples from apocalyptic literature of this kind of figurative and literal meaning for essentially the same terminology.¹⁴⁰

Gentry’s mixed hermeneutic continues in his exegesis of Rev 11:3–13 and the two witnesses. Gentry argues that large rounded numbers in Revelation are symbols, but smaller numbers should be taken literally, so he takes the forty-two months in Rev 11:2 and the 1,260 days in 11:3 literally.¹⁴¹ But then in the same verse (11:3) he fails to follow his own interpretive method by indicating that the two prophets in Rev 11:3–13 “probably represent a small body of Christians who remained in Jerusalem to testify against it. They are portrayed as *two*, in that they are legal witnesses to the covenant curses.”¹⁴² For Gentry, the forty-two months in Rev 11:2 are literal, and the 1,260 days in 11:3 are literal, but the *two* prophets in 11:3 are not. Thomas likens this to changing the rules in the middle of the game, and observes, “Any interpretation can win that way.”¹⁴³

Gentry argues that this mixture of literal and figurative interpretation is required in Rev 11:1–2.¹⁴⁴ However, it is only required if one adopts Gentry’s preterist viewpoint. If, on the other hand, the temple in Revelation is a literal temple in Jerusalem in the end times, then the worshipers who are favored are literal end-time Jewish

¹⁴⁰ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, xlvi.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 163, 247, n. 46, 250.

¹⁴² Gentry, *Dominion*, 408.

¹⁴³ Thomas, “Dating Revelation,” 196.

¹⁴⁴ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 174–75.

worshippers who are acceptable to God in the midst of apostasy because of their humble faith in God's Word and chosen way. Rev 11:1 is probably an allusion to God's house (temple) and the faithful worshippers in Isa 66:1–2.¹⁴⁵ “Thus says the Lord, ‘heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is the place that I may rest? For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being,’ declares the Lord. But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.”

The following context in Isa 66:3–6 presents God's view toward self-reliant worshippers in the end-time temple and His punishment for their sins.

‘But he who kills an ox is like one who slays a man; he who sacrifices a lamb is like the one who breaks a dog's neck; he who offers a grain offering is like one who offers swine's blood; he who burns incense is like the one who blesses an idol. As they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their own abominations, so will I choose their punishments, and I will bring on them what they dread. Because I called, but no one answered; I spoke, but they did not listen. And they did evil in My sight, and chose that in which I did not delight.’ Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at His word; your brothers who hate you, who exclude you for My name's sake, have said, ‘Let the Lord be glorified, that we may see your joy.’ But they will be put to shame. A voice of uproar from the city, a voice from the temple, the voice of the Lord who is rendering recompense to His enemies.

Interpreting Rev 11:1–2 in light of Isa 66 maintains a consistent literal hermeneutic that is in line with the parallel Old Testament background.

Revelation 11:1–2 and Ezekiel 40–48.

A fourth reason for rejecting the Herodian temple view is that the Old Testament background for Rev 11:1–2 is Ezek 40–42, where the prophet Ezekiel, in a vision, watches as an angel measures every part of the temple.¹⁴⁶ In this section, the

¹⁴⁵ Randall Price provides an excellent discussion of the historical setting of Isa 66 and its parallel with the tribulation temple in Rev 11:1–2 (*Temple*, 217–19, 497–98).

¹⁴⁶ Mounce, 213.

prophet Ezekiel had a vision of a temple that did not exist at the time of his vision. With this as the background for Rev 11:1–2, one would expect John to refer to a future temple as well. This point will be presented in depth in the next section. In light of these four arguments, it is unlikely that Rev 11:1–2 is a reference to the Herodian temple in Jerusalem.

Future, End-Time Temple

The fourth view is that the temple in Rev 11:1–2 is a literal, earthly, future temple that will stand in Jerusalem in the end times. In other words, it is a temple that is still future even today.¹⁴⁷ There are three main points in favor of viewing the temple as a literal tribulation temple. First, a literal temple fits the activity of measuring the temple, altar, and worshipers and the non-measurement of the outer court in 11:2. The purpose of making these measurements was not to obtain physical dimensions since the dimensions are never reported. Some have proposed that the measuring is a symbol for preservation, protection, and safeguarding.¹⁴⁸ The problem with this view is that it does not adequately fit the immediately subsequent verses in 11:3–13. The measuring appears to be a sign of divine approval or favor for the sanctuary, altar and worshipers and divine disapproval of all the Gentile enemies who reject him.¹⁴⁹ This is substantiated by the two witnesses in 11:3–13 who enjoy God’s favor, but not his protection or preservation from every enemy

¹⁴⁷ Gentry dismisses the future rebuilt temple view on two grounds. First, he states that the events of Revelation are *near* and that the rebuilt temple is at least 2000 years distant (*Before Jerusalem*, xlix). This timing issue was discussed earlier in this chapter. Second, he notes that the text in Revelation is based on Luke 21:24, which he believes is contextually bound to the first century (*ibid.*). For a thorough critique of the preterist view of the Olivet Discourse, see Toussaint, “Critique,” 468–90; Ice, “Olivet Discourse,” 151–200.

¹⁴⁸ Kistemaker, “Temple,” 435.

¹⁴⁹ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 80–81.

(11:5–11).¹⁵⁰ As Thomas observes, “So the measuring is an object lesson of how entities favored by God will fare during the period of Gentile oppression that lies ahead.”¹⁵¹

Second, and closely related to the first point, the literal view fits the following context of the two witnesses in Rev 11:3–13. The close relationship between 11:1–2 and 11:3 indicates that the time and purpose of the two witnesses are parallel to the Temple’s desecration.¹⁵² Apparently, the two witnesses are originally among the approved worshipers in 11:1. But when the temple is desecrated, as prophesied by Dan 9:27, the two witnesses clothe themselves in sackcloth (Rev 11:3) which is the proper Jewish response to tragedy, particularly Temple desecration (Lam 2:10).¹⁵³ They enjoy God’s favor and their prophetic activity serves to counteract the signs and wonders of the false prophet. However, the two witnesses are eventually overcome by the beast, but their bodies are resurrected after three and a half days (Rev 11:7–11). The desecration of the temple and the murder of the two witnesses form a unit and function as catalysts that bring the hand of God in judgment on His enemies (Rev 11:13–14).

Third, the primary support for interpreting the temple in Rev 11:1–2 as a future, rebuilt temple is derived from the Old Testament background of the text. It is recognized by scholars of every stripe that Revelation relies heavily on the Old Testament, especially Daniel and Ezekiel.¹⁵⁴ Gentry strongly supports the notion that

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 81.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Price, *Temple*, 319–20.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Revelation contains more Old Testament allusions than any other New Testament book. In terms of actual allusions Isaiah is first, followed by Daniel, Ezekiel, and Psalms although exact statistical counts vary. Beale, *Revelation*, 77. However, Daniel is generally considered to be the Old Testament book with the most influence on Revelation. idem, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984); idem, *Revelation*, 77. According to Jenkins, Revelation contains fifty-three allusions to Daniel and forty-three to Ezekiel. Ferrell Jenkins, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (Marion, IN: Cogdill Foundation, 1972), 24.

Daniel is the Old Testament counterpart to the Book of Revelation. He says, “In several respects Revelation is reminiscent of the Old Testament book of Daniel: (1) Each is a prophetic work. (2) Each was written by a devout, God-fearing Jew in times of the author’s personal exile and national Jewish distress. (3) Each shares a frequent and very obvious stylistic similarity. (4) Revelation frequently draws from Daniel. Indeed, Revelation is even recognized as a New Testament Daniel by some scholars.”¹⁵⁵

Interestingly, in both of Daniel and Ezekiel a temple was mentioned which was not in existence at the time the prophet was writing. Daniel wrote his great prophecy after the destruction of the temple in 586 B.C. and before the temple was rebuilt in 520–516.¹⁵⁶ When Daniel wrote there was no temple standing in Jerusalem. It had been in ruins for about fifty years. However, he refers to temple sacrifices and temple desecration on several occasions: 8:11–14; 9:27; 10:31; 12:11. Daniel must have been referring to a temple that was future to his own day when he wrote. Moreover, the mention of “forty-two months” (Rev 11:2) and “1,260 days” (Rev 11:3) is an unmistakable allusion back to the second half of Daniel’s seventieth week and a literal temple in Dan 9:24.¹⁵⁷ If John is the New Testament Daniel, as Gentry admits, why would it surprise him to find John also referring to a future temple that did not exist at the time he received his vision?

Likewise, Ezekiel describes a huge temple in his prophecy in chapters 40–48. Ezekiel’s temple vision is especially germane to the interpretation of Rev 11:1–2 because of the close contextual and linguistic relationship between the two texts. G. K. Beale says that the measuring of the temple in Rev 11:1–2 “is best understood against the

¹⁵⁵ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 17.

¹⁵⁶ While many modern scholars date Daniel in the second century B.C., most conservative scholars date the final edition of the book to about 530 B.C. during the final decade of Daniel’s life. Gleason L. Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 387.

¹⁵⁷ Price, *Temple*, 314–16.

background of the temple prophecy in Ezekiel 40–48.”¹⁵⁸ Alan Johnson observes: “Most agree that the principal OT passage in John’s mind was Ezekiel’s lengthy description of the measuring of the future kingdom temple (Ezek 40:3–48:35).”¹⁵⁹ Almost every scholarly commentary or journal article on Rev 11:1–2 mentions the close connection between Ezek 40–48 and Rev 11:1–2. Yet, incredibly, Gentry never mentions Ezek 40–48 even one time in his entire discussion of Rev 11:1–2. His only mention of Ezekiel 40–48 in *Before Jerusalem Fell*, according to his own Scripture Index, is in a footnote on page 224 that has nothing to do with Revelation 11:1–2.

The Solomonic temple in Jerusalem was burned by the army of Nebuchadnezzar on August 16, 586 B.C. (2 Kgs 25:8–12). Ezekiel was exiled to Babylon in the second Jewish deportation in 597 B.C. From 593–571 B.C., Ezekiel prophesied concerning Judah and the nations. This concise outline of Ezekiel highlights the general flow of the book.

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| I. Ezekiel 1–3 | Ezekiel is commissioned with a message of judgment against Judah and her near enemies. |
| II. Ezekiel 4–24 | Judgment on Judah |
| III. Ezekiel 25–32 | Judgment on Judah’s near enemies |
| IV. Ezekiel 33 | Ezekiel receives news in Babylon that Jerusalem has fallen. He is recommissioned with a new message of restoration. |
| V. Ezekiel 34–48 | Restoration and Blessing on Judah |

As can be seen in this simple overview, Ezekiel 33 is the pivotal chapter in the book. In this chapter Ezekiel received news of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in Jerusalem on January 9, 585 B.C. (Ezek 33:21). All that he had prophesied had

¹⁵⁸ Beale, *Revelation*, 559.

¹⁵⁹ Johnson, “Revelation,” 499–500; cf. E. W. Hengstenberg, *The Revelation of St. John*, trans. Patrick Fairbairn, vol. 1 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1852), xlvii.

come to pass. The city and temple were in ruins. In chapters 34–48, the message of the prophet changes from judgment and destruction to future blessing and restoration. In 573 B.C, twelve years after Ezekiel received news of the destruction of the temple, Ezekiel received a vision of a new temple (40:1–4) that, if taken literally, has never existed even up to this day.¹⁶⁰

The Temple in Ezekiel 40–48

The difficulty in interpreting Rev 11:1–2 in light of Ezek 40–48 is that there is not a consensus concerning the meaning of Ezekiel’s vision, and this ambiguity carries forward to John’s description.¹⁶¹ Broadly speaking, there are three main interpretations of the temple in Ezek 40–48: (1) one of the historic temples in Israel’s past, (2) a symbolic temple, and (3) the eschatological, millennial temple.¹⁶² Each of these views will be briefly considered.

Historic Temple from Israel’s Past

It seems clear that the temple in Ezek 40–48 is not a look back at the Solomonic temple because the features of the two temples are vastly different.¹⁶³ It also does not appear to be the post-exilic temple since the dimensions are different, and the glory of God never filled the post-exilic temple as it does the temple in Ezek 40–48 (43:4–5). The returning glory is the focus of Ezekiel’s restoration temple.

¹⁶⁰ The date of the vision was April 28, 573 B.C. Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. Robert L. Hubbard Jr. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 513.

¹⁶¹ Johnson, “Revelation,” 500.

¹⁶² Mark F. Rooker, “Evidence from Ezekiel,” in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, ed. Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townsend (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 129.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*; see Price, *Temple*, 511–12.

Symbolic Temple

While Gentry never mentions Ezek 40–48 in *Before Jerusalem Fell*, he does provide his view of this temple in his work *He Shall Have Dominion*. Gentry interprets the temple in Ezek 40–48 symbolically of, “the covenantal relationship of God with His people.”¹⁶⁴ He states, “That visionary Temple is symbolic of the glorious presence of God in the Kingdom of Christ coming in the New Covenant era. And it is so because even further defined, it is symbolic of Christ Himself. Christ is the true presence of God which could only be hinted at in the temple construction.”¹⁶⁵ The “rebuilding” of the temple according to Gentry speaks of Christ and the building of His Church.¹⁶⁶ He supports his view with several New Testament verses (Matt 12:6; 16:18; 21:42; John 1:14; 2 Cor 6:16–7:1; Col 2:9).¹⁶⁷

There are three key arguments that render the symbolic view of Ezek 40–48 unlikely. First, the details of the architecture are too minutely detailed for a symbolic interpretation.¹⁶⁸ If these nine chapters packed full of minute details are symbolic, what does each detail symbolize? John Taylor, who adopts the symbolic view, summarizes his understanding of the basic ideas in Ezekiel’s vision.

- (a) the perfection of God’s plan for His restored people, symbolically expressed in the immaculate symmetry of the temple building;
- (b) the centrality of worship in the new age, its importance being expressed in the scrupulous concern for detail in the observance of its rites;
- (c) the abiding presence of the Lord in the midst of His people;

¹⁶⁴ Gentry, *Dominion*, 356. It is interesting that Gentry views the temple in Ezek 8–11 literally, the temple in Ezek 40–48 figuratively, and the temple in Rev 11:2 literally, but the inner aspects of it in Rev 11:1 figuratively. The lack of hermeneutical consistency is a weakness in Gentry’s view.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 357.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 359.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 357–60.

¹⁶⁸ Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 237.

- (d) the blessings that will flow from God's presence to the barren places of the earth (the river of life);
- (e) the orderly allocation of duties and privileges to all God's people, as shown both in the temple duties and in the apportionment of the land.¹⁶⁹

But how can one objectively verify Taylor's conclusions? Without any established, governing principles one could make the intricate features of the text mean almost anything.¹⁷⁰

Second, Ezek 40–48 is reminiscent of Exod 25:9 and 1 Chr 28:19 where the Lord showed Moses and David, respectively, the detailed pattern of a tabernacle or temple they were to actually build. Why should the detailed pattern of the Ezekiel temple complex be treated differently?

Third, interpreting this section other than in a normal, literal approach contradicts the interpretive guide in the vision who commands Ezekiel to record all the minute details of the temple and its regulations so that these details might actually be carried out and followed (40:4; 44:5).¹⁷¹ Ezek 43:10–11 is very specific:

As for you, son of man, describe the temple to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the plan. And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the house, its structure, its exits, its entrances, all its designs, all its statutes, and all its laws. And write it in their sight, so that they may observe its whole design and all its statutes, and *do them* (italics added).

As Jon Levenson notes,

The highly specific nature of the description of the Temple, its liturgy and community bespeaks a practical program, not a vision of pure grace. For example, when the text says that eight steps led up to the vestibule of the inner court (Ezek. 40:31), can this be other than the demand that the new Temple be constructed just

¹⁶⁹ John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. Donald J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1969), 253–54.

¹⁷⁰ Ralph H. Alexander, "Ezekiel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 943; Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 461.

¹⁷¹ Alexander, "Ezekiel," 943.

so?. . . . what Ezekiel was shown is the divinely constructed model, the *tabnit* like the one David showed Solomon (1 Chron. 28:11–19).¹⁷²

Mark Rooker aptly summarizes the case against the symbolic view and in favor of the literal interpretation of Ezek 40–48:

Those who disapprove of a literal interpretation of the passage and opt for a spiritualized or symbolic meaning are far from speaking with one voice regarding what the new Temple of Ezekiel does signify. It has been argued, for example, that the temple represents heaven, the new heavens and new earth, the church, Christ and His community of believers, or Jesus Himself. This lack of unanimity is an argument against the strength of this position. Indeed, the intricate detail in the description of the temple does not seem to mesh with a spiritualized interpretation. . . . If the vision is to be taken symbolically, it must be asked what is the correspondence between the minute details and the symbolized blessings. Satisfactory answers have not been forthcoming. The details are typologically similar to those given for the Tabernacle in the wilderness as well as Solomon's Temple—both being built after the layout was presented in detailed and descriptive design. Similar references to a temple in the messianic kingdom include Isaiah 2:2–4 and Haggai 2:9. An expectation of a rebuilt temple in the messianic age was part of later Jewish expectation as witnessed by the Dead Sea Scrolls as well as rabbinic literature.¹⁷³

For these reasons, the symbolic view is not an acceptable interpretation of this temple.

Literal, Eschatological (Millennial) Temple

While there is no sound contextual or exegetical basis in Ezek 40–48 for taking the temple figuratively or allegorically, there is ample evidence for interpreting it as a literal, eschatological temple. Five main points favor this view. First, the entire context of Ezek 36–37 points to Israel as a transformed people restored to a transformed land. Ezek 37:25–28 serves as an introductory summary to chapters 40–48.

And they will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons, and their sons' sons

¹⁷² Jon Douglas Levenson, *Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40–48*, Harvard Semitic Monographs, no. 10 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 45. Rooker observes that, “the arrangement of the book of Ezekiel is typologically the same as that found in the Pentateuch—both focus on a redemption from exile followed by a giving of legislation.” Rooker, “Ezekiel,” 130, n. 53.

¹⁷³ Rooker, “Ezekiel,” 130–31; cf. Alexander, “Ezekiel,” 942–52.

forever; and David My servant shall be their prince forever. And I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My *sanctuary* in their midst forever. My *dwelling place* also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever (italics added).

As Randall Price notes, “These verses reveal that the future restoration of the Nation will be in the same place (Israel) and in the same form (a Temple) as in the past.”¹⁷⁴ The context continues in Ezek 38–39 which contain a prophecy of a great invasion of Israel in the end times when the people have been restored to their land and are living in peace and prosperity. Ezek 36–39, and its theme of eschatological restoration, forms the larger context for Ezek 40–48.¹⁷⁵

Second, Ezekiel includes specific measurements and types of sacrifices. Scholars almost universally interpret the details and sacrifices of the Law of Moses literally. These same scholars likewise adopt a literal understanding of the detailed measurements of the Jewish tabernacle and first temple. There is no sound exegetical reason to reject the details of the fourth temple as equally literal. If they are not literal, then why does Ezekiel not explain the meaning of these symbols?¹⁷⁶

Third, the literal temple in Ezek 8–11 supports a literal interpretation for the temple in Ezek 40–48. In chapters 8–11, Ezekiel, who was in exile in Babylon, received a vision of the literal, Solomonic temple in Jerusalem. He saw the glory of God depart from the temple and announced God’s judgment at the hand of the Babylonians. Almost everyone would agree that this structure in chapters 8–11 was the literal Solomonic temple. With this pattern established in Ezek 8–11, the temple in Ezek 40–48 should be interpreted the same way since there is nothing in the text to indicate that it is symbolic.

¹⁷⁴ Price, *Temple*, 519.

¹⁷⁵ Alexander, “Ezekiel,” 943–44.

¹⁷⁶ Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, 461–62.

The genre of Ezek 40–48 is “divine visions” (40:2) which directly links this section with the earlier temple vision in 8–11 (8:1).¹⁷⁷ Daniel Block says, “The substantive parallels among these texts require that the same hermeneutical principles employed in the interpretation of the previous prophecies apply here, and that one interpret this block in light of the previous visions of God.”¹⁷⁸

Everything Ezekiel mentions in chapters 8–11 concerning the Temple, its “inner court” (8:3), “porch” (8:16), “altar” (8:16), “threshold” (9:3), and “east gate” (10:19) were all seen in a vision. However, they are considered to have been a vision of the literal Solomonic temple. Why, then, when in a vision of the Temple (Ezek 40:2) in chapters 40–48 Ezekiel mentions the exact places—“inner court” (40:27), “porch” (40:48), “altar” (43:18), and “the gate facing toward the east” (43:4)—should they be interpreted as only spiritual symbols?¹⁷⁹

In Ezek 40–48 there is a complete reversal and restoration of what occurred in 586 B.C. In Ezek 8–11 the glory of God departed from the temple in Jerusalem. In Ezek 43:4–5 the glory of God returns to another temple in Jerusalem. Applying a consistent, normal, grammatical, historical hermeneutic, if the glory departed from a literal temple in Ezek 8–11 why not understand the return of God’s glory as taking place in a literal temple as well? The parallels between Ezek 8–11 and 40–48 support the notion that both passages refer to literal, earthly temples.

Ezek 8–11

Ezekiel has a vision of a temple in Jerusalem

Ezek 40–48

Ezekiel has a vision of a temple in Jerusalem

¹⁷⁷ Block, *Ezekiel*, 496.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 496–97. It appears, however, that Block fails to follow his own suggestion. He views the temple in Ezek 8–11 as the literal Solomonic temple that was desecrated but sees the temple in Ezek 40–48 “ideationally” or symbolically as a non-literal temple (*ibid.*, 505, 745).

¹⁷⁹ Price, *Temple*, 518.

The Glory departs	The Glory returns
Judgment	Restoration
Literal temple (First/Solomonic)	Literal temple (Fourth/Millennial)

Fourth, the literary unity of Ezekiel sustains the view that a literal temple be understood throughout the entire book. Without the return of God's glory to a literal temple the message of Ezekiel would be incomplete. The final phrase of Ezekiel's prophecy, "the Lord is there" (48:35), is the climax of the book. God is permanently present with his people in his city. One could argue that God's presence with His people is a uniting theme of the book.

As has already been noted, the glory of God departed from the literal Solomonic temple in Ezek 8–11. At the end of Ezek 39 the people are regathered to their land and spiritually restored to the Lord by his Spirit (Ezek 39:25–29). But the nagging question remains—how will the departed presence of God be restored to Israel? Ezek 40–48 provides the answer to this quandary. Randall Price aptly summarizes the significance of a literal view of Ezek 40–48 to the literary unity of the book.

Chapters 40–48 form an inseparable literary conclusion to the book. Although these chapters constitute a new vision in the prophecy, they are linked with chapters 1–39 because they repeat earlier themes in a more detailed fashion. . . . In like manner, the problem created by the departure of God's presence in chapters 8–11 finds its resolution with the return of His presence in this section (see Ezekiel 43:1–7). In fact, the concern for the presence of God could be argued as 'the uniting theme of the entire text of Ezekiel.' Without chapters 40–48 there is no answer to the outcome of Israel, no resolution to their history of sacred scandal, and no grand finale to the divine drama centered from Sinai on the Chosen Nation. . . . The literary structure of the book of Ezekiel argues against the possibility that chapters 40–48 are a spiritual vision. . . . In summary we can say this in regard to the literary unity of the book: If the presence of God left a literal Temple and will return, it should return to a literal Temple. If the desecration and destruction of a literal Temple were described in a vision, then the restoration and consecration of a Temple should also be understood as literal.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ Price, *Temple*, 517–18.

The reestablishment of Israel's theocracy is described in Ezek 40–46. The center of her new life will be the Lord Himself who will return in glory to rule in her midst (Ezek 43:1–9). The necessity of a royal residence for God's glory will be fulfilled in the construction of the millennial temple according to the outlined plan. God will reign with this temple as His throne (43:7) just as he had done previously in the Tabernacle and the Temple.¹⁸¹

Fifth, the eschatological interpretation of Ezek 40–48 is in harmony with other Old Testament prophetic passages that prophesy the existence of a millennial temple and sacrifices in that future temple (Isa 2:3; 56:6–7; 60:13; Jer 33:18; Joel 3:18; Hag 2:7, 9; Zech 14:16–21).¹⁸²

Arguments against the Literal View of Ezekiel 40–48

Gentry lists five main arguments against the literal view of the temple in Ezek 40–48.¹⁸³ First, he says that the site of the temple is on a “very high mountain” (Ezek 40:2), but there is no very high mountain in the area of Jerusalem. Zechariah 14:4–10 records incredible topographical changes in the land that will occur in conjunction with the Second Coming of Christ. One of those dramatic changes will be that, “Jerusalem will rise” (Zech 14:10). Viewing this literally, God will supernaturally provide the high mountain for the temple to occupy (Isa 2:2–4; Mic 4:1–2).¹⁸⁴ Second, Gentry notes that the source and flow of the river is incredible (Ezek 47:1–2). He is correct, but would this

¹⁸¹ Alexander, “Ezekiel,” 952.

¹⁸² Price, *Temple*, 523–24.

¹⁸³ Gentry, *Dominion*, 353–54.

¹⁸⁴ Merrill F. Unger, *Zechariah: Prophet of God's Glory* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963), 260. Unger views this elevation of Jerusalem literally but believes that “the literal furnishes the vehicle for the emblematic.” He holds that the physical elevation will portray spiritual truths as Jerusalem serves as the center of blessing for the whole earth. Eugene Merrill views the flattening and elevation as figurative only. See Eugene H. Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 355–56.

really be an impediment to God in the messianic kingdom? Joel 3:18 also mentions the millennial river. Third, Gentry states that the function of the river in making the Dead Sea flourish (Ezek 47:6–12) surely must be symbolism? But why must this be symbolic? In the messianic kingdom great changes will occur throughout the earth as the curse is reversed and the earth is restored (Isa 11:1–11). Fourth, Gentry maintains that the twelve tribes are provided parallel tracts of land, which would be awkward in real geography (Ezek 47:13–23). The apportionment of the land among the twelve tribes is consistent with the greatly expanded borders in the Promised Land in the kingdom.¹⁸⁵

Fifth, Gentry's most strenuous argument is that interpreting the animal sacrifices, circumcision, and priesthood literally in these chapters is "redemptively retrogressive."¹⁸⁶ However, an examination of the text reveals that there will not be a reinstatement of the Law of Moses in the messianic kingdom, but a new system of kingdom law. While there are some similarities with the Mosaic law, the numerous differences reveal that the systems are not the same.¹⁸⁷ The millennial system of sacrifices and priesthood will not be a reinstatement of the Law of Moses that was terminated permanently with the death of the Messiah.¹⁸⁸ The numerous differences between Ezekiel 40–48 and the Mosaic Law prevented the Jewish rabbis from accepting Ezekiel into the Hebrew canon for some time.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, 472–74.

¹⁸⁶ Gentry, *Dominion*, 354–56. Both Rooker and Alexander deal with the issue of the re-institution of sacrifices in a millennial temple. Rooker, "Ezekiel," 131–34; Alexander, "Ezekiel," 946–52.

¹⁸⁷ Fruchtenbaum provides an extensive list of the differences between the Mosaic Law and Ezek 40–48 (*Footsteps*, 462–64).

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 458.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 462.

The issue of millennial sacrifices has been dealt with extensively and ably by numerous scholars and should no longer be a serious impediment to this view.¹⁹⁰ Every mention of “atonement” in Ezek 40–48, except 45:15–17, relates to the concept of ceremonial purification or consecration of the temple or altar.¹⁹¹ In the one exception in 45:15–17 the purpose would be the same as in the Mosaic system, that is, to provide a graphic picture of the ultimate atoning work of Christ which alone can pay the ransom price for sin and provide forgiveness.¹⁹²

Ezekiel 40–48 and Revelation 11:1–2

Having established that the temple in Ezek 40–48 is a literal, eschatological temple, this text can now be compared with Rev 11:1–2. The two texts are remarkably similar in two main areas. First, the two texts bear remarkable contextual similarities. The following chart delineates some of the key parallels between the two texts and their surrounding context.

Ezek 40–48	Rev 11:1–2
Ezekiel was an OT prophet	John was a NT prophet
Ezekiel ate a scroll (3:1–3)	John ate a little book (10:9)
Ezekiel was in exile in Babylon	John was in exile on Patmos
Ezekiel had a vision (40:2)	John had a vision (4:1–2)
He saw a temple that did not exist on earth at the time of the vision	He saw a temple that did not exist on earth at the time of the vision

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 458–69; Price, *Temple*, 533–57; Jerry M. Hullinger, “A Proposed Solution to the Problem of Animal Sacrifices in Ezekiel 40–48” (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1993); idem, “The Problem of Animal Sacrifices in Ezekiel 40–48,” *BSac* 152 (1995): 279–89; Thomas Ice, “Literal Sacrifices in the Millennium,” *Pre-Trib Perspectives* 5 (2000), 1, 4–5; Rooker, “Ezekiel,” 131–34; Alexander, “Ezekiel,” 946–52; John C. Whitcomb, “Christ’s Atonement and Animal Sacrifices in Israel,” *GTJ* 6 (1985): 201–21.

¹⁹¹ Alexander, “Ezekiel,” 950.

¹⁹² Ibid.

(Solomon's temple was destroyed 12 years earlier)

An angel measured the temple as Ezekiel carefully observed

(The second Jewish temple was destroyed 25 years earlier)

John was commanded to measure the temple

The argument here is not that the temples in Ezek 40–48 and Rev 11:1–2 are the same eschatological temple. Both are eschatological temples, but the settings are very different. The setting for the temple in Rev 11:1–2 is tribulation and desecration, while the setting in Ezek 40–48 is restoration. Based on these settings, I believe that the temple in Rev 11:1–2 is the third Jewish temple that will exist in Jerusalem during the tribulation (Matt 24:15; 2 Thess 2:4); whereas, the temple in Ezek 40–48 is the fourth Jewish temple that will exist during the messianic kingdom. The salient point is that if Ezekiel spoke of a literal, future temple that did not exist at the time he wrote then John could follow that same pattern.

The only discernible difference in the two contexts is the person who performs the measuring. In Ezekiel, the measuring is performed by an angelic being (Ezek 40:3–5); whereas, in Rev 11:1–2 John is commanded to measure the temple. However, the identity of the person doing the measuring is not a key factor in the interpretation of the two texts because in Ezek 40–48, although Ezekiel does not personally measure the temple, he carefully observes the angel as he makes each measurement and reports his findings. The main point is that a temple structure is being measured by or in the presence of a prophet of God.

Kenneth Strand argues against Ezek 40–48 as the Old Testament background for Rev 11:1–2 and in favor of Lev 16.¹⁹³ He lists several contrasts between the two texts in Ezekiel and Revelation.¹⁹⁴ However, the nature of analogical use of the Old Testament

¹⁹³ K. A. Strand, "An Overlooked Old Testament Background to Revelation 11:1," *AUSS* 22 (1984): 320–25.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 321.

in Revelation often involves the application of images and words not in a totally parallel manner but in keeping with the purpose of the Apocalypse at that particular point.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, the huge disparity in the length of the two texts would necessitate many contrasts and omissions. Ezek 40–48 is nine chapters long, while the text in Rev 11:1–2 is only two verses. The point is that what is in Rev 11:1–2 is parallel to Ezek 40–48.

Second, in addition to the contextual similarities between these two texts, there is also a striking linguistic correspondence between Ezek 40–48 in the Septuagint, and the key terminology of Rev 11:1–2. The following chart depicts this linguistic linkage.

Key Terms in Rev 11:1–2	Usage in Ezek 40–48
μέτρον (measure)	διαμετερέω and μέτρον each occur about 30 times
κάλαμος (measuring rod)	18 times
ναός (temple)	6 times
αὐλή (court)	46 times
θυσιαστήριον (altar)	12 times

Again, as has already been noted, the angel in Ezekiel had to be measuring a temple that was future to Ezekiel’s day because no temple was standing on earth in Jerusalem for him to measure.¹⁹⁶ These examples from Daniel and Ezekiel reveal that there is a common theme in Old Testament prophetic writings to refer to a temple in Jerusalem that is future from the perspective of the writer. If Daniel and Ezekiel both

¹⁹⁵ Beale, *Revelation*, 559, n. 244.

¹⁹⁶ Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, 1:xlvi–vii. Christ Schlect, a preterist who follows the Neronian date, admits that the command for Ezekiel to measure the temple 12 years after it was destroyed weakens the view that the temple was standing when John was commanded to measure it. Chris Schlect, “A Reasonable Look at Revelation,” in *And It Came to Pass* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1993), 102, n. 40.

present a temple in Jerusalem when there was no temple standing in their own day, and Ezekiel even witnessed the measuring of this future temple, it follows that John, the great New Testament prophet, would follow the same pattern.

Conclusion

In light of the larger context of Rev 11:3–13 and the parallels in Daniel and Ezekiel it is best to view the temple in Rev 11:1–2 as a future, reconstituted temple. The temple John measured is the future tribulation temple or third Jewish temple (Matt 24:15; 2 Thess 2:4). To summarize this section, seven key points are highlighted.

1. Rev 11:3–13 and the activity of the two witnesses is consistent with a literal interpretation of 11:1–2.
2. The primary Old Testament background for Rev 11:1–2 is Daniel and Ezek 40–48.
3. Daniel mentions a temple and sacrifices several times even though the temple in Jerusalem was not standing at the time he prophesied. And the time period in Rev 11:2–3 (forty-two months or 1260 days) is consistent with the final half of Daniel's seventieth week where a literal temple is mentioned.
4. In Ezek 40–48, in a vision, the OT prophet saw a temple that did not presently exist at the time of the vision.
5. The temple in Ezek 40–48 is a literal, eschatological temple (fourth Jewish temple).
6. In Rev 11:1–2, in a vision, John, the NT prophet, received a vision of a future, literal temple (third Jewish temple) that did not exist at the time of the vision.
7. The eschatological temple in Rev 11:1–2 offers no support for the early date for Revelation.

No Mention of the Destruction of Jerusalem

One argument that underlies the entire early-date position is the fact that the destruction of Jerusalem and institutional Judaism in A.D. 70 is not mentioned in

Revelation. This argument from silence is the thesis of John A. T. Robinson's book *Redating the New Testament* in which he argues that the entire New Testament canon was completed before A.D. 70.¹⁹⁷ Preterists argue that since Christ prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem, if Revelation was written after A.D. 70, how could John fail to mention the fulfillment of this prophecy? Gentry says: "It is inconceivable that a book of the nature of Revelation could fail to mention its already having been destroyed, if Revelation were written after A.D. 70."¹⁹⁸

There are two reasonable explanations for the omission of any mention of the destruction of Jerusalem in Revelation. First, the original audience was ethnically, religiously, chronologically, and geographically removed from the destruction of Jerusalem. The primary audience in the seven churches was Gentile Christians. In A.D. 95, twenty-five years after the fact, the destruction of the Jewish temple would have little relevance for predominantly Gentile churches that were approximately eight hundred miles from Jerusalem.

Second, and most significantly, if the futurist interpretation of Revelation is adopted there is no reason to refer back to the events of A.D. 70. The content of Rev 4–22 is a vision of future events John saw while on the island of Patmos. Revelation is not a history that deals with the past but a prophecy that concerns the future (1:3; 22:7, 18–19). John received a vision of the future and was commanded over and over again to write what he saw and heard (1:2, 11, 19; 21:5). The past event of the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 was not part of the vision that John was shown; therefore, he did not write about it. John was a prophet or seer gazing into the future not a historian recording

¹⁹⁷ John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 11–13.

¹⁹⁸ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 192; cf. R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 147; Gonzalo Rojas-Flores, "The *Book of Revelation* and the First Years of Nero's Reign," *Bib* 85 (2004): 377.

the past. Therefore, the silence of Revelation concerning the events of A.D. 70 is understandable.

Nero and the Beast

A sixth internal argument for the early date of Revelation centers on the relationship of Nero with the beast of Rev 13. Early-date advocates utilize a number of alleged parallels between Nero and the beast that they believe equate the two. This identification of Nero as the beast of Revelation is central to the early-date position because clearly, if Rev 13 prophesies events in Nero's life in the A.D. 60s, then it had to be written before those events occurred. Early-date supporters rely on four main arguments to support the view that Nero was the beast.¹⁹⁹

Nero and 666

One of the most popular and well-known sections of Revelation is 13:16–18, which describes the number 666 or the mark of the beast. It reads,

And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, and he provides that no one should be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.

A common solution to the meaning of 666 is that the triple six refers to man's number, which is the number six or one short of God's perfect number, seven. Walvoord writes,

¹⁹⁹ In addition to his four main arguments for identifying Nero with the beast, Gentry includes three other arguments that are hermeneutically questionable. First, Gentry contends that Nero, like Satan, is a serpent (Rev 20:2) because in English and in Greek the pronunciation of the number χξς (*chxs*) "sounds hauntingly like a serpent's chilling hiss," and "their eerie sound is that of a serpent's hiss" (*Before Jerusalem*, 215). Second, he says that the middle number-letter of 666 in Greek has the appearance of a writhing serpent: ξ (*ibid.*). Third, he notes that for a time Nero had a red beard like the color of the beast in Rev 17:3 (*ibid.*, 217). See Thomas, "Dating Revelation," 195, n. 57.

Though there may be more light cast on it at the time this prophecy is fulfilled, the passage itself declares that this number is 'man's number. In the Book of Revelation, the number '7' is one of the most significant numbers indicating perfection. Accordingly, there are seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls of the wrath of God, seven thunders, etc. This beast claims to be God, and if that were the case, he should be 777. This passage, in effect, says, No, you are only 666. You are short of deity even though you were originally created in the image and likeness of God. Most of the speculation on the meaning of this number is without profit or theological significance.²⁰⁰

Beale adopts a similar symbolic view of 666. "But the triple six repetition of sixes connotes the intensification of incompleteness and failure that is summed up in the beast more than anywhere else among fallen humanity."²⁰¹

While the symbolic view may be part of the significance of 666, its meaning seems to involve some form of gematria, which is the rabbinic Hebrew term for cryptogrammic riddles where the numerical value of letters in a proper name are added up to arrive at a numerical value for the name.²⁰² These cryptograms were widely recognized in Greek and Hebrew literature.²⁰³ Adolf Deissman records a graffito from Pompeii which reads, "I love her whose number is 545," and another that says, "Amerimnus thought upon his lady Harmonia for good. The number of her honourable name is 45 (or 1035)."²⁰⁴ In the *Sibylline Oracles* the numerical value of the name of Jesus in Greek is 888.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁰ John F. Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, 1990), 587.

²⁰¹ Beale, *Revelation*, 722; cf. Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 395.

²⁰² Osborne, *Revelation*, 518–19.

²⁰³ Gentry provides an excellent discussion of the meaning and ancient use of gematria (*Before Jerusalem*, 193–97). Bauckham argues that John and his audience would have been familiar with the concept of gematria from other Jewish and Christian apocalyptic writings. Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), 384–407.

²⁰⁴ Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), 276.

²⁰⁵ *Sibylline Oracles* 1.324–329.

It seems that some kind of numerical value for the beast's name is intended in Rev 13:18, since the one with wisdom is to "calculate" or "count" the number. To count the number of a name means simply to add up the numbers attached to all the letters in the name. Fruchtenbaum notes that the interpretation of the mark is provided by five sequential clues in Rev 13:17b–18.

1. The name of the Beast;
2. The number of his name;
3. The number of the beast;
4. The number of a man;
5. The number is 666.²⁰⁶

These five clues indicate that the personal name of the beast will equal the number 666. Further support for the gematria view of 666 is derived from Irenaeus, who assumed this interpretation in his discussions of the mark of the beast in Rev 13:16–18.²⁰⁷

Early-date advocates use the process of gematria to identify Nero as the beast of Rev 13. It is true that Nero is the only Roman emperor Suetonius mentions as having gematria associated with his name. A Greek poem circulating around Rome ridiculed Nero thus: "Alcmaeon, Orestes, and Nero are brothers, Why? Because all of them murdered their mothers. Count the numerical values of the letters in Nero's name, and in 'murdered his own mother': You will find their sum is the same."²⁰⁸ The numerical value of Nero's name in Greek is 1005. This is the same numerical value as the phrase "murdered his own mother" in the Greek verse.²⁰⁹

Early-date supporters apply gematria to Nero's name with the added title "Caesar." They note that when the Greek words *Neron Kaiser* are translated into Hebrew

²⁰⁶ Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, 255.

²⁰⁷ Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 5.30.3.

²⁰⁸ Suetonius *Nero* 39.2.

²⁰⁹ Mark Wilson, "The Early Christians in Ephesus and the Date of Revelation, Again," *Neot* 39 (2005): 184.

(גרון קסר) the gematria value equals 666, thus indicating that John wrote the Apocalypse during his reign.

Arguments against Equating Nero with 666

Several arguments have been raised against the identification of Nero with 666. Gentry lists several of the objections and deals with each of them.²¹⁰ However, there are five arguments that make the identification of Nero with the number of the beast in Rev 13:16–18 doubtful. First, for the number 666 to fit the gematria value of Nero, the name and title Nero Caesar must be used. This is important to note at the outset because there are many names and titles for Nero one could choose.²¹¹ Choosing this title seems too convenient for the Nero view.²¹² How can one be sure that this is the form of the name that should be adopted? While Nero's name with his title can certainly be rendered in this way, it could be a case of adapting the facts to fit a predetermined solution. Moreover, the titles of other first century Roman rulers also yield the sum 666. Abbreviated forms of the titles of Domitian that appeared on coins can equal 666.²¹³ And coins issued in A.D. 72 bear a legend around the head of Vespasian the sum of which is 666.²¹⁴

Second, the text of Rev 13:16 specifically says that the numerical value 666 is the “the *name* of the beast or the number of his *name*” (italics added). “Nero Caesar” was not Nero's name. It was his name with an added title. Using Nero Caesar to calculate the number of his name would be akin to someone today using the title “President” or “Prime Minister” as part of a person's name to arrive at the gematria value of his name.

²¹⁰ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 203–12.

²¹¹ Beale, *Revelation*, 719.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid., 720; Caird, *Revelation*, 175. Both Beale and Caird note that the weakness of this view is that no single coin contains all five abbreviated titles together.

²¹⁴ W. G. Baines, “The Number of the Beast in Revelation 13:18,” *HeyJ* 16 (1975): 195–96.

Moreover, Irenaeus used only single names in his examples of names that equal 666, and he did not include any titles with the names.²¹⁵

Third, for the gematria value to fit Nero Caesar the Greek form of his name must be transliterated into Hebrew נרון קסר. The sum of 666 can only be reached by transliterating the Greek form of this one name and title for Nero into Hebrew. The numerical value of *Neron Kaiser* in Greek is 1005.²¹⁶ One wonders why John, writing to a primarily Greek-speaking audience in western Asia Minor, would not use a Greek form instead of a Hebrew form.²¹⁷ Gentry attempts to answer this objection by noting that Revelation is one of the most “Jewish” books in the New Testament, that John often uses Hebraic names such as “Abaddon” (Rev 9:11) and “Armageddon” (Rev 16:16), and that Asia was well-populated by Jews.²¹⁸ Notwithstanding these points, Revelation was written to a primarily Greek-speaking audience and a Greek calculation would make much more sense.²¹⁹ As Kistemaker notes, “Would these hearers (1:3) readily understand that they had to transliterate a name from Latin via Greek to Hebrew (or Aramaic) to understand the number 666?”²²⁰ Irenaeus, in his discussion of 666, assumed without question that the calculation of 666 must be made in Greek.²²¹ Also, the *Sibylline Oracles* used the name of Jesus in Greek to reach the total 888.²²²

²¹⁵ Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 5.30.3.

²¹⁶ Ladd, *Revelation*, 186.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 209–12.

²¹⁹ Caird, *Revelation*, 175; Osborne, *Revelation*, 520.

²²⁰ Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 395.

²²¹ Guthrie, *Introduction*, 959–60; Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 5.30.3.

²²² *Sibylline Oracles* 1.324–329.

Fourth, even if one agrees that this specific title (Neron Caesar) is the correct one and that the correct form is the Greek transliteration into Hebrew (נרון קסר), there is still another hurdle—should the Hebrew letters ך and ך be included? The calculation for Neron Caesar from Hebrew only equals 666 if the Hebrew letter ך is omitted from the word Caesar after the ק (קיסר). This appears to be a defective spelling. In a Judean scroll fragment from Murabba‘at, D. R. Hillers claims that the spelling of Caesar in Hebrew without the ך is present.²²³ The Aramaic document is dated to the “second year of the emperor Nero.”²²⁴ The letter ק follows the word Nero, but the letters after the ק are missing. The missing letters could be ך and ך, to form the word קסר, but others could also be supplied.²²⁵

An examination of the document confirms that if the damaged word were קסר there is probably not sufficient space for a ך between the ק and ך.²²⁶ However, there is no way to be certain that the missing letters are ך and ך.²²⁷ Moreover, Buchanan affirms that only the spelling with the ך is found in a concordance search of the Talmuds, the Mishnah, the Tosephta, and the Tannaitic Midrashim.²²⁸ Therefore, there is no indisputable evidence for the spelling of קסר without the ך, and yet this spelling is necessary for identifying Nero as the beast of Rev 13.

²²³ D. R. Hillers, “Revelation 13:18 and a Scroll from Murabba‘at,” *BASOR* 170 (1963): 65.

²²⁴ Ibid.; P. Benoit, J. T. Milik, and R. de Vaux, *Discoveries in the Judean Desert, II, Les grottes de Murabba‘at*, no. 18, plate XXIX (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 100–2.

²²⁵ Beale, *Revelation*, 719.

²²⁶ Benoit, Milik, and de Vaux, *Discoveries*, 100–2; Hillers, “Revelation 13:18,” 65; G. W. Buchanan, who has analyzed the Judean scroll fragment, agrees that in the part of the word where the ך should be located it is missing and that even if the broken word were קסר there does not appear to be enough space for it to include the ך. G. W. Buchanan, *The Book of Revelation: Its Introduction and Prophecy*, Mellen Biblical Commentary, New Testament Series (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 1993), 345–46; cf. Beale, *Revelation*, 719

²²⁷ Beale, *Revelation*, 719.

²²⁸ Buchanan, *Revelation*, 345–46.

Additionally, to successfully arrive at the number 666 not only must the ρ in Caesar be omitted, but the ρ in Neron must be retained.²²⁹ This kind of subjective decision-making in spelling could easily expose this view to the charge of manipulating the facts to fit a desired result.

Robert Mounce summarizes the problems early-date advocates face on this issue. “What is not generally stressed is that this solution asks us to calculate a Hebrew transliteration of the Greek form of a Latin name, and that with a defective spelling.”²³⁰ G. Salmon has developed three rules that have been used throughout the centuries for making any desired name equal 666. His rules are appropriate for the attempts to make Nero fit the number of the beast. “First, if the proper name by itself will not yield it, add a title; secondly, if the sum cannot be found in Greek, try Hebrew, or even Latin; thirdly, do not be too particular about the spelling. . . . We cannot infer much from the fact that a key fits the lock if it is a lock in which almost any key will turn.”²³¹

The 616 Variant

Early-date supporters allege further corroborative support for identifying Nero as the beast of Revelation from the occurrence of the number 616 in a few ancient manuscripts.²³² If the Latin form Nero, rather than the Greek form Νέρων, is transliterated in Hebrew characters then the final Nun (ן), with a numerical value of 50, is omitted. If

²²⁹ Sanders refers to this as “especially awkward.” H. A. Sanders, “The Number of the Beast in Revelation 13:18,” *JBL* 37 (1918): 97. Sanders contends that 666 refers to the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius who used the title Aurelius Caesar Deus which yields 666 (*ibid.*, 99).

²³⁰ Mounce, *Revelation*, 262.

²³¹ G. Salmon, *An Historical Introduction to the Study of the Books of the New Testament*, 9th ed. (London: John Murray, 1904), 230–31.

²³² The manuscripts that read 616 are ϳ¹¹⁵, C, and some that are no longer extant (some manuscripts known to Irenaeus and two minuscules MSS, 5 and 11). *New English Translation, Novum Testamentum Graece*, ed. Michael H. Burer, W. Hall Harris, and Daniel B. Wallace (Dallas: NET Bible Press, 2004), 885.

this is done the total adds up to only 616.²³³ Preterists make a great deal out of the presence of this textual variant. They claim that the variant is intentional to make the identity of the beast with Nero more readily discernible to a non-Hebrew mind.²³⁴ However, there is no evidence to prove that the 616 variant was intentional. There are several other reasonable explanations. It is likely that the variant resulted from the accidental confusion of the Greek letter ι for ξ which would change the sum in Rev 13:18 from 666 to 616.²³⁵ There is one manuscript (2344) that has the number 665. The 616 reading also could have resulted from a scribal error.²³⁶

But even if the variant were intentional there is no way to be certain that a connection with Nero was intended. Oskar Rühle believes that the 616 variant is best explained by an intentional attempt to identify the cruel Roman emperor Caligula with the beast. Caligula's title "Gaius Caesar" equals 616.²³⁷ Also, if the final *n* is dropped from Teitan (Titus) the value of Teita is 616.²³⁸ Since there is no way to be certain if the 616 variant was accidental or intentional, and that even if it was intentional it was connected to Nero, it does not appear to add any support to the early-date view.

²³³ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 387; Beale, *Revelation*, 719; Gerhard A. Krodel, *Revelation*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1989), 259.

²³⁴ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 202–3.

²³⁵ Beale, *Revelation*, 719, n. 298.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ Oskar Rühle, "ἀριθμέω, ἀριθμός," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 463; cf. Sanders, "The Number of the Beast," 99; Guthrie, *Introduction*, 960.

²³⁸ William Milligan, *Discussions on the Apocalypse* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1893), 117.

The Worship of the Beast

Gentry admits that if Nero is the personal incarnation of the beast of Revelation, then he must have been worshiped since 13:8 says, “And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.”²³⁹ To support his identification of Nero as the beast, Gentry provides evidence from Seneca, Suetonius, Tacitus, and Dio Cassius that Nero was worshiped.²⁴⁰ He notes that Nero was worshiped as God and that a statue of Nero the same size as the statue of Mars was set-up in the temple of Mars in A.D. 55.²⁴¹

The question, however, is not whether Nero was the recipient of emperor worship. No one would deny that Nero was worshiped during his reign. However, the real issue is whether the worship of Nero fits the facts of the worship of the beast in Revelation. Gentry’s main example of emperor worship of Nero is a narrative from Dio Cassius from A.D. 66 when Tiridates, King of Armenia, bowed in worship of Nero.²⁴²

Indeed, the proceedings of the conference were not limited to mere conversations, but a lofty platform had been erected on which were set images of Nero, and in the presence of crowds of Armenians, Parthians, and Romans Tiridates approached and paid them reverence; then, after sacrificing to them and calling them by laudatory names, he took off the diadem from his head and set it upon them . . .²⁴³

²³⁹ Gentry, *Beast*, 73.

²⁴⁰ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 271–73.

²⁴¹ Gentry, *Beast*, 81.

²⁴² Gentry cites the Roman historian Dio Cassius as a witness for the worship of Nero (*Before Jerusalem*, 273). However, sixteen pages later, on page 289 of *Before Jerusalem Fell*, Gentry questions the usefulness of Dio since his testimony at that point is against Gentry’s view. One cannot rely on a source when he helps one’s case, but then question that same source when his testimony is unfavorable unless there is some evidence to indicate that the testimony in that specific case is unreliable. Consistency in evaluation of ancient witnesses must be fair and balanced.

²⁴³ Dio *History* 62.23.3.

Everything had been thus got ready during the night; and at daybreak Nero, wearing the triumphal garb and accompanied by the senate and the Praetorians, entered the Forum. He ascended the rostra and seated himself upon a chair of state. Next Tiridates and his suite passed between lines of heavy-armed troops drawn up on either side, took their stand close to the rostra, and did obeisance to the emperor as they had done before. At this a great roar went up, which so alarmed Tiridates that for some moments he stood speechless, in terror of his life. Then, silence having been proclaimed, he recovered courage and quelling his pride made himself subservient to the occasion and to his need, caring little how humbly he spoke, in view of the prize he hoped to obtain. These were his words: ‘Master, I am the descendant of Arsaces, brother of the kings Vologaesus and Pacorus, and thy slave. And I have come to thee, my god, to worship thee as I do Mithras. The destiny thou spinnest for me shall be mine; for thou art my Fortune and my Fate.’²⁴⁴

Based on this account, Gentry concludes that Nero fulfilled Rev 13:15. He says, “By this action this king actually worshiped ‘the image of the Beast’ (Rev. 13:15).”²⁴⁵ But there are three historical problems with Gentry’s conclusion. First, according to Dio, Tiridates paid homage to *images* of Nero (plural); whereas, in Revelation, the word “image” (εἰκόν) is singular (Rev 13:14–15).²⁴⁶ Second, there is no evidence whatsoever that the image Tiridates revered spoke or received breath as required by Rev 13:15.²⁴⁷ Third, the worship described in Rev 13:8 is global in scope, not local.²⁴⁸ As Thomas notes, “The prophecy anticipates the almost universal success the beast will have in attracting worshipers. The only limiting factor will be the refusal of the elect to comply.”²⁴⁹ The worship of Nero by Tiridates does not comport with the requirements of Rev 13.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 62.4.3–5.2.

²⁴⁵ Gentry, *Beast*, 82.

²⁴⁶ Andy Woods, “Revelation 13 and the First Beast,” in *The End Times Controversy*, ed. Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2003), 242.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 241–42.

²⁴⁹ Thomas, *Revelation* 8–22, 164.

The Death of the Beast

Gentry also notes that Nero died a violent death by means of a sword as indicated in Rev 13:10 which says, “If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.” Revelation 13:14 also mentions the death of the beast by the sword. According to Rev 13:3 one of the beast’s heads receives a mortal blow delivered by someone else; whereas, Nero committed suicide by stabbing himself in the throat with the help of his secretary Epaphroditus.²⁵⁰ Gentry further argues that Rev 13:10 (“Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints”) was intended to give “encouragement to those whom Beast was presently afflicting.”²⁵¹ But it is generally agreed that the Neronic persecution never extended beyond the city of Rome and its immediate environs.²⁵² So, how could Rev 13:10 be understood as encouragement to the persecuted believers in Asia during the Neronic era when his persecution never reached them?²⁵³

*Three Final Reasons for Rejecting
the Nero View of Revelation 13*

In addition to the arguments against the Nero view of Rev 13 that have already been presented in answering Gentry’s contentions, there are three more reasons for rejecting this view.

²⁵⁰ Suetonius *Nero* 49; Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 31.

²⁵¹ Gentry, *Beast*, 89–90.

²⁵² Morris, *Revelation*, 37; Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Anchor Bible Reference Library, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 805; Witherington, *Revelation*, 4; Poythress, *Returning King*, 50; Beale, *Revelation*, 12; Osborne, *Revelation*, 8.

²⁵³ Woods, “Revelation 13,” 238–39.

Nero, 666, and the Early Church

First, the identification of Nero with 666 is not corroborated by the early church fathers as one would expect if this view is correct and as obvious as Gentry alleges. To his credit, Gentry openly admits the problem this poses for his position.

It would seem most reasonable to expect that since Irenaeus wrote within about one hundred years of Revelation, he likely would have heard of the proper view. At the very least, we would think, Irenaeus would recognize the true view, though growing indistinct, as a theory to be given equal footing with the solutions he does proffer. But, as a matter of fact, in his lengthy treatment of the gematria in *Against Heresies* 5.28–30 (especially chapter 30), he provides at least three possible interpretations—and Nero’s name is conspicuously absent. Furthermore, *no* early Church father suggests Nero’s name as the proper designation of 666, even though various suggestions were given by such men as Irenaeus, Andreas of Caesarea, Victorinus, Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria, and others. Surely this is a potent objection for the twentieth century interpreter.²⁵⁴

Gentry is correct. Irenaeus wrote extensively about the number 666. He warned against anyone who falsely presumed that he knew the name of the Antichrist.²⁵⁵ He was aware of many candidates for the number 666 and mentions three of them by name: Evanthas, Lateinos, and Teitan.²⁵⁶ However, he never identified anyone with the number 666. Irenaeus said, “We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision.”²⁵⁷ Andreas, in his commentary on Revelation, also mentions several Greek names that total 666.²⁵⁸ This pattern is followed by Arethas,²⁵⁹ Primasius,²⁶⁰

²⁵⁴ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 205.

²⁵⁵ Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 5.30.1.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.30.3.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ Andreas, PG 106:340.

²⁵⁹ Arethas, PG 106:681.

²⁶⁰ Primasius, PL 68:194.

and Victorinus.²⁶¹ Those closest in time to the book of Revelation and Nero, as Gentry admits, never made any connection between 666 and Nero.

Gentry proposes three possible solutions to this problem. First, he suggests that Irenaeus' uncertainty concerning the proper designation of 666 indicates that the proper interpretation had been lost.²⁶² While it is, of course, possible that the correct interpretation had been lost, this in no way proves that Gentry's view is the correct interpretation that was lost.

Second, Gentry argues that Irenaeus' reference to "*Lateinos*" signifies the Roman Empire and could be a reference to the empire's head, which could be Nero if the book was written during Nero's reign. Irenaeus also mentions "*Teitan*" in his section on 666. Gentry maintains that *Teitan* is a reference to the sun god and that Nero adopted the attributes of the sun deity as his own.²⁶³ From these references, Gentry concludes, "It seems that Irenaeus at least may have been on the right path."²⁶⁴ However, if Irenaeus believed that others had identified Nero as the beast why would he refer to him in such a veiled fashion? Why would Irenaeus not just name Nero specifically if that is who he meant? Moreover, it is possible that Irenaeus' mention of *Teitan* is a reference to Titus who destroyed Jerusalem.²⁶⁵

Third, Gentry states that Irenaeus may not have recorded the Nero theory because of his predisposition to a futuristic interpretation in keeping with his premillennialism or chiliasm.²⁶⁶ However, this is mere conjecture. Gentry provides no

²⁶¹ Victorinus, PL 3:339.

²⁶² Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 205–6.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 206.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 207.

²⁶⁵ Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 31.

²⁶⁶ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 207.

evidence to substantiate this claim. One could use this kind of argument to prove almost anything. Irenaeus says clearly why he fails to identify any one particular person. He believes that any such identification would be presumptuous. “For if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision.”²⁶⁷

Scholars generally agree that the first proposal of the name Neron Caesar for the number 666 did not come until the nineteenth century when it was suggested independently by four German scholars in the 1830s: O. F. Fritsche, Ferdinand Benary, Ferdinand Hitzig, and Eduard Reuss.²⁶⁸ This conclusion has recently been challenged by Francis X. Gumerlock. According to Gumerlock he has “evidence from a fifth-century book on biblical genealogies that some in the early church had been using Nero’s name to calculate the number of the beast.”²⁶⁹

Gumerlock found this evidence in a chronology entitled *Liber genealogus* meaning *Genealogical Book* or *Book of Genealogy*.²⁷⁰ It is a work that was written in the fifth century in North Africa, composed between 405 and 412 and then edited in 427, 438 and again in 455. It is in Latin and was edited by Theodore Mommsen.²⁷¹ It lists events from the creation of Adam and Eve all the way up to the fifth century A.D.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Many scholars make reference to this discovery in the 1830s. See David Brady, *The Contribution of British Writers between 1560 and 1830 to the Interpretation of Revelation 13.16–18: (the Number of the Beast): A Study in the History of Exegesis*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese, vol. 27 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1983), 291–93; Milligan, *Discussions*, 110; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 387, n. 10; Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 394–95; Gentry, *Beast*, 42. Benary relates 666 to Nero. See Ferdinand Benary, “Interpretation of the Number 666 (χξς) in the Apoclypse (13:18) and the Various Reading 616 (χις),” *BSac* 1 (1844): 84–86. This article was an excerpt from a book he authored in 1836. Ferdinand Benary, *Zeitschrift für speculative Theologie*, 2d ed., vol. 1 (Berlin: 1836).

²⁶⁹ Gary DeMar and Francis X. Gumerlock, *The Early Church and the “End of the World:” The Past Fulfillment of Matthew 24* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2005), 81, n. 108.

²⁷⁰ Gumerlock graciously provided this information to the author.

²⁷¹ Theodore Mommsen, ed., *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi*, vol. 9 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892; reprint, Munich: Strauss and Cramer, 1981), 154–96.

The *Liber* says on page 194 that, “Nero is he whose name John called in the Apocalypse 616. *Here wisdom is understood* [Rev 13:18], that through letters the name of him may be computed, who is called, as is related: ‘Antichrist.’” 1 13 18 9 3 17 8 9 18 19 20 18. The collected number equals 154. Multiplying this by four, according to the four letters of the name of Nero equals 616, which is the name of Antichrist.”²⁷²

Admittedly, this moves the date of the first connection between Nero and the beast of Rev 13 back about 1,400 years from what was previously believed. But even if there were those in the fifth century who made this connection, the question still remains why did none of the earliest Christian writers who discussed 666 ever mention it? Why were Irenaeus, Andreas, Victorinus, and Primasius apparently unaware of this view? If Neron Ceasar is such an obvious connection to the number 666 or even 616, then why did it take at least 350 years for someone to see it? The lack of any early support for the Nero view, which is alleged to be obvious, still undermines the identification of Nero with 666.

Identity of the Second Beast

A second reason for rejecting the notion that Nero is the beast out of the sea in Rev 13:1–10 is that there is no historical figure during Nero’s reign who corresponds to the beast from the earth in Rev 13:11–18. In Rev 13:11–18, the second beast or beast from the earth is described in detail. It is clear from the description of the beast from the earth that he is an individual who implements the agenda of the first beast. The beast from the earth is referred to ten times in 13:11–16 as either “he” or “him.” The second

²⁷² hic Nero ipse est, cuius nomen Iohannes in apocalpsin vocavit DCXVI. hic sapientia vertitur, ut computetur per eras nomen eius, qui dicitur, “antichristus sic”
 A N T I C H R I S T V S
 I XIII XVIII VIII III VIII XVII VIII XVIII XVIII XX XVIII
 fit numerus collectus asses CLIII: haec quater “ducta secundum litteras IIII nom(inis) Neronis” faciunt DCXVI, quod est nomen Antichristi. Translation courtesy of Francis X. Gumerlock of Westminster, Colorado, published in a paper entitled *NERO ANTICHRIST: Patristic Evidence of the Use of Nero’s Name in Calculating the Number of the Beast (Rev 13:18)* which was delivered November 17, 2005 at the 57th annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Valley Forge, PA and in a forthcoming book entitled *Ancient Interpretations of Revelation*.

beast is a member of the false trinity in Rev 16:13 and is labeled the “false prophet” in Rev 16:13; 19:20; and 20:10.²⁷³ The first beast is the civil, political, and military head, while the second beast represents religious power employed in fostering worship of the first beast.²⁷⁴

Preterists appear to be at a loss to find any historical person in the Neronic era to serve as a fulfillment of the prophecies of the second beast.²⁷⁵ Gentry follows J. Stuart Russell and identifies the beast from the earth as Gessius Florus, the Roman procurator or governor of Judea under Nero.²⁷⁶ Gentry believes that the origin of the second beast “from the earth” means “from the land,” that is, the land of Israel.²⁷⁷ While it is possible that the false prophet will be a Jewish apostate, his origin from the earth probably denotes his “earthly” as opposed to heavenly origin. As Kistemaker says, “This beast stands in direct opposition to everything that comes from heaven and is devoid of anything that is heavenly.”²⁷⁸ Or, his origin from the earth, which is more familiar, could be in contrast to the first beast who comes from the sea which is more fearsome and mysterious than the earth.²⁷⁹

However, even if the second beast is a Jew that hardly proves that he should be identified with Gessius Florus. Neither Gentry nor Russell provide any historical evidence that Gessius Florus ever performed great signs and wonders, that he constructed

²⁷³ Osborne, *Revelation*, 510.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*; cf. Ladd, *Revelation*, 183.

²⁷⁵ Ladd, *Revelation*, 183.

²⁷⁶ Gentry, *Dominion*, 410; J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: The New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming*, new ed. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 465–69.

²⁷⁷ Gentry, *Dominion*, 410.

²⁷⁸ Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 388.

²⁷⁹ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 172; Morris, *Revelation*, 166.

an image of Nero, that he made the image speak, that he forced the mark of the beast upon the populace as a kind of passport for commercial transactions, or that he executed those who failed to take the mark (Rev 13:12–18).²⁸⁰ It is clear from his close association with the beast and the detailed description of his activities that the false prophet is a key religious figure who actively promotes the worship of the first beast. Josephus, who discusses Gessius Florus, never mentions any activities by him that even remotely correspond to the prophecies of Rev 13:11–18.²⁸¹ If Florus did perform great signs and wonders, constructed an image of Nero, and gave breath to the image, Josephus' failure to mention these stupendous feats is inexplicable. The inability to successfully identify a historical person who fulfilled the role and activities of the false prophet in the Neronic era is a drawback for the preterist position and the early date of Revelation.

No Literal Fulfillment by Nero

The third and strongest argument against identifying Nero with the beast of Rev 13 is that Nero did not fulfill the activities of the beast as recorded in that chapter and other places in Revelation. Gentry and other preterists take the reference to “666” literally as the gematria value of the name “Neron Caesar.” They also take the forty-two months in 13:5 as a literal span of time when Nero persecuted Christians. However, they are not able to successfully point to literal fulfillments of the other prophecies in Rev 13.

²⁸⁰ Sherrer discusses the use of contrived religious wonders in the imperial cult which he believes fulfills what is stated in Rev 13:13–15. Steven J. Scherrer, “Signs and Wonders in the Imperial Cult: A New Look at a Roman Religious Institution in the Light of Rev. 13:13–15,” *JBL* 103 (1984): 599–610; cf. Edwin A. Judge, “The Mark of the Beast,” *TynBul* 42 (1991): 158–59. However, Sherrer and Judge seem to miss the point that in Rev 13 these are real signs and wonders not tricks, manipulation, or sleight of hand (Matt 24:24; 2 Thess 2:9). These miracles are said to be under divine control (Rev 13:14). Revelation 13:14, 15 say that it “was given” to the false prophet to do these signs and wonders. God permits the false prophet to delude the world with counterfeit signs and wonders as part of the great end-time deception and delusion (2 Thess 2:9–12; Rev 13:14; 19:20). It would not be necessary for God to give special permission for the false prophet to perform tricks or sleight of hand. Osborne, *Revelation*, 513–16; Thomas, *Revelation* 8–22, 177–78.

²⁸¹ Josephus *Antiquities* 20.11.1.

This chapter states that the beast will rule the world for forty-two months, that all who dwell on the earth will worship him, that he will be killed and come back to life, that all people on the earth must take his mark of “666” on their right hand or forehead, and that all must take this mark to engage in any form of commerce. These things were not literally fulfilled during the reign of Nero from A.D. 54–68. As Raymond Brown concludes, “too many elements in Rev seem irreconcilable with Nero’s lifetime.”²⁸²

Gentry uses Rev 19:20 twice to prove that the beast was worshiped.²⁸³

Revelation 19:19–21 says,

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies, assembled to make war against Him who sat upon the horse and against His army. And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat upon the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

But when were these verses ever fulfilled in the life of Nero? Nero never gathered his armies with other kings of the earth to make war with the returning Christ from heaven (Rev 19:11–18). Nero was not cast alive into the lake of fire. He died in Rome on June 9, A.D. 68. History never records that Nero had a henchman like the false prophet. There was never a time when Nero’s army was slaughtered and fed to the birds after he was cast alive in the lake of fire.

Preterists are not consistent at this point in their method of interpretation. If the beast is a literal world ruler (Nero), the numerical value of his name is literally 666, and he is literally worshiped and literally waged war against Christians for forty-two months, then consistency demands that the other prophecies concerning him in Rev 13

²⁸² Brown, *Introduction*, 805.

²⁸³ Gentry, *Beast*, 73, 224.

and elsewhere must also be literally fulfilled as well. But history indicates they were not literally fulfilled in Nero.

The best view is the futurist interpretation, which maintains that the beast of Rev 13 refers not to Nero but to the future beast or Antichrist who will literally fulfill all the prophecies in this chapter including 666. This was the view of the early church as witnessed by Irenaeus and Hippolytus.²⁸⁴ Bernard McGinn summarizes what he calls the “kind of mainline eschatology” of the early church in the closing decades of the second century concerning the Antichrist, or beast of Rev 13. “Antichrist is a Jewish false messiah whose coming is still some time in the future, following the fragmentation of the Roman Empire. Antichrist is seen primarily as a persecuting tyrant who will rebuild Jerusalem and its temple. Exalting himself as God and demanding public worship, he will slaughter those who refuse to worship him. . . . His fall after three and a half years will usher in Christ’s return to earth.”²⁸⁵

This view of the beast of Rev 13 is consistent with futurism and contrary to preterism. For these reasons the identification of Nero with the Beast of Rev 13 is rejected, thereby eliminating this argument as a support for the early date.

Persecution of Christians under Nero

Early-date interpreters maintain that the persecution of Christians under Nero in the A.D. 60s fits the socio-religious background for Revelation much better than the reign of Domitian in the 90s. In order to avoid duplicating the same material, this issue

²⁸⁴ Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 5.25.3–4; 5.28.2; 5.30.1; Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel* [PG 10:647–655, 665–66]; Hippolytus, *On the Antichrist* 49 [PG 10:767–68]. Hippolytus’ commentary on Daniel is the oldest extant Christian biblical commentary. Hippolytus saw the Roman empire as merely preparatory of the kingdom of Antichrist. The Antichrist could not come until the Roman empire had been divided into ten kingdoms or “ten democracies.” Hippolytus *Antichrist* 27 [PG 10:747–50]. The *Didache* also refers to the future deceiver of the world who will appear as a son of God and makes clear reference to Mark 13 and Matt 24 as future (16.3–8).

²⁸⁵ Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 63.

will be examined in the next chapter in conjunction with the discussion of the oppression of Christians under Domitian.

The Sixth King in Revelation 17:9–11

The eighth main internal argument by early-date advocates is that the “sixth king” in Rev 17:9–11 is Nero. For some early-date advocates this is the strongest argument for their position.²⁸⁶ Gentry refers to this text as, “*the* leading objective evidence for Revelation’s date of composition.”²⁸⁷ Revelation 17:9–11 says,

Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while. And the beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction.

Revelation 17:9 begins with the words, “Here is the mind which has wisdom.” Alluding to Dan 2, 9, 11 and 12, the seer indicates at the outset that those with spiritual understanding and wisdom will be able to both cognitively and spiritually discern the angel’s explanation of the vision of the beast and the woman in 17:9b–18.²⁸⁸ This introductory, hermeneutical allusion to Daniel is a powerful clue that Daniel’s prophecy looms large over Rev 17:9–11. The key issue in these verses is the identity of the seven kings. There are four main approaches to their meaning

Symbolic

The first approach views the seven heads and seven kings as symbolic of a complete set of Roman rulers, or possibly world kingdoms, regardless of how many there

²⁸⁶ Philip S. Desprez, *John, or the Apocalypse of the New Testament* (London: Longmans Green, 1870), 6; J. Christian Wilson, “The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation,” *NTS* 39 (1993): 599.

²⁸⁷ Gentry, *Beast*, 137.

²⁸⁸ Beale, *Revelation*, 867–68; idem, “The Danielic Background for Revelation 13:18 and 17:9,” *TynBul* 31 (1980): 163–70.

actually were. The number seven is regarded as an apocalyptic symbol indicating completeness.²⁸⁹ All agree that Revelation contains highly symbolic language. But the chief problem with the symbolic interpretation in this text, as well as in the rest of Revelation, is that the symbol has no concrete, meaningful referent. If all the text means is that the Roman rule is complete, why is the vision so detailed and particular in noting that, “five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while. And the beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction.” (Rev 17:9b–11). Also, if seven is the number of completion, why add the reference to the beast as the eighth? The symbolic approach fails to do justice to the intricate details of the text.

Furthermore, in Daniel, the Old Testament counterpart to Revelation, symbols have real, historical referents. When Daniel interpreted the dream of Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 2 he said, “You are the head of gold” (2:38). The angelic interpreter in Dan 7 identified the four beasts as “four kings who will arise from the earth” (7:17). In Dan 8, the ram and goat are identified as the “kings of Media and Persia” and “the king of Greece” (8:20–21). Even more significantly, in Revelation itself symbols have identifiable, specific referents: the seven stars are seven literal messengers (1:20), the seven lampstands are seven literal, historical churches (1:20), the Lamb is Jesus (5:5–7), the golden bowls of incense are the prayers of the saints (5:8), and the dragon is the devil (12:9).²⁹⁰ To make the seven kings in Rev 17:9–11 symbolic in some general way of the

²⁸⁹ Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1919; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 704–8; Mounce, *Revelation*, 317; Witherington, *Revelation*, 223; G. R. Beasley-Murray, “Book of Revelation,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Development*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 256–57; Osborne, *Revelation*, 620; David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Ralph P. Martin, vol. 52C (Dallas: Word Books, 1998), 948.

²⁹⁰ Outside Revelation, in other ancient apocalyptic literature, the referential nature of symbols can be observed. Examples of this are found in *1 Enoch* 85–90 and *4 Ezra* 3–14 where the subsequent interpretation by the angel reveals that the symbol has a historical or eschatological referent. Steven Friesen compares Rev 17:9–11 to an analogous text in *4 Ezra* 11–12 where a vision of Roman imperialism is symbolized by an eagle with twelve wings, three heads, and eight smaller wings. He notes that in that text

full set of Roman rulers fails to fully account for the way symbols are used in prophetic/apocalyptic literature both within and outside the biblical canon and especially within the Apocalypse itself.

Successive Roman Emperors

Another view of the seven kings is adopted by preterists. Under this approach, the seven kings are identified as seven, individual Roman emperors who rule in succession. For preterists, all one must do to determine the date of Revelation is discover the identity of the sixth king since he was ruling at the time the Apocalypse was written. As Gentry says, “All that is required for determining the chronology indicated by Rev 17:10 is that we find a series of seven kings, five of whom ‘have fallen,’ the sixth of whom ‘is’ still ruling, and the last of whom was of but a brief reign. The one who ‘is’ will be the king alive and ruling at the time John wrote Revelation. Then, of course, the discovery of the dates of his reign will serve as the *termini* within which Revelation must have been composed.”²⁹¹

The reference to the seven mountains on which the woman sits is viewed as an unmistakable reference to the city of Rome and the seven hills of Palatine, Aventine, Caelian, Esquiline, Viminal, Quirinal, and Capitoline.²⁹² With this background, preterists begin the count of Roman “kings” with Julius Caesar and the royal litany points to Nero

only three of the major wings and the three heads are important. Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 140–41. He uses this argument to support his symbolic view of Rev 17 and suggest that the enumeration of consecutive emperors for Rev 17 is unnecessary and inadvisable. While Friesen’s conclusion to reject the consecutive emperors view is correct, his basis for doing so appears flawed. In *4 Ezra* 12.19–22 the eight smaller wings are identified as eight kings “whose times shall be short and their years swift.” The text proceeds to give very specific details concerning these eight heads. *Fourth Ezra* 11–12 goes against his figurative interpretation.

²⁹¹ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 152; cf. James M. MacDonald, “The Date of the Apocalypse from Internal Evidence,” *BSac* 26 (1869): 474.

²⁹² MacDonald, “Date,” 473; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 149–51.

as the sixth king. The fact that the reign of Nero was followed by the brief reign of Galba is seen as further historical substantiation of this position.²⁹³ The following is a list of the twelve Roman emperors from Julius Caesar to Domitian.

1. Julius Caesar (49–44 B.C.)
2. Augustus (27 B.C.– A.D. 14)
3. Tiberius (A.D. 14–37)
4. Caligula (37–41)
5. Claudius (41–54)
6. Nero (54–68)
7. Galba (June 68–January 69)
8. Otho (January–April 69)
9. Vitellius (April–December 69)
10. Vespasian (69–79)
11. Titus (79–81)
12. Domitian (81–96)

There are three barriers to interpreting the sixth king as Nero. Each of these obstacles will be considered individually.

Variety of Schemes

First, there are many different schemes for counting the seven kings in Rev 17:9–11. David Aune lists nine alternate ways of counting the Roman emperors.²⁹⁴ G. K. Beale provides five different schemes of enumerating the emperors in Rev 17:9–11.²⁹⁵

²⁹³ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 158.

²⁹⁴ Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 947–48.

²⁹⁵ Beale, *Revelation*, 874.

J. Massyngberde Ford lists four viable constructions.²⁹⁶ The reason for these different schemes is that there are many ways to count the Roman emperors depending upon several factors.²⁹⁷

1. With what emperor should one begin counting—Caesar Augustus, Julius Caesar, or even Caligula? The evidence is far from conclusive. Several ancient sources support beginning sequentially with Julius Caesar (Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.2.2; 18.6.10; 19.1.11; *Sibylline Oracles* 5.12–15; 4 *Ezra* 12:15; and Seutonius who begins his *Lives of the Caesars* with Julius). Against this starting point is the fact that Julius Caesar was not part of New Testament history. Other ancient sources commence with Augustus as the first emperor (Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.789–97; Tacitus, *Annals* 1.1).²⁹⁸ In support of Augustus as the first king, the Roman Empire was officially established under his rule, and he was the first to be proclaimed emperor.²⁹⁹

2. Are all the emperors to be counted or only those deified by an act of the Senate?

3. Should the brief reigns of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, who all reigned during the eighteen months between Nero's death and Vespasian's capture of Rome (December 21, 69), be excluded from the count?

Unfortunately for preterists, one must be absolutely correct in answering all three of these questions to arrive at the proper solution. And each of these decisions is purely arbitrary.³⁰⁰ As Robert Mounce concludes, “However people try to calculate the seven kings as Roman emperors, they encounter difficulties that cast considerable doubt

²⁹⁶ J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, Anchor Bible, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, vol. 38 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 289.

²⁹⁷ J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, Guides to New Testament Exegesis, ed. Scot McKnight (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 44–45; Adela Yarbro Collins, “Dating the Apocalypse of John,” *BR* 26 (1981): 35–36; Beale, *Revelation*, 872–73. Robinson, *Redating*, 242–43.

²⁹⁸ Gentry argues that Tacitus never denies the role of Julius as the first king of the empire. However, Tacitus begins his annals with the reign of Augustus, not Julius, and it is clear that he views Augustus as the first Roman king (*Before Jerusalem*, 154). See Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 947, n. c.

²⁹⁹ Guthrie, *Introduction*, 958.

³⁰⁰ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 297.

on the entire approach.”³⁰¹ Gentry and other preterist interpreters, in order to support their view of the date of Revelation, have to begin with Julius Caesar to arrive at Nero as the sixth king. But, as already noted, the counting can begin with Julius Caesar, Augustus, or even Caligula.³⁰² Beginning with Caligula makes Domitian the sixth king. It must also be remembered that there was a thirteen-year gap between the death of Julius Caesar and the beginning of Augustus’ reign.³⁰³

The real drawback is that early-date advocates cannot even agree among themselves on the answers to these questions. Philip Schaff, an early-date advocate, excludes Julius Caesar, begins with Augustus as the first emperor, and then leaves out Galba, Otho, and Vitellius and arrives at Vespasian as the sixth head.³⁰⁴ Hort, an early date advocate, says, “To begin counting the emperors from Augustus rather than Julius is the more correct reckoning of the two.”³⁰⁵ John A. T. Robinson, who supports the early date, says, “But in Revelation it is clear that the first king must be Augustus.”³⁰⁶ If it is so clear-cut that one should begin counting with Julius, as Gentry alleges, why do a majority of the most respected early-date advocates begin the count with Augustus and end up with Galba or Vespasian as the sixth king? One would expect a much greater level of

³⁰¹ Mounce, *Revelation*, 316–17; Witherington, *Revelation*, 223; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, New Century Bible Commentary, ed. Matthew Black (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1974; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 256.

³⁰² Collins views beginning the count with Caligula as a credible theory because he was “the first emperor to come into conflict with the Jews and the first to encourage the ruler cult” (“Dating the Apocalypse,” 36). Beale notes that Caligula was the first Roman emperor to come to power after the death and resurrection of Christ (*Revelation*, 874).

³⁰³ Thomas, “Dating Revelation,” 195.

³⁰⁴ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 3d ed., vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), 835–36.

³⁰⁵ F. J. A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John: I–III* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1908), xxviii.

³⁰⁶ Robinson, *Redating*, 243. Raymond Brown also believes it is more historical to begin with Augustus as the first emperor (*Introduction*, Table 1, 792). Brown indicates that Revelation was written during Domitian’s reign but was backdated to the reign of Vespasian (*ibid.*, 792, n. 38). He notes that backdating was not unusual in apocalypses.

agreement among the proponents of a theory upon which so much rests.³⁰⁷ Moreover, the modern problem associated with the counting of the kings is not due to a lack of historical information. The original audience would have had no more information concerning the succession of emperors than modern readers, and possibly even less.³⁰⁸

Identity of the Eighth King

A second reason for rejecting Nero as the sixth king is that the rest of the facts in Rev 17:9–13 do not fit this identification. Those who argue that Nero is the sixth king encounter an obstacle for their view when they come to the seventh and especially the eighth king. Gentry begins the count of emperors with Julius Caesar and ends up at Nero as the sixth king. He then interprets Galba as the seventh king in Rev 17:10 who comes and remains “a little while.” He notes that Galba’s reign was very brief—from June, 68 to January 15, 69.³⁰⁹ A consistent continuation of this method of interpretation would lead to Otho (January–April 69), the next Roman emperor after Galba, as the eighth king in 17:11. However, at this point Gentry skips both Otho and Vitellius (April–December 69) to arrive at Vespasian (A.D. 69–79) as the eighth king. Gentry substantiates this view by contending that the Roman empire almost died during the tumultuous years after the death of Nero in A.D. 68, but was revived under Vespasian, the eighth king, in A.D. 69.³¹⁰

Gentry acknowledges the difficulty of this interpretation, so he explains his justification for skipping Otho and Vitellius to arrive at Vespasian as the eighth king.

The reference to the ‘eighth’ king (Rev. 17:11) might seem a difficulty for this view. This is because the eighth emperor of Rome was actually Otho, the second

³⁰⁷ Milligan, *Discussions*, 101.

³⁰⁸ Caird, *Revelation*, 218; Johnson, “Revelation,” 559.

³⁰⁹ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 158.

³¹⁰ The Nero Redivivus Myth is often used to explain the meaning of the eighth king in Rev 17:11. This myth will be discussed briefly in chapter 5.

of the interregnum rulers, and not Vespasian, who actually gave life again to the Empire. Exegetically, it should be noted that in the chronological line of the seven heads/kings, John speaks of the matter with exactness used by use of the definite article. That is, he writes in Revelation 17:10 (we translate it literally): ‘*the* [οἱ] five fell, *the* [ὁ] one is, *the* [ὁ] other not yet come, and whenever he comes a little while it behooves him to remain.’ But the definite article is conspicuously absent in reference to the eighth head/king in Revelation 17:11: ‘And the beast which was and is not, even he is *an* eighth.’ Of course, there is no indefinite article in Greek, but the omission of the definite article that clearly and repetitively defined the chronological series of head/kings (‘*the* five,’ ‘*the* one,’ ‘*the* one to come’) vanishes before the eighth is mentioned. Thus, the eighth is ‘*an* eighth.’ This indicates that John is not concerned with the number of the particular emperor arising after *the* seventh in the Roman Civil War. Rather he is interested solely with the fact that there is one coming soon, who will, as the empire’s stabilizing head, bring life back to the empire. There is a very important sense in which the revival of the Empire under Vespasian, was a revival under ‘an eighth,’ who is ‘of the seven.’ It is the same Roman Empire that is brought to life from the death of the Civil War. . . . The fact that this revival is of an eighth head, however, indicates the rapid recovery of the Beast. That recovery will come shortly after the demise of the original seven.³¹¹

There are three chief problems with this interpretation of the eighth king.

First, the novelty of Gentry’s method alone argues strongly against this view. Gentry cites no other scholars who make so much out of the lack of the Greek article. Moreover, would a reader, without a particular viewpoint to defend, really make the shift from Galba to Vespasian just based upon the lack of the definite article? One cannot simply ignore or skip Otho and Vitellius to arrive at Vespasian to fit a predetermined outcome.³¹²

Second, Rev 17:8 and 17:11 are parallel with Rev 13:2, 12 which describe the death and resurrection of the beast as a mimicry of the death and resurrection of Christ.³¹³ This would appear to require the actual death and resurrection of the beast, not a “near

³¹¹ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 315–16. Gentry further justifies his hermeneutical shift by noting that the original vision only contained seven kings and that the interpreting angel added the eighth. He argues that the shift is in the text and that all he is trying to do is interpret it (ibid., xxxi). It is true that the eighth king is added, but this does not justify skipping Otho and Vitellius and shifting from a reference to individual kings to the entire empire.

³¹² Poythress, *Returning King*, 51, 166.

³¹³ Beale, *Revelation*, 864–65, 875–77.

death” experience. Gentry says, “from June, A.D. 68, through December, A.D. 69, the Roman Empire suffered through a gruesome and severe Civil War that *almost* brought the Empire down, and that had reverberations throughout the Empire”³¹⁴ (italics added). The language used in Rev 13:2, 12 of the fatal wound of the beast is the same language used of Christ’s death in Rev 5:6. Gentry’s view of the near-death of the beast (Roman Empire) fails to adequately satisfy the details of the text. The best view is that the death and resurrection of the beast refers to the individual Antichrist in the end-times who will receive a fatal wound and be healed and institute his kingdom.³¹⁵

Third, the mention of the eighth king seems to take the reader to the end. There is no mention of a ninth or tenth king. The eighth king is the final manifestation of the beast.³¹⁶ The eighth brings the reign of the beast to its end. Speaking of the eighth and final form of the beast’s rule, Rev 17:11 says, “and he goes to destruction.” For Gentry, this is a reference to Vespasian. Two chapters later in Rev 19:20 this final destruction of the beast is described as the beast and the false prophet are cast alive into the lake of fire. Contextually, this must be the same destruction of the final head of the beast that is described in 17:11. Yet, Gentry interprets Rev 19:20 as a reference to Christ’s providential destruction of Nero.³¹⁷

Inconsistent Interpretation

The third argument against the successive emperors view is that in the verses immediately following 17:9–11, Gentry interprets the ten kings in Rev 17:12–13 as the

³¹⁴ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 144.

³¹⁵ G. H. Harris, “The Wound of the Beast in the Tribulation,” *BSac* 156 (1999): 464–68. For a defense of the notion of a literal death and resurrection of the Antichrist see, Thomas Ice, “The Death and Resurrection of the Beast, Part 1,” *Pre-Trib Perspectives* 8 (2005): 1, 4–5; idem, “The Death and Resurrection of the Beast, Part 2,” *Pre-Trib Perspectives* 8 (2005): 1, 4–5.

³¹⁶ Poythress, *Returning King*, 51, 166; Beale, *Revelation*, 875.

³¹⁷ Gentry, *Dominion*, 413.

ten major Roman provinces: Italy, Achaia, Asia, Syria, Egypt, Africa, Spain, Gaul, Britain, and Germany.³¹⁸ In Rev 17:9–11, as has already been noted, Gentry maintains that the “seven kings” are seven Roman emperors or kings. But in the very next verse (17:12), without any textual justification for the shift, he interprets the “ten kings” as ten kingdoms or provinces. Gentry says that the word *Βασιλείς* never means kingdom.³¹⁹ Yet, the ten provinces he identifies as the ten kings are kingdoms. For these reasons, this view of the identity of the seven kings lacks merit.

Successive Forms of Government

A third view of the seven kings is that they represent sequential types of government in the Roman empire. The five that have fallen are the five types of government in Rome before the first stage of the Empire of Imperialism developed. The five are:

The Tarquin Kings	753–510 B.C. (The First Head)
The Counselors	510–494 B.C. (The Second Head)
The Plebians or Dictators	494–390 B.C. (The Third Head)
The Republicans or Decimvers (Oligarchy of Ten)	390–59 B.C. (The Fourth Head)
The Triumvirate	59–27 B.C. (The Fifth Head) ³²⁰

Under this view, the sixth head that was present when John wrote was the Empire of Imperialism which began in the year 27 B.C.³²¹ As Fruchtenbaum explains, “There is one head still to come, that is the seventh head, which is the Antichrist stage

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 412–13.

³¹⁹ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 164.

³²⁰ Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, 42.

³²¹ *Ibid.*

and the stage of Absolute Imperialism. Once the seventh head is established, *he must continue for a little while*, namely 3 ½ years. Thus, the seven kings represent a chronological development from the Tarquin Kings to Absolute Imperialism. Five heads are fallen, the sixth head of imperialism now exists, and one is yet to come, the Antichrist.³²² While this view is a credible solution to the meaning of the seven kings, it seems best to view the kings as separate kingdoms, not different types of government within one kingdom. The arguments in support of the successive kingdoms view will now be presented.

Successive Kingdoms

The best solution to the identify of the seven kings is a fourth approach that understands the seven kings primarily as representing seven successive Gentile world powers or kingdoms.³²³ This interpretation is supported by the parallels between Rev 17:9–12 and Dan 7:17, 23 where kings and kingdoms are interchangeable, thus revealing that a king can stand for the kingdom that he rules. Adopting this interpretation, the eight kingdoms are the eight Gentile world powers that encompass the sweep of history: Egypt, Assyria, Neo-Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, the Reunited Roman empire in a ten king form, and the future kingdom of the beast or final world ruler that emerges out of the reunited Roman empire.³²⁴

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 297; Seiss, *Apocalypse*, 391–94; Ladd, *Revelation*, 227–29; William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1939), 170–71; Walvoord, *Revelation*, 250–54; Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament: With a Critically Revised Text: A Digest of Various Readings: Marginal References to Verbal and Idiomatic Usage: Prolegomena: And a Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1866), 710–11; E. W. Hengstenberg, *The Revelation of St. John*, trans. Patrick Fairbairn, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1852), 200–4.

³²⁴ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 296–300; Seiss, *Apocalypse*, 392–93; Alford, *Greek Testament*, 710; Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, 2:200–4. Beale prefers the successive kingdoms view to the Roman emperor view but raises several issues with it (*Revelation*, 874–75). He objects that the empires in Dan 7 are different from those in Revelation. This objection is only partially correct. Six of the eight kingdoms are the same in both texts (1) Babylon, (2) Medo–Persia, (3) Greece, (4) Rome, (5) the reunited Roman empire under ten kings, and (6) the empire of Antichrist, or the little horn. The only two that are different are Egypt

This view has antiquity on its side. It can be traced all the way back to Andreas of Caesarea. He interpreted the seven kings in Rev 7:9–10 as representing seven successive kingdoms each of which was associated with a specific king: (1) Assyria (Ninus), (2) Media (Arbakes), (3) Babylon (Nebuchadnezzar), (4) Persia (Cyrus), (5) Macedonia (Alexander), (6) the old Roman Empire (Romulus), and (7) the new Roman Empire (Constantine), followed by (8) the kingdom of Antichrist.³²⁵ The view of Andreas, with its blending of the kingdom and the main king who ruled the kingdom, is attractive because in Revelation the beast appears to be both a kingdom and the Satanically empowered individual who embodies that kingdom.³²⁶

There are minor variations of the successive kingdom scheme, but almost all include Egypt, Assyria, Neo-Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, historical Rome, Rome II or the reunited Roman empire, and then the final world empire under Antichrist.³²⁷ Under all the variations the first five empires or kingdoms had already fallen and Rome is the sixth kingdom, the kingdom described as “one is,” when John wrote Rev 17:10.

This is the best view for three main reasons.³²⁸ First, the seven heads are seven mountains (Rev 17:10), and “mountains” or “hills” often symbolize kingdoms or empires

and Assyria. It could be argued that God omitted these nations in the revelation to Daniel since the focus was on what would happen from Daniel’s day forward. Beale’s second main objection is that this theory does not account for the major world empires between the time of the Roman empire and the end times. However, if one views Revelation through the lens of Dan 9:24–27 and sees a gap of time between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks, this objection disappears. See Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), 115–39; Thomas Ice, “The 70 Weeks of Daniel,” in *The End Times Controversy*, ed. Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2003), 307–53.

³²⁵ Andreas, PG 106:379–83.

³²⁶ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 154; Walvoord, *Revelation*, 200.

³²⁷ Ladd, *Revelation*, 229; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 297; Walvoord, *Revelation*, 251–54. Hendriksen views the first six kings as Old Babylonia, Assyria, Medo-Persia, Greco-Macedonia, and Rome, but holds that the seventh king is the collective title for all the empires between the historical Roman empire and final days of world history (*More Than Conquerors*, 170–71).

³²⁸ Another argument that is sometimes used in favor of this view is the presence of the verb “have fallen” (ἐπεσον from πίπτειν) in Rev 17:10. According to Alford, this word is much more applicable

in the Old Testament and in Jewish writings (Ps 30:7; 68:15–16; Isa 2:2; 41:15; Jer 51:25; Ezek 35:3; Dan 2:35; Hab 3:6,10; Zech 4:7; 1 *En* 52; Tg. Isa. 41:15).³²⁹

Second, the seven mountain's imagery should not be interpreted as a reference to the city of Rome. Most commentators see a reference to Rome in the mention of the seven mountains since Rome was widely known as the city on seven hills. However, in the context, there is no need to guess about the meaning of the seven mountains or import a meaning from outside the text. Revelation 17:10 says plainly that the seven mountains are "seven kings." The text requires a strict political identification of the seven mountains with seven kings rather than a geographical location.³³⁰

Gentry says that, "the obvious allusion to Rome via the 'seven hills' cannot be mistaken. To allow it to refer to something other than Rome would be a cruel taunting of the original audience."³³¹ But how could this be a cruel taunt if the next phrase tells the reader that the seven mountains are seven kings? It is only a cruel taunt if one disregards the clear interpretation provided by the angel and tries to import his own preconceived meaning into the text. The text clearly says that the seven mountains are seven kings. How much clearer can the meaning be? Adding a geographical referent that is foreign to the context of the vision gives the seven heads a double meaning not indicated in the

to the violent overthrow of empires or kingdoms than to individual kings. He notes that this word is used in the LXX repeatedly and Theodotian in Daniel of the violent overthrow of kingdoms (*Greek Testament*, 710). Kistemaker also points to this verb in support of the successive kingdoms view (*Revelation*, 472). However, this argument is not persuasive since the verb can be used of the demise of individuals or kingdoms. Also, in Daniel in the LXX and in Theodotian, πίπτειν is used more frequently of individuals falling down in homage or fear than it is of kingdoms falling. It is only used of the violent overthrow of armies or kingdoms on four occasions (8:10; 11:14, 19, 26). See Beale, *Revelation*, 871; Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 949.

³²⁹ Beale, *Revelation*, 868; Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, 2:200.

³³⁰ Johnson, "Revelation," 558–59; Ladd, *Revelation*, 227.

³³¹ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 164.

text.³³² It also combines a symbolic and literal meaning for the seven hills that is not derived from the text itself.³³³

Third, the successive kingdoms approach fits the Old Testament imagery of the beast and its heads drawn from Dan 7.³³⁴ The imagery of the seven-headed beast in Rev 13 and 17 clearly alludes to Dan 7 where there are four beasts with a total of seven heads. The reference to the beast like a leopard, bear, and lion in Rev 13:2 is an allusion to Dan 7 as are the ten horns of the beast in Rev 13:1; 17:3, 7, 12. In Dan 7 the four beasts that come up out of the sea and the seven heads on these beasts symbolize four great kingdoms. The parallel between the beast kingdoms and seven heads in Dan 7:3–7 and the beast and seven heads in Rev 17:9–11 is unmistakable.

³³² Gentry notes that a symbol may have a two-fold referent in Revelation (ibid., xlvi). In support of this he cites the seven heads of the beast, which represent both seven mountains and seven kings (Rev 17:9–10). However, the difference is that the text specifically says that the seven heads have two referents while it never says that the seven mountains do. All it says about the seven mountains is that they are seven kings. Going beyond this clear statement in search of an additional referent to the city of Rome is unnecessary and unwarranted.

³³³ Seiss, *Apocalypse*, 391–93. Seiss marshals an impressive array of evidence against the idea that the seven mountains in Rev 17:9–10 refer to the city of Rome (ibid.). One of Seiss' arguments is that Rome was the city of seven hills, not seven mountains. However, Aune presents evidence that Roman writers often used the Latin terms *mons* (mountain) and *collis* (hill) interchangeably when referring to the Seven Hills of Rome (*Revelation 17–22*, 944–45). Also, the Greek term ὄρος (Rev 17:9) can mean either mountain or hill (BDAG, 724–25).

³³⁴ Surprisingly, Gentry never mentions Dan 7 in his entire discussion of Rev 17:9–11 in *Before Jerusalem Fell*. Gentry openly acknowledges, near the beginning of his work, that Revelation is the New Testament counterpart to Daniel (*Before Jerusalem*, 17). Yet, according to his own Scripture Index in *Before Jerusalem Fell*, the book contains only seven references to the entire book of Daniel, and three of those are in footnotes. The Old Testament in general, and Daniel in particular, form the backdrop for properly understanding the Apocalypse. Gentry's consistent failure to interact with the Old Testament background of specific texts in Revelation is a major weakness in his work. Every reputable, scholarly commentary or journal article on Rev 17 that the present author investigated makes note of the Old Testament background from the beasts in Dan 7. Almost every book one consults on interpreting Revelation highlights the need for the interpreter to consider Old Testament allusions. See Michaels, *Revelation*, 107–8. All texts must be read in relationship to earlier texts (ibid.). Gentry's lack of interaction with this basic, foundational material undermines his work. Another example of his lack of interaction with the Old Testament background of Revelation is his failure to make any reference to Ezek 40–48 in his entire discussion of Rev 11:1–2.

Beasts in Dan 7:1–7	Corresponding Empire
Lion (one head)	Babylon
Bear (one head)	Medo–Persia
Leopard (four heads)	Greece
Terrible Beast (one head)	Rome
Total of 7 heads	

Moreover, Dan 7:17 and 7:23 state that the four beasts are four kings although they in fact represent four kingdoms or empires: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. In Dan 7 kings represent kingdoms.³³⁵ The translated Aramaic text of Dan 7:17 reads, “These great beasts, which are four in number, are four kings who will arise from the earth.” But in 7:23a, as well as the entire context of Daniel, it is clear that the beasts are kingdoms. “Thus he said: ‘The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the other kingdoms.’” This translation is followed in numerous English translations as well (e.g., NASB, ESV, NIV, NLT, REB).

Since Rev 17:9–11 draws its imagery from Dan 7 and the beasts/kings there are successive kingdoms, it makes sense that the same principle of interpretation should be applied in Rev 17:9–11, and the kings in this text should likewise be interpreted as successive kingdoms. The following chart shows the significant parallels between Dan 7:1–8 and Rev 7:9–12.

Dan 7:1–8	Rev 17:9–12
Four Beasts (lion, bear, leopard, terrible beast with ten horns)	One Beast that is like a leopard, bear, and lion (Rev 13:2) with ten horns (13:1; 17:3)
Seven heads representing	Seven heads representing

³³⁵ Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 472.

four successive kingdoms

seven successive kingdoms

Four Kingdoms

Seven kingdoms

Ten horns (7:7)

Ten horns (13:1; 17:3,12)

Therefore, under this interpretation, the eight kingdoms in Rev 17:9–11 represent these kingdoms and the kings that embody them.³³⁶

1. Egypt (Pharaohs)
2. Assyria (Assyrians kings)
3. Neo-Babylon (Nebuchadnezzar)
4. Medo-Persia (Cyrus)
5. Greece (Alexander the Great)
6. Rome (Caesars)
7. Reunited Roman Empire (10 kings)
8. Final Gentile World Kingdom (Antichrist)

While no interpretation of the kings in Rev 17:9–11 is without difficulty, the successive kingdoms view avoids the nebulous nature of the symbolic view, is consistent with the Old Testament imagery from Dan 7, and provides a consistent interpretation of all eight kings. For these reasons, this is the preferred view. Therefore, Rev 17:9–11 offers no support for the early date of Revelation.

The Jewish Character of Christianity in Revelation

A ninth argument for the Neronian date of Revelation centers on the role of Jewish Christianity in Revelation. Gentry maintains that the evidence in Revelation points to a time when Christians and Jews lived together.³³⁷ He alleges that it was only

³³⁶ This list adopts Andreas' view that the heads are a blending of these kingdoms and the kings who embody them.

³³⁷ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 225.

after A.D. 70 that a complete breach between Jew and Christians occurred.³³⁸ Thus, he maintains that this *Sitz im Leben* favors a pre-70 date for Revelation.³³⁹

To support his conclusion, Gentry notes that some of the expressions in Revelation are very Hebraic and that Christians in Rev 7:4–8 “are still designated as the true Jews, the fullness of the Twelve Tribes of Israel.”³⁴⁰ Another piece of evidence he uses to support his thesis is the mention of Jews in Rev 2:9 and 3:9 in the messages to the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia. In each of these letters the church is warned of some who claim to be Jews but are not. Also, in both Rev 2:9 and 3:9, there is a reference to “the synagogue of Satan.” From this kind of evidence, Gentry argues that, “In Revelation there is quite suggestive evidence that the era in which John wrote was one in which Christianity was still largely affected by and strongly attached to the Jewish community.”³⁴¹

However, these same two texts can be used to support the late date for Revelation. In Rev 2:9 the Lord directed these words to the church at Smyrna, “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.” A similar message was given to the church at Philadelphia. “Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews, and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them to come and bow down at your feet, and to know that I have loved you.”

³³⁸ Ibid., 229.

³³⁹ Ibid., 231.

³⁴⁰ Gentry argues that the phrase “twelve tribes of Israel” could refer to “the totality of the Christian church” or “the saved of Jewish lineage” (ibid., 224). But he believes that either way it supports the early date since it denotes a time when “either the Church at large was called by Jewish names or in which the bulk of Christians were Jewish” (ibid.). But if one adopts a futurist interpretation, the 144,000 from the twelve tribes of Israel could be literal Jewish believers in the end times and a date after A.D. 70 for Revelation would pose no problem. See Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 474–80.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 222; cf. Robinson, *Redating*, 227–28.

In both Rev 2:9 and 3:9, the Jews are called the “synagogue of Satan” which probably refers to Satan’s leadership over them in their persecution of Christians.³⁴² At both Smyrna and Philadelphia Christians suffered at the hands of Jews on into the second century. According to Osborne, Jewish opposition “was nowhere more virulent than in Smyrna, with its large and highly visible Jewish population, many of whom were citizens and all of whom wished to protect their rights.”³⁴³ Jewish persecution of Christians certainly occurred before A.D. 70 as evidenced repeatedly in Acts (13:45–52; 14:19; 17:6–9, 13; 18:12–17; 21:27–40). But it was not limited to that time. When Polycarp was martyred in Smyrna in A.D. 156 the Jews denounced Polycarp and the church before the Roman authorities for refusing to worship the emperor.³⁴⁴ Although it was the Sabbath, they even helped gather wood to burn Polycarp.³⁴⁵ Persecution of Christians in Smyrna by Jews was still occurring in the mid-second century, long after A.D. 70.

According to Ignatius, there was a conflict between the Philadelphian church and some form of Judaism when he wrote to the church in about A.D. 110.³⁴⁶ This is further proof that Jewish opposition to Christianity in Asia continued long after A.D. 70.³⁴⁷ The Jews in Smyrna persecuted Christians in the middle of the second century, and

³⁴² Beale, *Revelation*, 286; Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 280. J. Ritchie Smith argues that the references in Rev 2:9 and 3:9 to the “synagogue of Satan” favor a date for Revelation after A.D. 70. He says, “Again, the name given to the Jews in the Apocalypse will not allow us to suppose that this book was written before the great judgment of God upon Jerusalem. They are called (ii. 9 and iii. 9) the synagogue of Satan. What Christian author—especially what Judaeo-Christian writer, such as the author of the Apocalypse must have been—would have allowed himself to brand with such a name the chosen people of God, before God had finally broken with them? . . . No, nothing but an event of so decisive a nature as the destruction of Jerusalem and of the Jewish nation can explain so novel a manner of speech with respect to the ancient people of God” (“Date,” 326–27).

³⁴³ Osborne, *Revelation*, 131.

³⁴⁴ *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 13–14.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁶ Ignatius *To the Philadelphians* 6.1.

³⁴⁷ Horbury provides evidence of escalation of formal Jewish antagonism and oppression against Christians in the late first century and subsequently. William Horbury, “The Benediction of *Minim* and Early Jewish-Christian Controversy” *JTS* 33 (1982): 19–61.

the church at Philadelphia experienced conflict with some form of Judaism at least into the first decade of the second century. In each of these second-century instances the Jews could rightfully be designated a “synagogue of Satan.” Thus, the statements in Rev 2:9 and 3:9 about Jews could just as easily have been written in A.D. 95 as in A.D. 65. The evidence on this point does not seem to be conclusive either way. Therefore, the evidence in Revelation from Jewish references and allusions is not useful in establishing the date of Revelation.

Conclusion

The internal clues from Revelation that early-date advocates rely on are not persuasive individually or collectively. The arguments do not meet the burden of proof to dislodge the traditional A.D. 95 date. Having answered the preterist’s internal arguments for the Neronic date, the internal evidence in favor of the Domitianic date will now be presented and defended.

CHAPTER 5

A PRESENTATION AND DEFENSE OF THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE FOR THE DOMITIANIC DATE OF REVELATION

Revelation contains several internal clues that are consistent with the Domitianic date of A.D. 95 as the time of composition. Eight internal arguments in support of the late date are commonly employed. Three of these arguments will not be used in this defense of the late date. Reasons for rejecting these three arguments will be provided first. Following that discussion, the five accepted, internal arguments for the late date will be presented and defended.

Three Rejected Late-Date Arguments

There are three popular arguments for the late date that will not be utilized as evidence in this defense. However, since they are commonly employed by most scholars, it is important to discuss them briefly. Each of these arguments will be presented and the reasons for rejecting each one will be cited.

“Babylon” as a Code Name for Rome

First, some maintain that the word “Babylon” is a code name for Rome in Rev 17–18 because Rome was the second destroyer of Jerusalem and the temple. It is argued that since Rome is called Babylon, she must have already destroyed the temple; therefore, Revelation must have been written after A.D. 70.¹ Also, Jews do not appear to have designated Rome “Babylon” until after A.D. 70, when like Babylon, the Romans

¹ Gerhard Krodel, *Revelation*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1989), 62–63.

destroyed Jerusalem and the Jewish temple (4 Ezra 3:1–2, 28–31; 2 Baruch 10:1–3; 11:1; 67:7; *Sibylline Oracles* 5.143, 159–60). Many late-date advocates believe this is the strongest evidence for the Domitianic date.² However, if “Babylon” in Rev 17–18 refers to a literal, rebuilt Babylon on the Euphrates, which is the view of the present author, then this point in favor of the late date disappears.³ Additionally, if “Babylon” in 1 Pet 5:13 is a reference to Rome this would be an exception to the notion that Rome is never called Babylon before A.D. 70 since 1 Peter was written prior to Peter’s death in about A.D. 67 or 68.⁴

² Adela Yarbro Collins, “Dating the Apocalypse of John,” *BR* 26 (1981): 35, 42; J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, Guides to New Testament Exegesis, ed. Scot McKnight (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 45.

³ Many writers hold the “literal Babylon” view. Benjamin Willis Newton, *Babylon: Its Future History and Doom*, 3d ed. (London: Houlston & Sons, 1890). In the preface to the 3d edition, Newton mentions that his first edition was published in the 1840s. Clarence Larkin, *The Book of Revelation* (Glenside, PA: Rev. Clarence Larkin Estate, 1919), 150; J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (New York: Charles C. Cook Publishers, 1900; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), 397–400; William R. Newell, *The Book of Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1935), 268, 272; Arthur W. Pink, *The Antichrist* (Swengel, PA: Bible Truth Depot, 1923; reprint, Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications, 1988), 237–38; Charles H. Dyer, “The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17–18 (Part 1),” *BSac* 144 (1987): 305–16; idem, “The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17–18 (Part 2),” *BSac* 144 (1987): 433–49; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 307. Walvoord views Babylon in Rev 17 as a religious entity and Rev 18 as a political entity located in rebuilt Babylon. John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 262–63; cf. Henry M. Morris, *The Revelation Record* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1983), 323–50. For a critique of this view see Homer Heater Jr., “Do the Prophets Teach that Babylonia Will Be Rebuilt in the Eschaton?,” *JETS* 41 (1998), 23–43. Preterists interpret Babylon in Rev 17–18 as a reference to Jerusalem and her destruction in A.D. 70. There are four problems with this view. First, Jerusalem and Babylon are distinguished from one another in Revelation 16:19, even as Babylon is introduced. The “great city,” which is Jerusalem in the context, is distinguished from Babylon the Great. Second, Jerusalem does not sit on many waters (Rev 17:15). Third, Jerusalem did not reign over the kings of the earth as Rev 17:18 requires. Jerusalem did not even reign over herself in the first century; she was in political bondage to Rome. Gentry responds to this objection by interpreting the word “earth” as the land of Israel. Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Atlanta: American Vision, 1998), lxiv. However, why would John need to say that Jerusalem ruled over the kings of the land of Israel. This would be obvious. Fourth, in the first century, Jerusalem was never the world economic juggernaut described in these chapters. For Gentry’s response to this point see *ibid.*, lxvi–ii.

⁴ J. Christian Wilson, “The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation,” *NTS* 39 (1993): 166; Mark Wilson, “The Early Christians in Ephesus and the Date of Revelation, Again,” *Neot* 39 (2005): 166.

The “Twelve Apostles” in Revelation 21:14

Second, the mention of “the twelve apostles” in Rev 21:14 is also cited as positive evidence for the Domitianic date. It is alleged that this phrase is not attested before A.D. 80 and suggests a date for Revelation in the late 80s or early 90s.⁵ This exact phrase appears in Matt 10:2. But the consensus of modern scholarship is that Matthew was written sometime between A.D. 80–100.⁶ However, the present writer dates Matthew before A.D. 70. For those who adopt an early date for Matthew, the reference to the “twelve apostles” in Rev 21:14 does not add any support to the Domitianic date.⁷

The Nero Redivivus Myth

Third, due to the popular fear and hatred of Nero, a story circulated after the death of Nero that he would return to Rome leading a Partian army against the Roman Empire.⁸ It is alleged that texts in Revelation that refer to the beast recovering from a mortal wound allude to a Nero Redivivus (revival of Nero) myth or theory (Rev 13:3, 14; 17:8, 11).⁹ Ancient support for the legend is drawn from Tacitus, Suetonius, and the

⁵ David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Ralph P. Martin, vol. 52 (Dallas: Word Books, 1997), lxx; idem, *Revelation 17–22*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Ralph P. Martin, vol. 52C (Dallas: Word Books, 1998), 1157.

⁶ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 54; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, lxiv. Mark Wilson highlights the circular reasoning that is often used in dating NT books. For instance, Revelation cannot be dated before A.D. 70 because Matthew is dated after 80 and vice versa. Wilson, “Early Christians in Ephesus,” 168.

⁷ D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 19–21.

⁸ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 17.

⁹ Paul Trudinger, “The ‘Nero Redivivus’ Rumour and Date of the Apocalypse of John,” *St. Mark’s Review* 131 (1987): 43–44. Bauckham presents extensive support for the theory. Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), 407–31. J. Stuart Russell, a full preterist, held to a form of the Nero Redivivus legend. J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: The New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord’s Second Coming*, new ed. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 462.

Sibylline Oracles.¹⁰ If the passages in Rev 13 and 17 reflect the myth, then this favors a later date for Revelation since it would have taken some time for the myth to arise, develop, and circulate after the death of Nero in A.D. 68.¹¹ However, this argument for the late date carries little weight, since the Nero Redivivus myth bears little resemblance to what is actually said about the beast in Rev 13 and 17.¹² Furthermore, if John referred to the Nero Redivivus legend, then he recorded a false prophecy based on fanciful superstition since Nero never returned from the dead and never will.¹³ It is highly doubtful that John or the early church believed this legend.¹⁴

Five Accepted Late-Date Arguments

There are five principal lines of internal evidence that favor the Domitianic date of Revelation. Each of these points in favor of the late date will now be considered.

Condition of the Churches in Revelation 2–3

One of the standard internal arguments for the late date of Revelation is the

¹⁰ Tacitus *Histories* 2.8; Suetonius *Nero* 57; *Sibylline Oracles* 5.361–85.

¹¹ Beale, *Revelation*, 17.

¹² D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2005), 710. G. H. Harris presents a survey of the various views of the wound of the Beast in Rev. 13. He rejects the Nero Redivivus position and adopts the Antichrist view. G. H. Harris, “The Wound of the Beast in the Tribulation,” *BSac* 156 (1999): 459–68.

¹³ J. Ritchie Smith, “The Date of the Apocalypse,” *BSac* 45 (1888): 311; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1935; reprint, Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1963), 394. Osborne, who views the beast in Rev 13 as the future Antichrist, contends that just as John used the Apollo legend in Rev 12:1–6, he likewise employed the Nero legend to fashion his description of the beast in Rev 13. Osborne acknowledges that neither legend was true, but believes that John used them to show “that what they knew as legend would become history.” He views the Beast as a Nero-like figure who parodies Christ’s death and resurrection. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 493–97.

¹⁴ Lenski, *Revelation*, 394.

condition of the seven churches of Asia Minor in Rev 2–3.¹⁵ A survey of the internal clues for the Domitianic date from these letters will be presented and defended.

The Church of Ephesus

Contemporary preterists maintain that John wrote Revelation from Patmos in A.D. 65. If this date is correct, John must have arrived and been settled in Asia by at least 62–63, if not earlier, to have had adequate time to gain the respect of the believers throughout the entire province and to become such a force that he required exile to end his influence.¹⁶ This reconstruction of the chronology creates three serious hurdles for the Neronic date of Revelation.

First, it would mean that the ministries of John and Paul to the churches of Asia overlapped. Some time after his release from house arrest in Rome in the spring of A.D. 62, but before A.D. 65, Paul visited the church in Ephesus. When Paul departed from Ephesus for Macedonia, he left Timothy in charge of the church (1 Tim 1:3). In A.D. 64–65, from Macedonia, Paul wrote 1 Timothy to his beloved son in the faith who was still in Ephesus.¹⁷ Using preterist chronology, Revelation and 1 Timothy would have been written within one year of each other, if not a few months.

This raises some hard questions for preterist, early-date interpreters. Why would Paul have felt the necessity even to visit Ephesus after his release from house arrest if the apostle John was there? Why would Paul leave Timothy in charge if the apostle John had assumed authority over the churches of Asia? Since Paul wrote 1 Timothy in A.D. 64–65, about the same time that John was writing Revelation

¹⁵ Osborne claims that the evidence from the seven churches is what first convinced him to change his view from the Neronic date to the Domitianic date (*Revelation*, 9).

¹⁶ Robert L. Thomas, “Theonomy and the Dating of Revelation,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 5 (1994): 200.

¹⁷ Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 572.

(according to preterists), why would Paul make no reference to the presence or recent banishment of John and his influence over the church?¹⁸

Along this same line, Paul wrote 2 Timothy in A.D. 67–68, which is one to three years after the preterist date for Revelation. In 2 Tim 4:9–21, Paul lists at least seventeen present and former co-workers by name, but John is not included. Surely, if John were present at Ephesus or exiled to Patmos when Paul wrote, he would have referenced his fellow apostle. Paul’s failure to mention John in 1 and 2 Timothy is inexplicable. Finally, if John came to Ephesus as early as A.D. 61–62, which is probable under the preterist chronology, he would have been there when Paul wrote Ephesians, yet Paul makes no mention of him in that epistle either. Therefore, the Neronian date of Revelation fails to account for its necessary overlapping of the ministries of John and Paul in Ephesus, but the A.D. 95 date for Revelation easily explains why Paul never mentions John in Ephesians, or 1 and 2 Timothy.¹⁹

Second, there are also substantial differences between Rev 2:1–7 and Paul’s correspondence to the Ephesian church. In 1 Timothy Paul makes no reference to the loss of first love or the presence of the Nicolaitans. The way the Nicolaitans are introduced in Rev 2:6 suggests that when John wrote they were a well-known sect that only needed to be referred to by name.²⁰ The failure of Paul to mention these issues in 1 Timothy is equally baffling under the preterist chronology since this epistle and Rev 2:1–7 would

¹⁸ Thomas, “Dating Revelation,” 200.

¹⁹ Hemer mentions another possible support for the Domitianic date from Rev 2:7. Hemer notes that, “In Rev 2:7 there may be a reference to the abuse of the right of asylum in Ephesus, a problem known from the ostensibly contemporary letters of Apollonius of Tyana (Nos. 65, 66) to have been acute under Domitian.” Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, The Biblical Resource Series, ed. Astrid B. Beck and David Noel Freedman (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1986; reprint, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 4, 48–50.

²⁰ Guthrie, *Introduction*, 954–55; cf. Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John the Greek Text with Introduction, Notes and Indices*, 3d ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1909), ci.

have been written to the same church at the same time (probably within a few months). Furthermore, Jesus' statement to the church of Ephesus in Rev 2:2 that it had guarded itself well against error also does not fit what is known of this church in Nero's day (Acts 20:29–30; 1 Tim 1:3–7; 2 Tim 2:17–18).²¹

Moreover, if Revelation was written in A.D. 65, then almost certainly Paul wrote 2 Timothy *after* John wrote to the church since 2 Timothy was written not long before Paul's martyrdom in about A.D. 67.²² Yet again, there is no mention of the loss of first love or the Nicolaitan sect. Neither does Paul mention these problems in his Ephesian epistle which was probably written in late 61 or early 62 near the end of his first Roman imprisonment.²³ Ephesians mentions no gross error in the church, yet the preterist date of Revelation would mean that Jesus threatened the Ephesian church with extinction only three years later (Rev 2:5). This is not reasonable. The Neronic date of A.D. 65–66 simply does not adequately account for the differences in the various letters to the Ephesian church within such a compressed time span.

Third, Rev 2–3 makes no mention of the great missionary work of Paul in Asia Minor. On his third missionary journey Paul headquartered in Ephesus for almost three years from autumn 53–spring 56 and had a profound ministry there and in all of Asia.²⁴ Paul returned and met with the Ephesian elders at Miletus in the spring of A.D. 57.²⁵ If John wrote Revelation in A.D. 65 then the omission of any mention of Paul in the

²¹ Craig S. Keener, *Revelation, the NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 26.

²² Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 578. Carson and Moo believe that 2 Timothy was written as early as A.D. 64–65 or as late as 66. They note that most modern scholars date Paul's execution to A.D. 64 or 65.

²³ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 96.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 91–92.

letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor is inexplicable.²⁶ Paul was still alive and active in A.D. 65 and was the human instrument directly responsible for the founding of these seven churches (Acts 19:10). The omission of any mention of Paul in Rev 2–3 would seem to require the passing of a substantial amount of time after the mid-sixties. A date in A.D. 95 would fit nicely.

The Church of Smyrna

The second church that Jesus addressed in Rev 2 was the suffering church of Smyrna. Apparently, the church of Smyrna did not even exist during the ministry of Paul. Polycarp was the bishop of Smyrna. In his letter to the Philippians, written in about A.D. 110, Polycarp says that the Smyrnaeans did not know the Lord during the time Paul was ministering. “But I have not observed or heard of any such thing among you, in whose midst the blessed Paul labored, and who were his letters of recommendation in the beginning. For he boasts about you in all the churches—those alone, that is, which at that time had come to know the Lord, for we had not yet come to know him.”²⁷

According to Rev 2:8-11, the Church in Smyrna had been persevering under persecution for some time. Yet Polycarp says that Paul praised the Philippian believers in all the churches but that during Paul’s ministry the church of Smyrna did not even exist.²⁸ This favors the close of the first century as the time of composition for Revelation.

Charles concludes:

The church of Smyrna did not exist in 60–64 A.D.—at a time when St. Paul was boasting of the Philippians in all the Churches. Cf. Polycarp (*Ad Phil . . .*). But though Polycarp’s letter tells us that the church of Smyrna was not founded in 60–64 A.D., he gives no hint as to when it was founded. Hence several years may

²⁶ Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1919; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 207.

²⁷ Polycarp *Letter to the Philippians* 11.3.

²⁸ Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 16

have elapsed after that date before it was founded. When, however, we turn to Rev. 2:8–11 we find that our text presupposes a Church poor in wealth but rich in good works, with a development of apparently many years to its credit. This letter, then, may have been written in the closing years of Vespasian (75–79) but hardly earlier.²⁹

Gentry's reply is that Smyrna must have been evangelized before A.D. 60 based on Act 19:10, 26.³⁰ With Ephesus as Paul's headquarters, Acts 19:10 says, "so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." From this verse and Acts 19:26, Gentry assumes that a church must have been founded in Smyrna during Paul's three year Ephesian ministry which lasted from about A.D. 53–56.

However, just because the gospel came to Smyrna during Paul's third missionary journey does not mean that a church was necessarily founded during this time. Acts 19:10 simply says that, "all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord." Those in Athens also heard the word, but there is no indication that a church was formed there (Acts 17:16–34). Scripture specifically says that churches were founded in the Asian cities of Ephesus, Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea by the time of Paul's first Roman imprisonment in A.D. 60 (Eph 1:1; Col. 4:13). However, there is no mention of any church at Smyrna. In the face of this Scriptural silence and the specific statement of Polycarp, it seems best to let Polycarp's statement stand.

The Churches of Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis

The churches of Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis also show signs of the passing of a considerable amount of time. Some in the church of Pergamum were entertaining the teaching of Balaam and endorsing Nicolaitanism (Rev 2:14–15). Thyatira

²⁹ R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), xciv. Guthrie supports Charles' argument (*Introduction*, 954).

³⁰ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 324–25.

tolerated the false prophetess Jezebel and “the deep things of Satan” (Rev 2:20, 24). The church of Sardis was dead with only a few members who had not “soiled their garments” (Rev 3:1, 4).

Based on this composite picture of the churches, J. W. Roberts aptly concludes, “The internal evidence is equally strong. The conditions of the churches in Asia Minor are not the same as those in the 50s and 60s as pictured in Acts of Apostles, the letters to Timothy and Titus, or 1 Peter. New opponents (Nicolaitans), new internal compromisers (Jezebel), new hazards (threat of death because of refusal to worship the Emperor) are present. References to growing cold and losing first love and having a name but being dead indicate indifference due to the passing of time.”³¹

Gentry’s primary response to this type of evidence from the seven churches is that error can erupt very quickly in a church.³² As examples he cites the churches of Galatia who Paul says, “so quickly deserted the gospel” (Gal 1:6) and the church of Corinth.³³ It is true that error can erupt and grow quickly in the proper soil. As Gentry correctly observes, the Ephesian church experienced false teaching even during Paul’s lifetime in A.D. 64–65 (1 Tim 1:6).³⁴ In light of the inherently subjective nature of this evidence, Guthrie urges caution. “All the letters, in fact, give the impression that the churches have a history behind them. But it is difficult to assess the length of time needed for deterioration to set in. All depends on the spiritual standard of the original church. That all the apostolic churches were not equal in this respect is abundantly clear from the Pauline epistles themselves. Spiritual decline and heretical ideas take little time to

³¹ J. W. Roberts, *The Revelation to John (the Apocalypse)* (Austin, TX: Sweet Publishing Company, 1974), 10; cf. William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1939), 14–15.

³² Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 326–29.

³³ *Ibid.*, 327–28.

develop in fertile soil, and some caution is necessary before concluding for a later date on these grounds.”³⁵

Nevertheless, in spite of his own warning, Guthrie concedes, “it must be admitted that a date towards the close of the century would allow more time for the conditions to develop.”³⁶ If just a few of the churches in Asia had deteriorated and fallen prey to false teaching, a case for the Neronic date of Revelation could possibly be made on this basis. However, all of the seven churches except Smyrna and Philadelphia had degenerated considerably by the time Revelation was written. The cumulative nature of the departure and error points strongly in the direction of a considerable interval of time.³⁷

The Church of Laodicea

The church of Laodicea is the only one of the seven churches, with the possible exception of Sardis, that did not have one thing to commend. In his letter to the Colossians, written in A.D. 61–62, Paul indicated that the church was an active group (Col 4:13). He mentioned the church at Laodicea three times in his Colossian letter (2:2; 4:13, 16). If Revelation were written in A.D. 65, as Gentry suggests, then Jesus’ letter to the Laodiceans would have been written only three or at most four years later. A span of more than three or four years would seem to be necessary for the church to depart so completely from its earlier acceptable status that absolutely nothing good could be said about it.³⁸ The condition of the church was so grave that the Lord threatened to vomit them out of his mouth (Rev 3:16). Again, one would expect a longer duration of time

³⁴ Ibid., 328.

³⁵ Guthrie, *Introduction*, 954; cf. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, lxiii.

³⁶ Guthrie, *Introduction*, 955.

³⁷ Smith, “Date,” 325.

³⁸ Homer Hailey, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 34.

than three or four years for this repugnant condition to develop. As Guthrie notes, “The Lord’s strong revulsion at the state of the Laodicean church would certainly become more intelligible after a considerable interval.”³⁹

Laodicea is also described in Revelation as flourishing economically. Jesus quotes the church as saying, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing.” Yet the city suffered catastrophic devastation in the earthquake that shook the Lycus Valley in A.D. 60.⁴⁰ On one or more previous occasions it appears that the Laodiceans had appealed to Rome and received assistance in reconstruction after incurring earthquake damage.⁴¹ This practice of seeking imperial relief was customary and expected.⁴² But after the A.D. 60 earthquake, the Laodiceans refused all aid and assistance from Rome preferring to rebuild their devastated city from their own resources. Tacitus, the Roman historian, describes this independent spirit. “In the same year, Laodicea, one of the famous Asiatic cities, was laid in ruins by an earthquake, but recovered by its own resources, without assistance from ourselves.”⁴³ By the time Revelation was written, the reconstruction efforts at Laodicea were complete since the church at Laodicea is depicted as wealthy and self-sufficient. This points to a date after A.D. 70 for the date of Revelation.⁴⁴

³⁹ Guthrie, *Introduction*, 955.

⁴⁰ Some date the Lycus Valley earthquake to A.D. 60 or 61 based on Tacitus *Annals* 14.27. Leon Morris, *Revelation*, rev. ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 38. Metzger dates it in A.D. 61 (*Breaking the Code*, 16). While either date is possible, 60 seems to be the standard date accepted by most scholars. See Hemer, *Seven Churches*, 193.

⁴¹ Strabo *Geography* 12.8.18; Suetonius *Tiberias* 8.

⁴² Hemer, *Seven Churches*, 193.

⁴³ Tacitus *Annals* 14.27.1.

⁴⁴ Rojas-Flores contends that the absence of any reference to the earthquake of 60 and the material well-being of the city indicates that Revelation was written prior to that time. Gonzalo Rojas-Flores, “Revelation and the First Years of Nero’s Reign,” *Bib* 85 (2004): 385–86. It is much better to see

Gentry offers three counter-arguments to this evidence. First, and somewhat incredibly, he states that it may be possible that the Laodicean church was spared the effects of the earthquake as a token of God's providence.⁴⁵ This would mean that the believers in Laodicea were still wealthy and self-sufficient while the rest of the city, and the other cities of the Lycus valley were destroyed. While this is within the realm of possibility, there is absolutely no biblical, historical, or archaeological evidence to support this claim.

Second, he says that it may be spiritual riches that are being described in Rev 3:17, not material riches.⁴⁶ But in the following context in Rev 3:18, Jesus alludes to relevant Laodicean industries that contributed to their material wealth: gold (Laodicea was a banking center), eyesalve (Laodicea marketed and profited greatly from an ointment used to treat ophthalmic ailments), and white clothing (Laodicea was a center of clothing production).⁴⁷ These local allusions to the sources of material wealth in Laodicea indicate that the reference to the wealth of the church was primarily to her material wealth that in turn created a sense of self-sufficiency and spiritual complacency. The material affluence and corresponding self-sufficient attitude of the culture had infiltrated the church.

Third, Gentry argues that the city could have been rebuilt in a very short time due to the material wealth of the city. He says,

Most ruinous to the entire argument is the documented fact of Laodicea's apparently effortless, unaided, and rapid recovery from the earthquake. Tacitus

the self-sufficiency of Laodicea as a result of her unaided reconstruction after the earthquake rather than before it. See Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 16, 43–44.

⁴⁵ Gentry, *Beast*, 232–33.

⁴⁶ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 320–21.

⁴⁷ Hemer, *Seven Churches*, 196–201; cf. W. M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, edited and updated by Mark Wilson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 306–9.

reports that the city did not even find it necessary to apply for an imperial subsidy to help them rebuild, even though such was customary for cities in Asia Minor. . . . This is as clear a statement as is necessary to demonstrate that Laodicea's economic strength was not radically diminished by the quake. Despite the quake, economic resources were so readily available within Laodicea that the city could easily recover itself from the damage.⁴⁸

While it is true, that Laodicea did rebuild on her own, the reconstruction was not “effortless” and “rapid” as Gentry asserts. The archaeological evidence at Laodicea points to a thirty-year rebuilding process.⁴⁹ The extent of the damage to Laodicea in the earthquake of A.D. 60 and the length of time it took to reconstruct the city are compelling evidence for the late date for Revelation. The catastrophic nature of the earthquake in A.D. 60 can be discerned from its mention in a catalog of woes in the *Sibylline Oracles*.⁵⁰

According to Hemer, archaeological excavations in the cities of the Lycus valley (Laodicea, Colosse, and Hierapolis) reveal a marked interruption of numismatic (coin) evidence from A.D. 60–79.⁵¹ Hemer states that from A.D. 60–69 there are no coins from Laodicea in the *Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum* and only two coins from Laodicea during the reign of Vespasian (A.D. 69–79).⁵² However, he notes that there is a much richer series of coinage under Domitian. Hemer cites this as evidence in support of his thesis that the earthquake had a long-term economic effect on Laodicea and the entire Lycus Valley. He says, “the abrupt numismatic poverty of Hierapolis, Laodicea and perhaps Tripolis is sufficiently marked to be suggestive.”⁵³

⁴⁸ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 321.

⁴⁹ Hemer, *Seven Churches*, 193–95.

⁵⁰ *Sibylline Oracles* 4.107–8.

⁵¹ Hemer, *Seven Churches*, 194.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 194; cf. E. B. Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticæ; or, a Commentary on the Apocalypse, Critical and Historical; Including Also an Examination of the Chief Prophecies of Daniel*, 4th ed., vol. 1 (London: Seeleys, 1851), 44, n. 6.

An examination of the numismatic catalogue in *Roman Provincial Coinage* may not fully support Hemer's evidence. It is true that the numismatic evidence under Titus and Domitian is more plentiful than under Nero.⁵⁴ However, *Roman Provincial Coinage* lists some bronze coins from Nero's reign that *may* have been issued after the earthquake in A.D. 60.⁵⁵ But even if one accepts Hemer's analysis of the evidence, numismatic paucity in Laodicea from A.D. 60–69 may add some credence to the late date, but it is not determinative.

The strongest archaeological data from Laodicea in support of the late date is the direct archaeological evidence of how long it took to rebuild the city. A team of Canadian archaeologists led by Jean des Gagniers conducted excavations at Laodicea from 1961–63. The primary focus of their campaign was the Nymphaeum (fountain) that is dated to the early third century, but they also included some other data in their published report. Their findings related to several inscriptions confirm that the reconstruction process after the earthquake in A.D. 60 covered a span of at least twenty years.⁵⁶ The report notes that after the earthquake in A.D. 60 Laodicea did not ask for imperial financial assistance.⁵⁷ However, it also notes that the government of the Flavians was particularly benevolent toward Laodicea.⁵⁸ The Flavian emperors were Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian who reigned from A.D. 69–96. The report does not say what form

⁵⁴ Andrew Burnett, Michel Amandry, and Ian Carradice, *Roman Provincial Coinage*, vol. 2, *From Vespasian to Domitian (AD 69–96)* (London: British Museum Press, 1999), 193–97.

⁵⁵ Andrew Burnett, Michel Amandry, and Pere Pau Ripollès, *Roman Provincial Coinage*, vol. 1, *From the Death of Caesar to the Death of Vitellius (44 BC–AD 69)* (London: British Museum Press, 1992), 475–80. Question marks appear beside some of the dates for the issuance of coins in Laodicea from A.D. 60–62. However, the discussion of Roman coinage in Laodicea makes it fairly clear that the authors believe that some coins were issued in Laodicea in the early 60s.

⁵⁶ Jean des Gagniers, *Laodicæe du Lycos: Le Nymphæe; Campagnes 1961–1963* (Quebec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1969), 4–11.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

this Flavian benevolence took, but the Laodiceans rewarded the Flavian favor by dedicating the amphitheater to Vespasian and a door or gate in the amphitheater to his son Domitian.⁵⁹ This evidence points to a rebuilding process in Laodicea that lingered into the reign of Domitian, the final Flavian emperor.

Most of the main ruins that survive today in Laodicea are from buildings constructed during the time of earthquake reconstruction.⁶⁰ The great public buildings destroyed in the earthquake were rebuilt at the expense of individual citizens and were not finished until about the year A.D. 90. The completion date of the *stadium amphitheatrum*, with its 600-foot long track and 900-foot long arena, can be precisely dated to the latter part of A.D. 79. It was built by Nicostratus and dedicated to Vespasian for his favor toward the city. The inscriptions on several other buildings indicate that they too can be dated to this same period during the reign of Vespasian.⁶¹ The Odeon was apparently built during this same time.⁶² New gates and fortifications seem to have culminated the rebuilding of Laodicea. It is likely that the great triple gate (Syrian gate) and towers were not finished until A.D. 88–90.⁶³

Since the rebuilding of Laodicea after the earthquake occupied at least twenty years and was not fully complete until A.D. 90, it is problematic for early-date proponents to claim that Laodicea was rich, wealthy, in need of nothing, and boasting in her self-sufficiency in A.D. 65, only five years after the devastating earthquake. During those years the city was in the early stages of a rebuilding program that would last

⁵⁹ Ibid., 4–5.

⁶⁰ Hemer, *Seven Churches*, 194.

⁶¹ Ibid., 194–95. *Sibylline Oracles* 4.108 (A.D. 80) refers to the earthquake and the rebuilding of Laodicea. See W. M. Ramsay, *The Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia Being an Essay of the Local History of Phrygia from the Earliest Times to the Turkish Conquest*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895), 47.

⁶² des Gagniers, *Laodicæe du Lycos*, 6.

⁶³ Hemer, *Seven Churches*, 195.

another 15–25 years. However, if Revelation was written in A.D. 95 the description of Laodicea in Rev 3:14–22 would fit the situation quite well. By this time the city was completely rebuilt by means of its own resources enjoying prosperity and prestige and basking in the pride of its great accomplishment.

Conclusion

The churches of Asia Minor show all the symptoms of a considerable passage of time since their founding. The period of Paul’s great mission seems to lie in the past. John is the recognized human superintendent of the churches. John fails to mention Paul in any of the letters in Rev 2–3. Likewise, Paul makes no mention of John in any of his three letters to Ephesus written in the early to mid-sixties (Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy). Every key indicator in Rev 2–3 points to the late date of Revelation. As a result of his intensive study of the local imagery of the seven churches, Hemer concludes, “I started with a provisional acceptance of the orthodox Domitianic dating, and have been confirmed in that view by further study. . . . We accordingly affirm the Domitianic date of the letters in light of the kind of evidence considered, while recognizing that many of these indications are uncertain. Cumulatively they align themselves with the case widely accepted on other grounds that the Revelation was written about AD 95.”⁶⁴

The letters to the seven churches provide solid evidence in support of the Domitianic date.

Banishment of John to Patmos

Revelation 1:9 is significant for determining the date of Revelation. It reads, “I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos, because of the word of

⁶⁴ Ibid., 3, 5.

God and the testimony of Jesus.” This verse indicates that Revelation was written during a time of persecution during which banishments took place.⁶⁵

The ancient record indicates that both Nero and Domitian practiced banishment. Dio mentions Nero’s practice of banishment twice.⁶⁶ Suetonius records four instances when Nero employed banishment or exile. First, he banished his wife Octavia on a charge of adultery but later had her executed.⁶⁷ Second, he exiled Tuscus, the son of his foster-mother.⁶⁸ Third, he banished the children of a group of conspirators against his life but later starved and poisoned them.⁶⁹ Fourth, he banished the actor Datus and the cynic Isidorus.⁷⁰

While Nero did use banishment, there are three points that favor Domitian’s reign as the time of John’s banishment to Patmos. First, church history consistently testifies that both Peter and Paul were executed in Rome near the end of Nero’s reign. Those who hold to the early date for Revelation maintain that during this same time the apostle John was banished to Patmos by Nero. This raises an obvious question—why would Nero execute Peter and Paul and banish John? Why would one apostle be treated differently than the other two if the same emperor were responsible for their sentences?

⁶⁵ Revelation 1:9 says that John was on the island of Patmos “because of the Word of God, even the testimony of Jesus.” There are three views of the reason John was on the island: (1) John was sent to Patmos to receive the content of the Apocalypse, (2) John went to the island to carry out Christ’s great commission, and (3) John was exiled there because of the preaching of the gospel. For a discussion of the three views and a defense of view three, see Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 87–89.

⁶⁶ Dio *History* 62.26.2; 62.27.4.

⁶⁷ Suetonius *Nero* 35.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

This seems inconsistent. The different penalties for Peter and Paul as compared with John argue for the fact that they were sentenced under different Roman emperors.

Second, while Nero did use banishment as a means of punishment on several occasions, Nero did not impose the sentence of banishment nearly as frequently as Domitian. Third, there is no mention of Nero ever banishing a Christian, while Domitian did banish a believer on one specific occasion for her testimony as a Christian. Domitian's penchant for banishment is mentioned by numerous ancient writers.

Tacitus

Gaius Cornelius Tacitus (ca. A.D. 55–ca. 117) was a Roman orator, lawyer, and senator. Only a few specific events from his life are known. In A.D. 78 he married the daughter of Gnaeus Julius Agricola. Tacitus served as proconsul of Asia from 113–116 or possibly 111–112.⁷¹ In A.D. 98 he wrote a biography of his father-in-law, Gnaeus Julius Agricola, who was governor of Britain for seven years. The work is known as *De Vita Iulii Agricolae* or *Agricola*. The final chapters of the work are a fierce invective against Domitian. At one point Tacitus mentions Domitian's penchant for banishment. "It was not his [Agricola's] fate to see the Senate-house besieged, the Senate surrounded by armed men, and in the same reign of terror so many consulars butchered, the flight and exile of so many honourable women."⁷²

Tertullian

Tertullian mentions banishment under Domitian. "Domitian, too, who was a good deal of a Nero in cruelty, attempted it; but, being in some degree human, he soon stopped what he had begun, and restored those he had banished."⁷³

⁷¹ Tacitus *Histories* 2:vii.

⁷² Tacitus *Agricola* 45.1.

⁷³ Tertullian *Apology* 5.4.

Eusebius

Eusebius recounted Domitian's banishment of countless prominent men early in his reign for no apparent reason.

When Domitian had given many proofs of his great cruelty and had put to death without any reasonable trial no small number of men distinguished at Rome by family and career, and had punished without cause myriads of other notable men by banishment and confiscation of their property, he finally showed himself the successor to Nero's campaign of hostility to God. He was the second to promote persecution against us, though his father, Vespasian, had planned no evil against us.⁷⁴

Suetonius

The Roman historian Suetonius Tranquillus lived from about A.D. 75–140. He was a close friend of Pliny the Younger and was the emperor Hadrian's private secretary from A.D. 119–121. Suetonius provides at least four instances when Domitian banished or exiled people for various reasons. First, he banished the paramours of the Vestal Virgins (the Oculata sisters and Varronilla).⁷⁵ Second, on one occasion he banished an ex-praetor who confessed to having a sexual liason with a Vestal Virgin, "because he admitted his guilt while the case was still unsettled and the examination and torture of the witnesses had led to no result."⁷⁶ Third, on another occasion all the philosophers were banished from Rome and Italy.⁷⁷ Fourth, he exiled many senators. Suetonius states, "He put to death many senators, among them several ex-consuls, including Civica Cerealis, at the very time when he was proconsul in Asia, Salvidienus Orfitus, Acilius Glabrio while

⁷⁴ Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.17. In 3.18.4, Eusebius provides a specific example of banishment of a Christian under Domitian. This will be discussed under the subheading "Dio Cassius."

⁷⁵ Suetonius *Domitian* 8.4.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.3.

he was in exile—these on the ground of plotting revolution, the rest on any charge, however trivial.”⁷⁸

Dio Cassius

Dio Cassius, the Roman historian, refers to Domitian’s use of banishment at least five times in his *Roman History*. First, he mentions a man named Mettius Pompusianus who Domitian exiled to Corsica but later put to death.⁷⁹ Second, Dio states that Domitian, “was putting many of the foremost men out of the way on many different pretexts, some by means of murder and others by banishment.”⁸⁰ Third, Dio records, “As a consequence of his cruelty the emperor was suspicious of all mankind, and from now on ceased to repose hopes of safety in either the freedmen or yet the prefects, whom he usually caused to be brought to trial during their very term of office. He had first banished and now slew Epaphroditus, Nero’s freedman, accusing him of having failed to defend Nero.”⁸¹ Fourth, Dio mentions that after Domitian’s assassination on September 18, A.D. 96, his successor, Nerva Cocceius, liberated all those that Domitian had banished and exiled.⁸²

Fifth, Dio recounts how Domitian brought charges against two of his own relatives and many other people for “atheism,” which was described as “drifting into Jewish ways.” His account reads as follows, “And the same year Domitian slew, along with many others, Flavius Clemens the consul, although he was cousin and had to wife

⁷⁸ Ibid., 10.2.

⁷⁹ Dio *History* 67.12.3–4. Dio also mentions a sophist named Maternus that Domitian “put out of the way” for delivering an offensive practice speech (ibid., 67.12.5). While this phrase could refer to execution, it seems to indicate that he too was banished or exiled by Domitian.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 67.3.3.

⁸¹ Ibid., 67.14.4.

⁸² Ibid., 68.1.2.

Flavia Domitilla, who was also a relative of the emperor's. The charge brought against them both was that of atheism, a charge on which many others who drifted into Jewish ways were condemned. Some of these were put to death, and the rest were at least deprived of their property. Domitilla was merely banished to Pandateria."⁸³

Based on these charges Domitian's own cousin Flavius Clemens was executed. Many were put to death and others were deprived of their property. The wife of Flavius Clemens was Flavia Domitilla who was Domitian's niece (his sister's daughter). She was banished by Domitian to Pandateria.⁸⁴

Eusebius, who explicitly supported the Domitianic date for John's banishment to Patmos, also mentioned Domitian's banishment of his niece Domitilla for her faith in Christ. Eusebius wrote, "and they even indicated the time accurately, relating that in the fifteenth year of Domitian, Flavia Domitilla, who was the neice of Flavius Clemens, one of the many consuls at Rome at that time, was banished with many others to the island of Pontia as testimony to Christ."⁸⁵ According to Eusebius, Flavia Domitilla was banished in the fifteenth year of Domitian which was the year A.D. 95, probably the same year John was banished to Patmos. Domitilla was released from exile under Nerva, and she returned to Rome to resume possession of her property.⁸⁶ It is best, in view of the archaeological evidence and testimony of Eusebius, to view Domitilla as a Christian.⁸⁷

⁸³ Ibid., 67.14.1-2.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.18.4. Eusebius' account varies from Dio Cassius on two points. First, Dio says that Domitilla was the wife of Flavius Clemens, while Eusebius says she was his niece. Second, Dio says that she was banished to Pandateria, an island in the Tyrrhenian Sea, while Eusebius says she was exiled to Pontia, another island in the Tyrrhenian Sea. This has led some to believe that there were two Domitillas (aunt and niece) who were banished as Christians. The minor discrepancies are probably due to errors in transcription or ambiguity of expressions. *Catholic Encyclopedia* [Internet www.newadvent.org/cathen/10751a.htm] 2003 (accessed July 7, 2005).

⁸⁶ Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.20.8.

⁸⁷ The archaeological evidence and other evidence that Domitilla was a Christian will be presented in the next section of the paper where the persecution of Christians under Domitian is discussed.

The banishment of Flavia Domitilla, mentioned by Dio Cassius and Eusebius, closely parallels the banishment of John in at least four ways that are depicted in this chart.

	Flavia Domitilla	The Apostle John
Time:	Banished in A.D. 95	Banished in A.D. 95
Reason:	For Christian testimony	For Christian testimony
Place:	An island (Pandeteria)	An island (Patmos)
Release:	Released by Nerva and resumed possession of property in Rome	Released by Nerva and returned to Ephesus

These striking parallels support the banishment of John to Patmos under Domitian.

Concerning the practice of banishment by Domitian, Brian Jones notes, “The sources refer to such action fairly regularly, though only rarely do they provide the names of the alleged victims. . . . Many more banishments, it is alleged, occurred later.”⁸⁸ Jones provides a litany of other ancient references to banishment by Domitian.

1. Pliny the Younger *Letters* 3.11.3; 4.9.1; 4:11.1; 7.19.6; 7.33.4.
2. Statius *Silvae* 3.3.160–2.
3. Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 7.8.⁸⁹

Schaff, an early date proponent, notes that Domitian’s propensity for banishment gives support to the Domitianic tradition for John’s exile.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Brian W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (New York: Routledge Publishing, 1992), 188–89.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 3d ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1979), 1:427.

Conclusion

Since Domitian was the second Roman emperor after Nero to persecute Christians, and since banishment to islands was one of his favorite modes of punishment, even for a Christian (Flavia Domitilla) in A.D. 95, John's exile to Patmos is much more likely under Domitian than Nero.

Oppression of Christians in Asia under Domitian

The internal testimony of Revelation indicates that there was at least some degree of persecution against Christians in the province of Asia at the time it was written. John had been banished to Patmos for his faith in Christ (Rev 1:10). The church at Smyrna was warned of imminent imprisonment, which indicates a more widespread and organized threat (Rev 2:10).⁹¹ The death penalty was a real possibility because the believers at Smyrna are urged to be faithful to death. Antipas of Pergamum had already been martyred (Rev 2:13). One could argue that the persecution at Smyrna was instigated by Jews (Rev 2:9), however, the banishment of John and the execution of Antipas had to have been carried out by the Romans since the right to banish and execute was reserved for Roman authorities. The issue, therefore, is what time period in the last half of the first century best fits this social-historical-political-religious setting or *Sitz im Leben* of Revelation involving persecution of Christians in the province of Asia?

Persecution under Nero

Gentry presents extensive evidence of the persecution of Christians under Nero.⁹² No credible scholar would disagree with Gentry's conclusion that Nero was a wicked, fierce persecutor of the church in the city of Rome. Nero's persecution of

⁹¹ Guthrie, *Introduction*, 950. As noted in the section on the condition of the seven churches, the church of Smyrna probably did not exist during the time of Paul's ministry. Yet, in Rev 2:9 the church had been suffering for some time. This is further support for the late date of Revelation.

⁹² Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 290–98.

Christians is reported by Tacitus and Suetonius.⁹³ Based on this evidence, Gentry concludes that the obvious occasion for the composition of Revelation must have been during his reign. However, the problem with this line of argument is that there is almost universal agreement that Nero's persecution never reached beyond the city of Rome and its environs.⁹⁴ Also, the persecution under Nero had nothing to do with the issue of worship.⁹⁵

The only evidence Gentry provides that the Neronian persecution extended beyond Rome is from Paulus Orosius.⁹⁶ However, he is a very late witness (early 5th century) that Guthrie says, "tends to make extravagant statements in other respects."⁹⁷ Gentry also makes an assumption from Pliny's correspondence with Trajan that imperial proscription of Christianity must have reached back to the days of Nero even though the letter of Pliny only specifically dates the persecution back to the reign of Domitian.⁹⁸ Gentry's basic argument is that the Neronian persecution in Rome was so severe that

⁹³ Tacitus *Annals* 15.38, 44; Suetonius *Nero* 16.2.

⁹⁴ Morris, *Revelation*, 37; Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Anchor Bible Reference Library, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 805; Ben Witherington III, *Revelation*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary, ed. Ben Witherington III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 4; Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2000), 50; Beale, *Revelation*, 12; Osborne, *Revelation*, 8.

⁹⁵ Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 16.

⁹⁶ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 298. Gentry criticizes the use of Christian sources to support the notion of a Domitianic persecution. He says, "The problem with the evidence for this persecution is that it proceeds almost solely from Christians sources—sources somewhat later than the events. For instance, the earliest specific evidence for a general (that is, empire wide) persecution of Christianity under Domitian is Melito of Sardis who flourished in the middle of the second century" (*ibid.*, 288). However, Gentry then turns around ten pages later on page 298 and relies solely on Paulus Orosius, a Christian source about 300 years after Melito of Sardis, to support the extension of Nero's persecution into the provinces. Fairness requires a balanced treatment and evaluation of sources.

⁹⁷ Guthrie, *Introduction*, 952.

⁹⁸ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 297–98.

provincial magistrates must have imitated what was transpiring in Rome.⁹⁹ However, he provides no evidence to support this contention.¹⁰⁰

The almost universal consensus among scholars is that the Neronic persecution of Christians did not extend beyond the city of Rome, and Revelation was not written to an audience in Rome but to churches in the eastern Roman province of Asia. What is relevant for dating Revelation is the socio-religious situation affecting the churches in Asia.¹⁰¹ Since, there is no convincing evidence of persecution in Asia during the reign of Nero, one must look elsewhere to find the setting for Revelation.

Persecution under Domitian

During the reign of Domitian, it is now generally agreed, that there was no empire-wide or systematic persecution of Christians.¹⁰² However, because no empire-wide

⁹⁹ Ibid., 297.

¹⁰⁰ Support for Neronic persecution of Christians in the Roman provinces is sometimes drawn from 1 Peter. Gentry does not present this evidence in any detail, but appears to make reference to it briefly in two footnotes (ibid., 294, n. 34, 296 n. 50). Several others draw extensive parallels between the backgrounds of 1 Peter and Revelation. Thomas B. Slater, "On the Social Setting of the Revelation to John," *NTS* 44 (1998): 243–44; Duane Warden, "Imperial Persecutions and the Dating of 1 Peter and Revelation," *JETS* 34 (1991): 203–12. First Peter was clearly written to believers in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1:1). If Peter was written during Nero's reign, and deals with governmental persecution, then this would be evidence of Christian persecution outside Rome during Nero's reign. The most likely date for 1 Peter is A.D. 62–64. Wayne Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 35–37. But the suffering of believers in 1 Peter appears to be social and religious not legal or governmental as described later by Pliny (1 Pet 2:13–17). The suffering of the believers in 1 Peter was not unique. It was the same general suffering that believers experienced everywhere (1 Pet 4:12; 5:9). It involved reproach and mistreatment by individuals (1 Pet 4:14). Guthrie, *Introduction*, 782–83. Moreover, there is no evidence in 1 Peter of martyrdom or torture as described by Pliny or as occurred with Antipas (Rev 2:13). D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 28. For these reasons the suffering of Christians in 1 Peter should not be equated with the persecution in Revelation or in Pliny's letter to Trajan.

¹⁰¹ Poythress, *Returning King*, 50; Witherington, *Revelation*, 4.

¹⁰² Osborne, *Revelation*, 8; Warden, "Imperial Persecutions," 206; Eugene M. Boring, *Revelation, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), 17. Gentry focuses on the lack of an empire-wide persecution under Domitian as evidence against this view; however, it is not necessary for the persecution to be empire-wide or systematic for believers in Asia to experience oppression and persecution from the local citizens and government (see Pliny *Letters* 10.96–97). Moreover, Gentry's own argument goes against him because the

persecution occurred under Domitian does not necessarily mean that believers in Asia and the other provinces were free from regional oppression and harassment.¹⁰³ The situation does not require an “all or nothing” approach. In a more nuanced understanding, a satisfactory case can be made for a setting of selective yet significant oppression and persecution of Christians as Christians in Asia Minor in the A.D. 90s. The difficulty, however, is that except for Revelation there is no extant documentation from Asia during the reign of Domitian that sheds light on the relationship between Christians and the Roman government.¹⁰⁴

The nearest such documentation is an interchange of official letters between Pliny, the governor of Bithynia (the Roman province just north of Asia) and the Emperor Trajan (A.D. 98–117). The letters were written about A.D. 112 and constitute the earliest pagan evidence of the Roman government’s attitude toward Christians.¹⁰⁵ Pliny’s letter to Trajan recounts the first pagan reference to a trial of Christians as Christians.¹⁰⁶ Brian Jones, who argues for a much more benign Domitian who was an able administrator, says categorically that, “No pagan writer accused Domitian of persecuting Christians.”¹⁰⁷ But then a few lines later he admits that Pliny supports the fact that trials of Christians were conducted during Domitian’s reign.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, the letter of Pliny is a key starting point of any serious discussion of persecution of Christians by Domitian.

persecution under Nero was far from empire-wide. It never even reached beyond the city of Rome and its environs.

¹⁰³ Slater, “Social Setting of Revelation,” 238.

¹⁰⁴ Boring, *Revelation*, 13.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. Brown dates Pliny’s letter to Trajan in A.D. 110 (*Introduction*, 808). Gentry accepts a ca. 113 date (*Before Jerusalem*, 297).

¹⁰⁶ David A. DeSilva, “The Social Setting of the Revelation to John: Conflicts Within, Fears Without,” *WTJ* 54 (1992): 279.

¹⁰⁷ Jones, *Domitian*, 114.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

Letter of Pliny the Younger to Trajan

Pliny the Younger carried on extensive correspondence with the emperor Trajan. But one particular letter from Pliny and the response from Trajan provide an ancient window into the Roman attitude toward Christians.¹⁰⁹ The letter displays an open disdain for Christians. In his letter, Pliny indicates that Christians have been previously tried. He gives no date for the commencement of this practice but his statement assumes that this was a common function in provincial administration.¹¹⁰ At no point in his communication does Pliny decry the practice. His purpose in writing is to receive assurance from the emperor that he has acted properly.¹¹¹ Therefore, he recounts to Trajan what he had done. When Christians were brought to him he would offer three opportunities, under penalty of death, to denounce their faith. If they persisted in their confession, they were executed.

The process Pliny describes is not empire-wide persecution, but it is also far from mere neighborhood resentment against Christians. The penalty for affirming faith in Christ was death. The letter makes it clear that there were official government responses to the Christian community in the eastern Roman provinces in A.D. 112 that had been occurring for twenty-five years. In one especially relevant section, Pliny says, “Others who were named by that informer at first confessed themselves Christians, and then denied it; true, they had been of that persuasion but they had quitted it, some three years, others many years, and a few as much as *twenty-five years ago*. They all worshipped your statue and images of the Gods, and cursed Christ”¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Pliny *Letters* 10.96–97.

¹¹⁰ Slater, “Social Setting of Revelation,” 248.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Pliny *Letters* 10.96 [italics added]. The reading “twenty-five years” in Pliny appears to be in doubt. Some translations read “twenty years.” See Hemer, *Seven Churches*, 10; Pliny, *The Letters of Pliny the Younger*, trans. Betty Radice (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1967), 294. The Loeb translation of Pliny the Younger contains no note of a textual variant that would explain the different

Twenty-five years before A.D. 112 would be A.D. 87, that is, in the time of Domitian, and only eight years before Revelation was written. Thus, Pliny's letter provides hard evidence that at least in Asia's neighboring northern province there was persecution in the later years of Domitian's reign that led some believers to renounce their confession of faith in Christ. It is no stretch to believe that Revelation, addressed to churches in the neighboring province of Asia, at about the same time, responded to a similar incident of regional oppression.¹¹³

Trajan responded by applauding Pliny's course of action. The following is Trajan's response to Pliny.

The method you have pursued, my dear Pliny, in sifting the cases of those denounced to you as Christians is extremely proper. It is not possible to lay down any general rule which can be applied as the fixed standard in all cases of this nature. No search should be made for these people; when they are denounced and found guilty they must be punished; with the restriction, however, that when the party denies himself to be a Christian, and shall give proof that he is not (that is, by adoring our Gods) he shall be pardoned on the ground of repentance, even though he may have formerly incurred suspicion. Informations without the accuser's name subscribed must not be admitted in evidence against anyone, as it is introducing a very dangerous precedent, and by no means agreeable to the spirit of the age.¹¹⁴

Trajan's answer makes it clear that that the imperial machinery was not involved in rounding up Christians for persecution. The initial charge and prosecution were initiated by local citizens, or what Pliny called "informers" or "accusers." But when the case was

English translations. However, the exact reading is not essential to the argument in this case. Either way the persecution Pliny mentions reached back into the later years of the reign of Domitian.

¹¹³ Slater, "Social Setting of Revelation," 250; Otto F. A. Meinardus, *St. John of Patmos and the Seven Churches of the Apocalypse* (Athens, Greece: Lycabettus Press, 1974), 2–3. Gentry alleges that the persecution Pliny mentions could have been occurring all the way back to the time of Nero (*Before Jerusalem*, 297). But the statement of Pliny specifically states that the persecution only reached back 25 years to A.D. 87. To fit into Gentry's time frame for the date of Revelation (A.D. 65) would require another 22 years. Gentry's contention is based on speculation not supported by the evidence.

¹¹⁴ Pliny *Letters* 10.97.

brought to the attention of the governor he was to activate the imperial judiciary to verify the charge and pronounce and carry out the sentence.

Gentry claims that, “The only non-Christian evidence for a Domitianic persecution of Christianity is based on an ambiguous statement from Dio’s *Roman History*, a history produced quite sometime after the events.”¹¹⁵ However, the correspondence of Pliny, that was written about 100 years before Dio’s *Roman History*, proves that persecution of Christians as Christians did exist under Domitian as early as A.D. 87. Therefore, Gentry’s claim is simply not historically accurate.

While the correspondence of Pliny is unambiguous evidence of the persecution of Christians as Christians in the eastern Roman provinces during the reign of Domitian, it does not stand alone. The correspondence between Pliny and Trajan, and its bearing on socio-religious conditions in Asia in the late-80s to early-90s is solidly corroborated by several other key witnesses that describe an environment during Domitian’s reign that placed Christians in a direct clash with the empire.

Dio Cassius

Dio Cassius (ca. 150–235) presents evidence of Domitian’s claim to deity that would have placed Christians directly at odds with the empire. Dio records that as Domitian’s reign progressed, he insisted upon being regarded as a god and took great pride in being called “master” and “god.”¹¹⁶ The titles were used not only in speech but in written documents as well.¹¹⁷ Dio notes that the empire was filled with images and statues

¹¹⁵ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 289.

¹¹⁶ Dio *History* 67.4.7.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

of Domitian constructed of silver and gold.¹¹⁸ Dio chronicles a particular incident that reveals Domitian's claim to deity.

Many others also perished as a result of this same charge of philosophizing, and all the philosophers that were left in Rome were banished once more. One Juventius Celsus, however, who had taken a leading part in conspiring with certain others against Domitian and had been accused of this, saved his life in a remarkable way. When he was on the point of being condemned, he begged that he might speak to the emperor in private, and thereupon did obeisance before him and after repeatedly calling him 'master' and 'god' (terms that were already being applied to him by others), he said: 'I have done not of this sort, but if I obtain a respite, I will pry into everything and will not only bring information against many persons for you but also secure their conviction.' He was released on this condition, but did not report any one; instead, by adding different excuses at different times, he lived until the death of Domitian.¹¹⁹

Dio also records a specific instance of persecution of Christians under Domitian. The incident transpired in A.D. 95 when Domitian ordered the execution of a Roman consul named Flavius Clemens and the banishment of his wife Flavia Domitilla, who was also Domitian's neice. Dio writes, "And the same year Domitian slew, along with many others, Flavius Clemens the consul, although he was cousin and had to wife Flavia Domitilla, who was also a relative of the emperor's. The charge brought against them both was that of atheism, a charge on which many others who drifted into Jewish ways were condemned. Some of these were put to death, and the rest were at least deprived of their property. Domitilla was merely banished to Pandateria."¹²⁰

Gentry rejects the testimony of Dio as evidence of a Domitianic persecution of Christians for two reasons. First, he maintains that the charge of of ἀθεότης (atheism) is too ambiguous to be equated with Christianity.¹²¹ However, it is clear that Eusebius

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 67.8.1.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 67.13.3–4.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 67.14.1–3.

¹²¹ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 289.

understood that the persecution of Flavius Clemens and Domitilla was due to their Christian faith. Eusebius wrote, “The teaching of our faith shone so brilliantly in the days described that even writers foreign to our belief did not hesitate to commit their narratives the persecutions and the martyrdoms in it, and they even indicated the time accurately, relating that in the fifteenth year of Domitian, Flavia Domitilla, who was the neice of Flavius Clemens, one of the consuls at Rome at that time, was banished with many others to the island of Pontia as testimony to Christ.”¹²²

Eusebius’ reference to “writers foreign to our belief” appears to be a reference to Dio’s account of the persecution of Flavius Clemens and Flavia Domitilla.¹²³

Moreover, the charge of atheism was sometimes leveled against Christians, and some would have considered them members of a Jewish sect.¹²⁴

Additionally, there is archaeological evidence that Flavius Clemens and especially Domitilla were Christians. The “Cemetery of Domitilla,” on the Via Ardeatina, is one of the oldest Christian cemeteries in Rome. There is inscriptional evidence that the cemetery was hollowed out under land which belonged to Flavia Domitilla and her family.¹²⁵ The cemetery also bears epitaphs commemorating those who bore the Flavian name.¹²⁶ Therefore, the evidence suggests that Flavius Clemens and Domitilla were persecuted by Domitian for their Christian faith.

¹²² Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.18.4. The “fifteenth year of Domitian” mentioned by Eusebius was A.D. 95.

¹²³ Dio *History* 67.14.1–2. Suetonius also mentions that Domitian put to death his own cousin Flavius Clemens (*Domitian* 15).

¹²⁴ Brown, *Introduction*, 807.

¹²⁵ F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1969), 414. Guthrie supports the view that Domitilla was a Christian (*Introduction*, 952).

¹²⁶ Bruce, *History*, 414.

Second, Gentry alleges there is uncertainty concerning what Dio actually wrote since two-thirds of his writing is preserved in an eleventh century epitome.¹²⁷

Albert Bell is a main source for Gentry's contention. Bell states,

But the second and overriding problem is that we do not know exactly what Dio wrote here. About two-thirds of his work survives only in an eleventh-century epitome by the Byzantine monk Xiphilinus and twelfth-century summary by Zonaras . . . The problem is that we cannot say positively who re-worked the material in what way. What is from Dio's sources, what from Dio, and what from his epitomators? Lacking answers to these questions, it seems risky at best to baptize and martyr Flavius Clemens on the word of an eleventh-century epitome of a third-century source.¹²⁸

However, it is not risky at all to receive the testimony of Dio on this matter since Dio's record of the persecution of Flavius Clemens and Flavia Domitilla is directly corroborated by Eusebius in the early fourth century. Eusebius, who wrote only about 100 years after Dio, must have been using a copy that was close in time to the original, and he considered Dio's account to be accurate. Therefore, the testimony of Dio, as corroborated by Eusebius, stands as solid evidence that Domitian made claims to deity and persecuted Christians.

Suetonius

The Roman historian Suetonius chronicles Domitian's claim to deity. He records that Domitian required people to address him as *Dominus et deus noster* ("our Lord and our God").

With no less less arrogance he began as follows in issuing a circular letter in the name of his procurators, 'Our Master and our God bids that this be done.' And so the custom arose of henceforth addressing him in no other way even in writing or in conversation. He suffered no statues be set up in his honour in the Capitol, except of gold and silver and of a fixed weight. He erected so many and such

¹²⁷ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 289.

¹²⁸ Albert A. Bell Jr., "The Date of John's Apocalypse. The Evidence of Some Roman Historians Reconsidered," *NTS* 25 (1978-79): 94-95.

huge vaulted passage-ways and arches in the various regions of the city, adorned with chariots and triumphal emblems, that on one of them someone wrote in Greek: 'It is enough.'¹²⁹

Suetonius also mentions Domitian's claim of deity when he welcomed his wife back after their divorce. "He also spoke of his action in taking Domitia back, after the divorce, as a 'recall to his divine couch'; and on the day of his public banquet delighted to hear the audience in the Coliseum shout: "Good Fortune attend our Lord and Mistress."¹³⁰

Suetonius also records that Domitian adopted the surname Germanicus and renamed September (the month of his birth) and October (the month of his accession) Germanicus and Domitianus, respectively.¹³¹ As Leonard Thompson notes, "Roman historians characterize especially the latter part of Domitian's reign as a reign of terror by an evil tyrant and megalomaniac who demanded imperial worship from his subjects."¹³²

Some scholars present a dissenting view concerning the testimony of Pliny, Dio Cassius, and Suetonius. While admitting that these historians depict Domitian as an evil despot, Leonard Thompson questions the unified negative portrait of Domitian by these standard ancient sources.¹³³ For the most part, he dismisses the testimony of Pliny, Dio Cassius, and Suetonius as intentionally biased in an attempt to curry favor with Trajan. To support this thesis, he appeals to five Roman historians who wrote during Domitian's reign: Quintilian, Frontius, Martial, Silicius Italicus, and Statius. He notes

¹²⁹ Suetonius *Domitian* 13.2–3.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.1

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 13.3.

¹³² Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 17. Gentry appeals to an argument from silence when he notes that Suetonius credited Nero with persecution of Christians but makes no mention of any such general persecution under Domitian (*Before Jerusalem*, 289). The reason for this omission is probably that there was no general persecution of Christians under Domitian as already noted. The persecution was more sporadic in nature, but it clearly did exist as evidenced by Dio, 1 Clement, and Pliny. Bell, "Date," 96.

¹³³ Thompson, *Revelation*, 96–109.

that their praise of Domitian's military exploits and successes is consistently positive.¹³⁴ Aune also views the testimony of Pliny the Younger, Suetonius, and Dio with suspicion. He references what he calls "the propagandist views" of the party line.¹³⁵ However, the difficulty with this position is that it is strikingly unbalanced in its analysis of the pertinent evidence. It completely fails to take into account the possibility that Domitian's contemporaries unduly praised him, seeking his favor, just as later writers excessively lauded Trajan.¹³⁶ A motive of bias for self-advancement works both ways.

Thompson also points to the testimony of Statius that Domitian refused the title *dominus*.¹³⁷ On its face, this testimony appears to flatly contradict the witness of Suetonius and Dio. However, as Beale observes, "Statius' testimony that Domitian forbade anyone addressing him as *dominus* cannot be a proof text for a universal fixed policy but only that there may have been occasions when such a form of address was not appropriate, especially in light of the contrary evidence elsewhere in Statius."¹³⁸ Beale presents a balanced appraisal of the evidence that seems to accurately reflect conditions under Domitian.

The truth likely lies somewhere in between the recent historical revisions concerning Domitian (Thompson and others) and more traditional assessments of Domitian, since all the ancient testimonies both for and against Domitian contain varying degrees of bias and truth. Probably some of the people oppressed by Domitian were Christians. . . . A balanced assessment is that such persecution

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 103–4.

¹³⁵ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, lxvii–viii.

¹³⁶ Beale, *Revelation*, 6. This and other weaknesses in Thompson's argument are also presented in K. A. Strand, review of *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire*, by L. L. Thompson, *AUSS* 29 (1991): 188–90.

¹³⁷ Statius *Silvae* 6.83–84.

¹³⁸ Beale, *Revelation*, 11; cf. Kenneth Scott, *The Imperial Cult under the Flavians*, *Ancient Religion and Mythology*, ed. W. R. Connor (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1936; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1975), 102–3. Scott presents inscriptional and numismatic evidence as well as extensive evidence from both Statius and Martial that Domitian was referred to as a god and worshiped (*ibid.*, 88–112).

highlights the danger of explicitly identifying with a religion that renounced any involvement with the imperial cult in a culture where sociopolitical requirements and religion overlapped.¹³⁹

Having examined the pertinent pagan testimony of persecution under Domitian, the applicable Christian witnesses will now be presented.

Melito of Sardis

The Christian tradition of persecution under Domitian first appears in the *Apology of Melito*, bishop of Sardis. The testimony of Melito of Sardis (A.D. 170–180) is preserved in the writings of Eusebius. Writing in the mid-second century to Emperor Marcus Aurelius, Melito says that Domitian, like his predecessor Nero, was persuaded to slander Christian teachers and to instigate the practice of falsely accusing Christians.¹⁴⁰ Melito's testimony is especially relevant since he wrote within seventy-five years of Domitian's reign.

Gentry discounts Melito's testimony as "at odds with Roman historians on the matter of the empire-wide Domitianic persecution of Christianity."¹⁴¹ But again it must be noted that there is no necessity of an empire-wide persecution for the setting of Revelation. All that is required is localized instances of persecution in Asia, and this fits the time of Domitian quite well as evidenced by Pliny. Furthermore, there is no credible scholar who maintains that the Neronic persecution was empire-wide. So, if as Gentry suggests, an empire-wide persecution is required for the time of Revelation's composition, the Neronic date is completely eliminated as a viable option. Gentry's argument here proves too much even for his own position.

¹³⁹ Beale, *Revelation*, 6.

¹⁴⁰ Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 4.26.9.

¹⁴¹ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem*, 288.

Hegesippus

In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius records a narrative from Hegesippus, who wrote in the mid-second century, that Domitian ordered the execution of all the descendants of David because he feared the coming of Christ.¹⁴² The grandchildren of Jude, the half-brother of Jesus, were still living and were brought before Domitian. After determining that they were humble men with no interest in politics, he released them. Eusebius records this statement of Hegesippus: “At this Domitian did not condemn at all, but despised them as simple folk, released them, and decreed an end to the persecution against the church.”¹⁴³ For the persecution of Christians to be stopped, it had to be occurring. Hegesippus provides testimony of at least some persecution of Christians under Domitian.

First Clement

First Clement is a letter written by Clement, bishop of Rome, to the church at Corinth which was suffering serious internal dissension. There is a general consensus that it was written in about A.D. 95 or 96.¹⁴⁴ Two passages in 1 Clement are often understood as referring to persecution of Christians that was occurring at that time in Rome during the final years of Domitian’s reign.¹⁴⁵ First Clement 1.1 says, “Because of *sudden and repeated misfortunes and reverses* which have happened to us, brothers, we acknowledge that we have been somewhat slow in giving attention to the matters in dispute among you” (italics added). Some argue that the statement in 1 Clement 1.1 without more

¹⁴² Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.19–20.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 3.20.5.

¹⁴⁴ *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, ed. and rev. Michael W. Holmes, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989), 25; cf. Beale, *Revelation*, 16. Raymond Brown dates 1 Clement between A.D. 96–120 (*Introduction*, 807); L. W. Barnard, “Clement of Rome and the Persecution of Domitian,” *NTS* 10 (1963–64): 255.

¹⁴⁵ *Apostolic Fathers*, 25.

explicit information is not conclusive concerning the existence of persecution.¹⁴⁶

However, in light of 1 Clement 4–7, which focuses on the persecution of God’s people, it is probable that 1 Clement 1:1, which serves as the introduction, is a reference to Christian persecution.¹⁴⁷

Furthermore, in 1 Clement 7.1, Clement compares the previous martyrdoms of Peter and Paul by the Romans (5.3–6) and the persecution of “a vast multitude of the elect, who have suffered many torments and tortures” (6.1) to the present circumstances of his audience.¹⁴⁸ In 7.1 he writes, “We write these things, dear friends, not only to admonish you, but also to remind ourselves. For we are in the same arena, and the same contest awaits us.” In light of the immediately preceding context in chapters 4–7, this statement indicates that the readers were suffering the same ill-treatment as their predecessors. Added to this testimony is the statement in 1 Clement 39.1, “Senseless and stupid and foolish and ignorant men jeer and mock at us.” And chapter 45 presents the past suffering and persecution of the righteous and their patient endurance, particularly of Daniel and his three companions, as “examples” (46.1) for the readers to emulate.¹⁴⁹ These statements in 1 Clement, when viewed in context, serve as solid evidence of persecution of Christians in Rome in the mid-A.D. 90s.

Tertullian

Tertullian spoke of persecution by Domitian in his *Apology* in about A.D. 197.

Consult your histories. There you will there find that Nero was the first to rage with the imperial sword against this school in the very hour of its rise in Rome.

¹⁴⁶ Bruce, *History*, 412. Bell, an early date advocate, agrees that 1 Clement 1.1 indicates a period of Christian persecution in Rome in ca. A.D. 95–96. Bell, “Date,” 96.

¹⁴⁷ Barnard, “Clement of Rome,” 255–58.

¹⁴⁸ Beale, *Revelation*, 13.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

But we glory—nothing less than glory—to have had such a man to inaugurate our condemnation. One who knew Nero can understand that, unless a thing were good—very good—it was not condemned by Nero. Domitian too, who was a good deal of a Nero in cruelty, attempted it; but, being in some degree human, he stopped what he had begun, and restored those he had banished. Such are ever our persecutors—men unjust, impious, foul—men who you yourselves are accustomed to condemn; and those whom you condemn you have become accustomed to restore.¹⁵⁰

The testimony of these Christian witnesses, when viewed in light of the evidence from Pliny and Dio should be accepted at the very minimum as evidence of some persecution of Christians during Domitian’s reign.¹⁵¹

Imperial Cult in Asia

One primary social-historical-religious factor that created an environment for persecution of Christians in Asia under Domitian was the promotion of the imperial cult or emperor worship. In the eastern Mediterranean, most peoples displayed their loyalty to Rome by worshiping not only the goddess Roma but also the emperor.¹⁵² Cult practices were a ritualized expression of allegiance to the emperor and a petition for favorable disposition and treatment of the emperor toward the province.¹⁵³ For this reason, Asian cities competed vigorously for the honor of hosting emperor temples. When this honor

¹⁵⁰ Tertullian *Apology* 5.4.

¹⁵¹ Shirley Jackson Case adds the testimony of Josephus to the witnesses who support a Domitianic persecution. Shirley Jackson Case, “Josephus’ Anticipation of a Domitianic Persecution,” *JBL* 44 (1925): 10–20. She notes that while Josephus’ narrative does not come down to the time of Domitian, his later works, written during Domitian’s reign, mirror the contemporary situation reflected in Revelation. Her thesis is that differences between *War* and *Antiquities* signal Josephus’ fear of “an impending outbreak of imperial hostility toward Judaism on distinctively religious grounds” (ibid., 14). She provides several specific instances in *Antiquities* where the tone and emphasis in the discussion of certain topics indicate that the Jews were much more uneasy during the reign of Domitian. She maintains that as the imperial cult became more menacing, Josephus was fully aware of the threat this posed to Judaism and that John of Patmos entertained this same anticipation of trouble for Christians who refused to worship an earthly ruler (ibid., 19–20). While certainly not conclusive, Case’s argument further corroborates the presence of some religious persecution by Domitian.

¹⁵² Keener, *Revelation*, 27.

¹⁵³ DeSilva, “Social Setting,” 277.

was bestowed it was known as *neokorate* which was derived from νεωκόρος, meaning “temple caretaker.”¹⁵⁴ The *neokorate* was a source of great civic pride. Ephesus and Smyrna were the principal Asian sites of the emperor cults, but all of the seven churches were strongly exposed to its influence.¹⁵⁵ Against this local backdrop, believers were easy targets of persecution for their failure to join the public cult and embrace this sign of loyalty to Rome.¹⁵⁶

During Domitian’s reign, two building projects in Ephesus point to significant developments in the imperial cult in Asia.¹⁵⁷ First, the Temple of the Sebastoi, dedicated to Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian, was constructed. The dedicatory inscriptions to Domitian were later changed to Vespasian after Domitian’s death.¹⁵⁸ The inscriptions refer to the building as “The Ephesian Temple (ναός) of the Sebastoi.”¹⁵⁹ The temple was also known as the “Temple of Domitian.”¹⁶⁰ There are thirteen inscriptions in Ephesus dating from A.D. 89–90 that were commissioned by various cities in Asia for the opening of the temple.¹⁶¹ The temple was a provincial temple, that is, it was not built as a municipal or individual project. The entire province was involved to some extent in the

¹⁵⁴ David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Ralph P. Martin, vol. 52B (Dallas: Word Books, 1998), 778; Slater, “Social Setting of Revelation,” 253.

¹⁵⁵ Keener, *Revelation*, 28.

¹⁵⁶ Brown, *Introduction*, 808.

¹⁵⁷ Steven Friesen, “Ephesus—Key to a Vision in Revelation,” *BAR* 19 (1993): 27. Leon Morris agrees that there was a significant advance of emperor worship in Domitian’s reign (*Revelation*, 36).

¹⁵⁸ S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 255.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 778.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*; Friesen, “Ephesus,” 32.

construction of the temple.¹⁶² Steven Friesen summarizes the importance of the Domitian temple to the imperial cult in Asia near the end of the first century.

Thus the temple of the Sebastoi in Ephesus provides us with information about socioreligious developments in the late first century in the province of Asia as a whole, not just in the city of Ephesus. In short, in the 80s wealthy families from various cities and towns in Asia made a cooperative effort to honor the Flavian imperial family with a temple and cult dedicated to them. They were able to gain approval from Rome for this provincial cult even though the province of Asia already had two provincial cults—one in Pergamum for Augustus and for Rome, founded in 29 B.C.E.; and, one in Smyrna for Tiberius, Livia and the Senate, founded in 26 C.E. This was a remarkable achievement. No other province is known to have had more than one provincial cult of the emperors at this time, and several provinces appear to have had none. Clearly, Asia was on the cutting edge of imperial cult activity.¹⁶³

Further evidence of the strength of the emperor cult and the promotion of Domitian as a god is found in an acrolithic statue of Domitian in the Sebastoi or Domitian Temple.¹⁶⁴ Only the head and forearm of the statue have been recovered. The colossal statue is four times life-size (7–8 meters) with the forearm extending to the height of a man (1.8 meters).¹⁶⁵ The colossal head and arm is one of “the grandest ensembles in the East.”¹⁶⁶ At that time, honorific portraits were often slightly over life-size.¹⁶⁷ But it was

¹⁶² Friesen, “Ephesus,” 36.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁶⁴ The remains of the statue are in the Ephesus Museum in Selcuk, Turkey. The author has seen this impressive sight on three separate occasions. Friesen states that while the statue was originally believed to be a likeness of Domitian, it is now identified with his brother and predecessor, Titus (*Imperial Cults*, 50). However, Yamauchi and Price both maintain that the statue represents Domitian. Edwin W. Yamauchi, *The Archaeology of New Testament Cities in Western Asia Minor* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 84–86; Price, *Rituals and Power*, 187, 255. Price notes that the inscriptional evidence excludes identifying the statue as an image of Titus and only allows for Vespasian or Domitian (*ibid.*, 255). Further support for identifying this statue with Domitian is drawn from the fact that the temple was dedicated during Domitian’s reign and was so closely associated with him. Scott also supports the identification of the statue with Domitian (*Imperial Cult*, 97).

¹⁶⁵ Yamauchi, *Archaeology*, 85.

¹⁶⁶ C. C. Vermeule, *Roman Imperial Art in Greece and Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 232.

¹⁶⁷ Price, *Rituals and Power*, 188.

deemed inappropriate for a statue to be incongruous with the actual size of the honoree.¹⁶⁸ This applied even to victors in the Olympic games. Officials at the games ensured that statues of victors were no larger than life-size.¹⁶⁹ However, the cult statues depicting emperors were on a larger-than-life scale like the images of the gods.¹⁷⁰ This had a powerful impact on the general populace.¹⁷¹ The colossal statue of Domitian in Ephesus strengthened his claim to deity.

Additionally, near the same time that the province built the temple of the Sebastoi for Domitian's family and the image of Domitian, the city of Ephesus constructed a municipal bath-gymnasium complex in the harbor area in honor of Domitian. This was the largest building project of the Domitianic period.¹⁷² The Ephesians established their own "Olympic" festival in honor of Domitian, and the bath-gymnasium project was built to honor Domitian as Zeus Olympios.¹⁷³ Evidence suggests that the Ephesian municipal Olympic games were initiated in about A.D. 90.¹⁷⁴ There is also numismatic evidence from Domitian's reign of a municipal imperial cult temple in Laodicea to Domitian and Domitia from the Domitianic period and an octastyle temple in Smyrna.¹⁷⁵

The primary impetus for this expansion of the imperial cult in Asia arose not so much from Rome as from the province itself. The social elites perceived their

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 187–88.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Friesen, "Ephesus," 34.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 36.

¹⁷⁴ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 52.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 61–62; cf. Yamauchi, *Archaeology*, 57.

demonstrations of increased loyalty to Rome and the emperor as opportunities to ingratiate themselves with Rome and thus receive financial favors. The end result was a solidification of their power base.¹⁷⁶ The consequence of this action was that the imperial cult became a greater part of the “warp and woof of life” and the overall structure of Asian society than it had been before.¹⁷⁷

The majority of scholars agree that Domitian’s claims to deity, the enthusiastic promotion of emperor worship in Asia, and the new temple erected in Ephesus during Domitian’s reign would have made persecution in Asia during his reign highly probable, if not certain.¹⁷⁸ S. R. F. Price concludes, “It is in principle quite likely that the establishment of the cult of Domitian at Ephesus, which involved the participation of the whole province, as attested by the series of dedications, by numerous cities, led to unusually great pressure on the Christians for conformity.”¹⁷⁹ Beale concludes that the evidence of pressure from the imperial cult in Asia Minor supports the Domitianic date of Revelation but is lacking for the pre-70 A.D. date.¹⁸⁰

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza provides an excellent summary of this socio-religious, or what she terms the “rhetorical situation,” of Revelation.

Under the Flavians, especially Domitian, the imperial cult was strongly promoted in the Roman provinces. Domitian demanded that the populace acclaim him as ‘Lord and God’ and participate in his worship. The majority of the cities to which the prophetic messages of Rev. are addressed were dedicated to the promotion of

¹⁷⁶ Beale, *Revelation*, 15.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation—Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 192–99; Guthrie, *Introduction*, 951–52; Slater, “Social Setting of Revelation,” 253–54. Witherington, *Revelation*, 8; Morris, *Revelation*, 36–37; Yamauchi, *Archaeology*, 84–85. Hemer concludes that, “contemporary secular evidence accords with the Christian tradition of persecution under Domitian” (*Seven Churches*, 11).

¹⁷⁹ Price, *Rituals and Power*, 198.

¹⁸⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 14.

the emperor cult. . . . In such an environment Christians were bound to experience increasing conflicts with the imperial cult, especially since they claimed Jesus Christ and not the Roman emperor as 'their Lord and God.' Rev. knows of harassment and persecutions of individual Christians in various localities. It anticipates an increase of persecutions and suffering for the near future, not least because of the increasing totalitarianism of the reign of Domitian.¹⁸¹

Arguments against a Domitianic Persecution

In spite of the foregoing evidence, several scholars have recently questioned the extent and even the existence of a Domitianic persecution of Christians as well as any relationship between the emperor cult and persecution. Adela Yarbro Collins views the imperial cult during the reign of Domitian as one of several disturbances in an incipient crisis and dismisses the notion that Domitian persecuted Christians as Christians.¹⁸² She contends that the banishment of John by Domitian was nothing more than an example of the normal, sporadic repression of Christians in the first two centuries.¹⁸³

Leonard Thompson and Friesen, who also both hold to the late date of Revelation, maintain that Roman imperial cult practice during the Domitianic period fits within the norm for provincial cults.¹⁸⁴ Thompson also believes that the Pliny correspondence confirms that the imperial cult was not a central issue.¹⁸⁵ However, the silence of the Pliny correspondence concerning the imperial cult does not necessarily indicate that it was never a factor. Certainly, there must have been many circumstances that resulted in Christians being brought before Pliny. There had to be some event that precipitated an informer's accusation against a Christian. Failure to embrace and honor

¹⁸¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 193–94.

¹⁸² Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 73. In spite of her rejection of the existence of persecution of Christians as Christians under Domitian, Collins holds to the late date of Revelation (*ibid.*, 76).

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 69–73.

¹⁸⁴ Thompson, *Revelation*, 47–49.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 163–64.

the imperial cult could certainly have been among the reasons. Finally, it is important to note that Thompson does not question the presence of the imperial cult under Domitian or its significant impact on social life in Asia. However, he dismisses the notion that the emperor cult under Domitian or his demands for divine honor were any greater than under his predecessors or successors.¹⁸⁶ Jones denies altogether that Domitian persecuted Christians.¹⁸⁷

Bell admits that some Christians were martyred during Domitian's reign.¹⁸⁸ However, he attributes this to the fact that some Christians in the upper class of Roman society must have been "caught up in the dragnet" of Domitian's anti-senatorial inquisition.¹⁸⁹ He further contends that while the total loss may have been insignificant to Rome, the loss of even a few prominent members would have dealt a staggering blow to the small fellowship of believers.¹⁹⁰ However, Bell totally dismisses the persecution of Christians *qua* Christians during Domitian's reign.¹⁹¹

It is true that Flavius Clemens and Flavia Domitilla were from the Roman upper class, but Bell's thesis falls flat in light of Eusebius' explicit statement that Domitilla was exiled for her faith in Christ. Another dilemma for Bell's position is that Pliny never alludes to the social status of the believers who were brought before him. Moreover, Pliny specifically states that those brought before him, and those brought before the Roman tribunal all the way back to A.D. 87, were executed specifically for

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 107.

¹⁸⁷ Jones, *Domitian*, 116–17.

¹⁸⁸ Bell, "Date," 96.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

failure to renounce Christianity. This is a patent, clear-cut case of persecution of Christians *qua* Christians in Bithynia during the reign of Domitian.

It also seems highly unlikely, as some allege, that all the witnesses who record instances of persecution of Christians under Domitian were mistaken, biased, or simply repeating the testimony of their predecessors. Although some may have exaggerated the systematic nature or severity of the persecution, the extensive evidence from both pagan and Christian sources cannot be entirely discounted.¹⁹² The witnesses are from varied backgrounds (pagan and Christian), geographical regions, and time periods.

In light of the totality of the evidence, it seems safe to say that the enthusiastic promotion of the imperial cult of Domitian had social consequences for Christians in Asia. From Pliny's letter to Trajan it is clear that some Christians in Bithynia faced persecution in the early A.D. 90s. The situation must have been just as serious for believers in Asia, or probably even worse, since Asia was more enthusiastic in its support of the imperial cult. Christians who refused to participate in the imperial cult and denied its validity would have constituted a serious affront to their Asian pagan neighbors.¹⁹³ Many local adherents to the imperial cult viewed Christians as social malcontents who were unpatriotic and even dangerous.¹⁹⁴ This exposed them to the kind of persecution Pliny described in his letter to Trajan. From Pliny, it is clear that the state did not "hunt down" Christians, but when confronted with them, the state had no problem condemning them to death if they failed to renounce their faith.¹⁹⁵ Brown agrees with this appraisal of the available evidence:

¹⁹² Beale, *Revelation*, 13–14.

¹⁹³ Slater, "Social Setting of Revelation," 254.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 250.

¹⁹⁵ Thompson, *Revelation*, 129–32.

The evidence does not warrant our attributing to Domitian a persecution in Rome of a ferocity nearly approaching Nero's. It does warrant the likelihood that in his distrust of possibly dangerous deviations Domitian showed hostility to Gentiles who abandoned the state religion for the Oriental cults that advocated the exclusive worship of one aniconic God (Judaism and probably Christianity). During his reign some 'cultists' were executed, especially when their religious stance might be connected to political opposition. Under Nero antichristian activities do not seem to have extended outside Rome; but under Domitian investigations were more widespread, e.g., to Asia Minor and Palestine. Whether or not by Domitian's personal orders, local authorities may have undertaken their own investigations, especially in areas where Christians annoyed their Pagan neighbors who judged them antisocial and irreligious. The Christians' refusal to join in the public cult and perhaps to honor the divinized Domitian, when reported by those hostile to them, would have resulted in tribunals and sentences and martyrdom.¹⁹⁶

Although the evidence of persecution of Christians in Asia during the reign of Domitian is not conclusive, the hard evidence that is available points to the final years of his reign as the time when Christians would most likely have collided with the claims of the imperial cult in Asia.¹⁹⁷ What is known about the socio-religious climate in Asia, and neighboring Bithynia, during the final years of the reign of Domitian fits this *Sitz im Leben* of Revelation much better than the alternative date under Nero.

Conclusion

Having examined the pertinent evidence concerning persecution of Christians under Nero and Domitian in the first century, six key conclusions can be reached.

1. Nero persecuted the church in Rome, but there is no credible evidence that it extended into the provinces.
2. While there was no systematic, empire-wide persecution of Christians under Domitian, persecution did exist during his reign as evidenced by Pliny, Dio Cassius, Clement of Rome, Melito of Sardis, Hegesippus, Eusebius, and Tertullian.

¹⁹⁶ Brown, *Introduction*, 808.

¹⁹⁷ Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 710.

3. The persecution (banishment) of Flavia Domitilla in A.D. 95 as recorded by Dio and Eusebius and the persecution of Christians reflected in 1 Clement (A.D. 95–96) occurred at the same time during Domitian’s reign, thereby, providing independent corroboration of one another.
4. In the province of Bithynia, just north of Asia, there was persecution of Christians in A.D. 87 that was severe enough to cause many to renounce their faith. The persecution was not instigated by Roman authorities, but once the charge was leveled by a private citizen (informer), the government would assume control of the prosecution, and the penalty for failure to recant was death.
5. The centrality, expansion, and enthusiastic support of the imperial cult of Domitian in Asia created a ripe environment for persecution, harassment, and ostracism of believers in the province of Asia. Thus, it is logical to conclude that the atmosphere for persecution would have been greater in Asia than Bithynia where there was persecution of Christians as early as A.D. 87.
6. Therefore, one can reasonably conclude that Christians suffered selective yet significant persecution as Christians in Asia in the early-mid A.D. 90s.

Having considered the three main internal arguments for the late date of Revelation, two less detailed, minor internal arguments for the Domitianic date of Revelation will now be presented.¹⁹⁸ While these arguments are not decisive, they do lend additional support to the late-date position.

The New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:9–22:5

Revelation 21:9–22:5 focuses on the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. The fact that John mentions a New Jerusalem points to the fact that the Old Jerusalem had already been destroyed.¹⁹⁹ Fourth Ezra 9:28–10:28, which was written

¹⁹⁸ One other minor argument for the late date is the reference to the “Lord’s day” in Rev 1:10. This is probably a reference to the first day of the week or Sunday. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 91; cf. *Didache* 14.1; Ignatius *To the Magnesians* 9.1. It is possible that this designation for Sunday was not used until after A.D. 70, thus, supporting the late date of Revelation. However, this argument is not helpful in determining the date of Revelation since it is simply not known how early the first day of the week was called the “Lord’s day.” Guthrie, *Introduction*, 957, n. 1.

¹⁹⁹Michaels, *Revelation*, 45.

about A.D. 100, contains a similar vision of the heavenly, new Jerusalem, but only after a description of the destruction of the old Jerusalem and the temple.²⁰⁰ While Revelation does not mention the destruction of the Old Jerusalem, this parallel with 4 Ezra points to the late date, after Jerusalem had been destroyed.

“Oil and Wine” in Revelation 6:6

Another supplementary argument for the Domitianic date is suggested by Rev 6:5–6, which appears to be an allusion to an edict of Domitian. Revelation 6:5–6 says, “And when he broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, ‘Come.’ And I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard as it were a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, ‘A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.’”

In A.D. 92, in the face of a grain shortage, Domitian handed down a vine edict. In this edict he restricted provincial viticulture by ordering half of the vineyards of Asia Minor destroyed and no new ones planted to make room for growing more grain. Suetonius records the circumstances of the edict. “Once upon the occasion of a plentiful wine crop, attended with a scarcity of grain, thinking that the fields were neglected through too much attention to the vineyards, he made an edict forbidding anyone to plant more vines in Italy and ordering that the vineyards in the provinces be cut down, or but half of them at most be left standing; but he did not persist in carrying out the measure.”²⁰¹

²⁰⁰James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 544–47.

²⁰¹ Suetonius *Domitian* 7.2.

The edict resulted in riots in Asia Minor because wine was a major source of income in that area. In response, Domitian revoked his earlier edict and ordered that anyone who allowed his vineyard to go out of production would be prosecuted.

This event would have been a familiar, vivid allusion for John's readers of a case when grain was in shortage, but when it was illegal to harm the supply of oil and wine. It would have had particular applicability for the residents of Philadelphia who were more dependent on viticulture than any city in Asia and whose volcanic soil was ideally suited for vines but not for corn.²⁰² Since Rev 6:6 is probably an intentional allusion to this event, Revelation had to be written after A.D. 92, thus, supporting the late date of Revelation.²⁰³

Summary and Conclusion

The internal clues in Revelation, derived from the setting and background of the book, when viewed both individually and collectively, point solidly to the A.D. 90s as the time of its composition. Thus, the internal evidence of Revelation is in harmony with the strong external evidence for the late date.

²⁰² Hemer provides an excellent discussion of the Domitianic vine edict in A.D. 92 and its relevance to the local setting of the church of Philadelphia (*Seven Churches*, 4, 158–59).

²⁰³ Guthrie, *Introduction*, 957, n. 1; Hemer, *Seven Churches*, 4, 158–59; Arthur S. Peake, *The Revelation of John* (London: Holborn Publishing House, 1919), 90–92.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

While the date of Revelation has always been an interesting issue in the field of New Testament Introduction, it has taken on greater significance in the last twenty years as a result of the rise of preterism. The debate has moved from a merely academic question to one where the interpretation and application of Revelation's message are significantly affected. In an attempt to defend the traditional Domitianic date of Revelation, the relevant external and internal evidence has been presented, critiqued, and defended. The external evidence was considered first.

A Summary of the External Witnesses

The external evidence demonstrates that the first unambiguous witnesses to the Neronian date of Revelation are the titles in two Syriac versions of Revelation from the sixth and seventh centuries. Others after this supported the Neronian date such as Arethas and Theophylact. But when this meager, late testimony is weighed against the early, consistent, and weighty testimony for the late date, it is unconvincing.

The testimony of Hegesippus and Irenaeus from the second century, support the Domitianic date. Irenaeus' statement in support of the Domitianic date is credible and clear. He was from Smyrna, the very area where Revelation first circulated. He was connected to the Apostle John through his relationship with Polycarp. Thus, he was in an ideal position to know the date of Revelation. Furthermore, his specificity concerning the date of Revelation ("at the end of the reign of Domitian") engenders confidence in his statement.

Gentry's attempts to discredit the testimony of Irenaeus are unsuccessful. His unimpeached testimony stands. The other late date witnesses after Irenaeus represent some of the most respected scholars in the early church: Victorinus, Primasius, Eusebius, Jerome, Sulpicius Severus, Paulus Orosius, Andreas of Caesarea, Isidore of Seville, and Venerable Bede. Clement of Alexandria and Origen can probably be added to this list, but since they never name Domitian specifically they are omitted.

The early date of Revelation has only been the majority view in church history for a brief period of about fifty years from 1850–1900 when the pendulum swung back to the prevailing Domitianic view. The external evidence, even according to most early-date advocates, supports the late date.

A Summary of the Internal Evidence for the Early Date

To establish the validity of the late date it is necessary to effectively refute the internal evidence for the early date. The internal evidence for the Neronian date of Revelation is considered by most early-date supporters to be their greatest strength. However, when considered one piece at a time their evidence is unimpressive. The thematic focus of Rev 1:7 is not a reference to the localized “cloud” coming of Christ in A.D. 70 but refers to the Second coming of Christ at the end of the age when “every eye” will see Him.

The location and concentration of the timing statements in Revelation in chapters 1 and 22 require that all the events in Revelation must be included within whatever time frame one assigns them. Therefore, they cannot mean that the events had to occur within a few years of the time when Revelation was written because, even as partial preterists agree, the Second Coming of Christ and the Great White Throne judgment are still future. The timing terms in Revelation, when viewed from the

prophetic perspective, point to the imminency of the events and call the reader to alertness and readiness.

The alleged historical and time-frame correspondences between the Neronic era (Jewish War) and Revelation are weak. During the Jewish War one-fourth of the Jewish people did not die as result of the sword, famine, plagues, and the wild beasts of the earth as required by Rev 6:7–8. The only resemblance between the hailstones in Rev 16:21 and the Roman ballista stones is their weight and color. The hailstones in Revelation come from heaven to earth, while the Roman catapults projected their missiles from earth to earth. Gentry adjusts the beginning of the First Jewish Revolt from the accepted date in A.D. 66 to the formal imperial engagement of the war in A.D. 67 in an attempt to meet the forty-two month requirement in Rev 11:1–2. But even with this adjustment, the time is only “close” or “almost” forty-two months.

Gentry’s view that the forty-two months in Rev 13:5–7 refers to the Neronic persecution of Christians from November, A.D. 64–June 9, A.D. 68 suffers from the same chronological imprecision. Also, if one accepts Gentry’s view that Revelation was written in A.D. 65–66, this means that as much as one-third of this forty-two month period had already passed when John wrote. Therefore, the persecution of Christians was not “soon;” it was already in progress. This exposes another acute problem for Gentry’s view of the timing texts. From these timing statements, Gentry maintains that the events in Revelation were chronologically near, yet some of the events were already in progress (the Neronic persecution) while others were at least over 1,900 years in the future (the Second Coming and Great White Throne Judgment).

The fact that there is no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem in Revelation is understandable when one recognizes that John was seeing a vision of the future, not recording events from the past. John was not at liberty to write what he wanted. He was

commanded to write what he saw and heard. The past destruction of Jerusalem was not part of the future revelation he received.

Two main weaknesses with Gentry's method have been noted several times. First, he frequently shifts back and forth between figurative and literal interpretation in the same immediate context without any textual signal to warrant the shift. Two examples of this fluid hermeneutic are Rev 11:1–2 and 16:18–21. Second, while admitting that Daniel is the Old Testament counterpart to Revelation, Gentry consistently fails to properly take into account the Old Testament background of specific texts in Revelation. This is especially apparent in Rev 11:1–2 and 17:9–11. This leads to interpretations that are not solidly grounded in the Old Testament. When interpreted in light of Ezek 40–48, Rev 11:1–2 refers to a literal, eschatological temple, not the Herodian temple. With Dan 7 as the background, the seven kings in Rev 17:9–11 are primarily seven successive kingdoms from the Assyrian empire to the final, Gentile world kingdom of Antichrist.

A Summary of the Internal Evidence for the Late Date

Three central internal clues point to the Domitianic date. First, the condition of the seven churches gives evidence of the passage of a considerable amount of time after the A.D. 60s. Second, Domitian's propensity for banishment, as witnessed by numerous ancient witnesses, fits with Rev 1:9 and the exile of John to Patmos. Third, Revelation gives evidence of some degree of persecution of Christians. While the persecution of Nero never reached beyond the confines of Rome, the later years of the reign of Domitian were a time when persecution by local officials in Asia was likely. This is supported by the Letter of Pliny to Trajan, Dio Cassius, and several early Christian witnesses.

Two less weighty but nevertheless worthy arguments also support the late date. First, the imagery in Rev 6:6 mirrors an edict from Domitian in A.D. 92 that

profoundly affected viticulture in Asia, especially in the city of Philadelphia. Second, the mention of the “New Jerusalem” in Rev 21–22 seems to presuppose the destruction of the “Old Jerusalem” that occurred in A.D. 70. Taken as a whole the internal evidence for the late date outweighs the evidence for the early date.

The Impact on Preterism

Since this dissertation has interacted heavily with the works of Kenneth Gentry, a final word about preterism is in order. As stated in the introduction, the entire preterist system is built on the early date of Revelation. An examination of the evidence, however, supports the late date at least by a preponderance of the evidence and probably beyond a reasonable doubt. While contemporary preterism has other weaknesses, the Achilles’ heel of this view is the date of Revelation. The external evidence for the late date of Revelation is strong and convincing, if not overwhelming. The internal evidence for the late date is also sound. It seems unwise to build one’s entire eschatological framework on the foundation of the early date of Revelation, which at best is strongly disputed. Certainly, the date of Revelation can continue to be debated, but preterists are urged to re-think their position and adopt an approach to eschatology in general and Revelation in particular that is not totally dependent upon the sandy foundation of a Neronian date for Revelation.

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