

# The Identification of Babylon the Harlot in the Book Of Revelation

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by  
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Editor's note: The following seven documents (title-table of contents, five chapters, and bibliography) constitute Ragan Ewing's Master's Thesis done at Dallas Theological Seminary in 2002. He argues in "The Identification of Babylon the Harlot in the Book of Revelation" that the harlot is Jerusalem. A part of this argument is also that Revelation was written pre-70. Although Ragan did not convince either of his readers (Dr. Harold W. Hoehner and Daniel B. Wallace), he did make out, I believe, as good a case as can be made for the view espoused. And it is well written. Although I am not yet convinced of his interpretation, I may well be wrong. And he has certainly gotten me to rethink this issue.

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March 27, 2003

## CHAPTER 3:

# DATING THE APOCALYPSE

<http://www.bible.org/docs/soapbox/st-essay/ragan/toc.htm> for the rest of this thesis.

### *The Significance of the Date*

One of the biggest difficulties for our interpretation of the material in Revelation 17–18 has always been the date of the writing of the book. While other aspects of the Jerusalem view will be considered below, a more thorough investigation must be made regarding the date issue before any defense of this interpretation is set forth, primarily because many of the scholars who reject preteristic interpretation of the book do so quite often a priori on the basis of the currently dominant view that the Apocalypse was written in the 90s, which of course quickly rules out the stance that much of the book is a prediction of Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70.<sup>1</sup> This objection, therefore, must be overcome at the outset if any serious consideration to preteristic interpretation is to be given.

Just how pivotal is an earlier date to the Jerusalem = Babylon argument? For some, it is not necessarily decisive. Writers such as Provan and Corsini believe that Jerusalem is in view despite their insistence on a late date.<sup>2</sup> These positions could be held simultaneously if one considered the imagery of the harlot to merely be reminiscent of A.D. 70's tragedy or if it is prophecy ex eventu. These scenarios allow some leeway for the Jerusalem view even in the case of a late date, and it may therefore be said that a decision on the time of writing need not necessarily end the discussion. However, the first option may not fit well with the form of the book, which seems to clearly represent itself as predictive prophecy (cf. 1:1, 1:3, 1:19, 4:1, et al.), and the second is short on evidence when we consider the parallels in other Jewish apocalypses that employ the ex eventu technique. As Collins notes, "[U]sually the entire work is clearly set in an earlier time and the seer is a venerable figure of the distant past. Revelation does not have these characteristics."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the late date is not a deathblow, but it must certainly be admitted that it significantly lessens the likelihood of our interpretation. On the other hand, we need not necessarily prove a pre-70 date, per se, in order to take seriously the Jerusalem view either. Our goal for this chapter will rather be to simply make clear that the door is still quite open, and that the preterist view of the Apocalypse is still in play.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, it is my personal estimation that the internal evidence (especially the issues raised in this thesis) may actually help us to evaluate the date itself, rather than vice versa, as has been the common order of method.

One related issue is worth noting at this point. Some difficulty arises in this question from the fact that the Book of Revelation differs so greatly in style from the Gospel of John. It seems unlikely that if the two were both written by John the Apostle they could have been written in the same decade. This obviously creates a conundrum for anyone who places both either in the 60s or the 90s. However, when we consider the fact that the authorship of both books as well as the date of both books remain unresolved questions for many scholars, there are enough variables to allow for several plausible scenarios. For instance: some recent scholars, such as

Wallace, have gone against the flow of the consensus and argued strongly for a pre-70 date for John.<sup>5</sup> However, the Gospel of John itself never claims to have been written by the Apostle, and it is common knowledge that many commentators prefer to ascribe it to someone else.<sup>6</sup> Thus, if we were to accept the early date of the Gospel, it could still be that John wrote Revelation pre-70 and another author penned the Gospel. On the other hand, skepticism of the identity of the "John" who wrote Revelation emerged as early as Eusebius<sup>7</sup> and is certainly a common view to this day. Therefore it could just as easily be claimed that John wrote the Gospel pre-70 just as some other unknown author was crafting the Apocalypse. Regardless, the overwhelming majority of scholars take a late date of John anyway, and this, if correct, would only fit better with an early date of Revelation. In other words, the authorship question is not crucial here.

What is crucial is the question of why the date under the Roman emperor Domitian has become so widely accepted. It seems in many circles to be an issue one dares not question. And yet, in recent years, a number of highly reputable scholars are reconsidering the party line and have come out in favor of the pre-70 position. Major

New Testament scholars such as C. F. D. Moule<sup>8</sup>, Joseph Fitzmyer<sup>9</sup>, F. F. Bruce<sup>10</sup>, E. Earle Ellis<sup>11</sup>, and J. A. T. Robinson<sup>12</sup> have all recently supported the early date position.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, this is far from novel. In reality, these writers are merely returning to what was once the foregone conclusion of nearly the entire New Testament studies world. As Wilson notes, "Throughout the nineteenth century the majority of New Testament scholars favored a pre-70 dating of the Book of Revelation."<sup>14</sup> Robinson echoes, "It is indeed a little known fact that this [a pre-70 date] was what Hort calls 'the general tendency of criticism' for most of the nineteenth century..."<sup>15</sup> Indeed Lightfoot, Westcott, Hort, and a host of others held strongly to an early dating of the book,<sup>16</sup> so much so that one author in Lightfoot's day agreed this date to be "universally accepted by all competent critics."<sup>17</sup>

How then did the pendulum swing? Before the turn of the century, the date seemed unshakable, and by the middle of the twentieth, the same had become true for the opposing position! What sparked this overturn? Why are so few willing to come out in favor of an earlier date today?

To answer these questions and get a grasp on the issues regarding the time of the Apocalypse's writing, we will consider the areas of evidence that seem to be most compelling to modern scholars. These fall largely into three major arenas discussed below: the historical testimony of writers in the church, the nature of the imperial reign of Domitian Caesar, and certain important internal indications of date.

### *The Testimony of the Church*

Overwhelmingly, the key reason why most scholars reject an early date for the book is a supposed unanimity among the

church fathers regarding a Domitianic date. Statements abound in the literature such as, “[The external evidence] almost unanimously assigns [Revelation] to the last years of Domitian,”<sup>18</sup> and, “[E]arly Christian tradition is almost unanimous in assigning the Apocalypse to the last years of Domitian,”<sup>19</sup> and, “[U]ndoubtedly a strong argument in favor of a Domitianic date is the fact that the earliest and the weightiest external witnesses attest it.”<sup>20</sup> However, in current studies this claim is coming under regular fire, and perhaps for good reason. When we consider the actual evidence in the fathers, the picture is not as clear as some have led us to believe, as we shall see below.<sup>21</sup>

## *The Evidence of Irenaeus*

Irenaeus (A.D. 103–202) was certainly one of the most distinguished figures in the opening centuries of Christianity. Thus, his testimony has been highly regarded in a number of matters, not the least of which is the date of the Apocalypse. The understanding that Irenaeus dates the book to the end of the first century has in and of itself been enough evidence for many scholars to hold firmly to a late date. J. P. M. Sweet, for instance, says, “The earlier date may be right, but the internal evidence is not sufficient to outweigh the firm tradition stemming from Irenaeus.”<sup>22</sup>

The quotation from Irenaeus that has become so important in the debate is generally translated as follows: “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. For that was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian’s reign.”<sup>23</sup>

This seems straightforward enough, but there are several problems here. First of all, there is a translational ambiguity. While our only extant complete text of the work containing this passage is in Latin, Eusebius preserves Irenaeus’ Greek.<sup>24</sup> In the Latin, the ambiguity is removed, the scribe having made a decision on the matter, but the Greek deserves careful consideration: *eij deÉ e[dei ajnafandoÉn ejn tw/ nu'n kairw/ khruvttēsqai tou[noma aujtou', di j ejkeivnou a]n ejrrevqh tou' kaiÉ thÉn ajpokavlyuin eJorakovto" oujdeÉ gaÉr proÉ pollou' crovnuu eJwrvqh, ajllaÉ scedoÉn ejpiÉ th" hJmetevra" geneav", proÉ" tw/ tevlei th" Dometianou' ajrch".*

The difficulty arises in Irenaeus’ statement, as translated above, “... that was seen ...” The Greek text simply reads *eJwrvqh*. The subject of the statement is simply subsumed in the verb, and there is therefore no grammatical indicator as to the referent; it could be the Apocalypse, or it could be John himself. In other words, the English could just as easily be, “... he was seen ...”<sup>25</sup> While it might seem initially odd to refer to a person as being “seen,” Hort acknowledges that Irenaeus has a general tendency to use *oJravw* of persons more commonly than visions or things.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the larger context speaks explicitly of “those who have seen John face to face” (*ejkeivwn tw'n kat j oJyin toÉn jIwavnwn eJorakovtwn*).<sup>27</sup> This translation may in fact fit better with the logic of the passage as well. Note the thematic analysis of Chase:

The logic of the sentences seems to me to require this interpretation. The statement that the vision was seen at the close of Domitian’s reign supplies no reason why the mysterious numbers should have been expounded “by him who saw the apocalypse,” had he judged such an exposition

needful. If, on the other hand, we refer *eJwrvqh* to St. John, the meaning is plain and simple. We may expand the sentences thus: “Had it been needful that the explanation of the name should be proclaimed to the men of our own day, that explanation would have been given by the author of the Book. For the author was seen on earth, he lived and held converse with his disciples, not so very long ago, but almost in our own generation. Thus, on the one hand, he lived years after he wrote the Book, and there was abundant opportunity for him to expound the riddle, had he wished to do so; and, on the other hand, since he lived on almost into our generation, the explanation, had he given it, must have been preserved to us.”<sup>28</sup>

This all seems plausible enough, but there are some factors that weigh against it. For one thing, Irenaeus seems to claim elsewhere that John lived until the reign of Trajan,<sup>29</sup> and it is also to be noted that the Latin scribal choice opts for the other view.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, even some early date advocates such as Stuart and Robinson still take Irenaeus to mean the Apocalypse dates to the 90s.<sup>31</sup> It seems to me that the evidence is inconclusive.

Nevertheless, there remains another problem with the Irenaeus’ historical claims? Caird (no doubt overstating the case), remarks that, “... second-century traditions about the apostles are demonstrably unreliable.”<sup>32</sup> Whether or not this generalization is fair, in Irenaeus’ case there is legitimate reason for us to remain skeptical. In one place he portrays James the Apostle as the same person as the brother of the Lord,<sup>33</sup> and in another, he astonishingly informs us that Jesus lived to be between forty and fifty years old!<sup>34</sup> Lapses like these have understandably led to assessments such as Guthrie’s caution that Irenaeus’ historical method is “uncritical,”<sup>35</sup> as well as Moffatt’s comment, “Irenaeus, of course, is no great authority by himself on matters chronological.”<sup>36</sup> Such being the case, should we really place the great confidence in this testimony that many scholars have?

It may seem excessive to dwell so thoroughly on this single witness, but it must be understood that for many scholars, this piece of evidence has been the linchpin of the late-date case. Moreover, it is pivotal that we recognize clearly the questionable quality of this witness for one crucial reason: the so-called “unanimity” of the fathers’ witness on the matter apparently stems entirely from the Irenaeus source.

Now it should first be noted that the “unanimity” is nothing of the sort. As we shall see, there is much more diversity among the witnesses than is often admitted. But for now, suffice it to say that the allegedly numerous “testimonies” to the Domitianic date are in reality merely a chorus of voices echoing one testimony. Bell highlights the little-known fact that “all later witnesses to this date seem to derive directly from Irenaeus.”<sup>37</sup> Milton Terry concurs: “[W]hen we scrutinize the character and extent of this evidence [i.e., the external witnesses], it seems ... clear that no very great stress can safely be laid upon it. For it all turns upon the single testimony of Irenaeus.”<sup>38</sup> And as Randell adds, “Eusebius and Jerome, in the fourth century, do not strengthen what they merely repeat.”<sup>39</sup> Even Collins, who elsewhere uses Victorinus, Eusebius, and “other writers” as support for the Domitianic date, goes on to concede the likelihood that the writers after Irenaeus are simply parroting him.<sup>40</sup> How many late-date advocates would accept this sort of evidence in

defense of the so-called "Majority Text" when dealing with textual criticism?<sup>41</sup>

In sum, we have a historically questionable, grammatically ambiguous single source that has become a "unanimity among the church fathers," and this evidence is serving for many as the decisive clue to the date. Furthermore, the fact is that there exists a greater diversity than many realize in the external witnesses, and we will thus explore these briefly.

### *Other Major Witnesses*

The matter of the external testimony is only complicated by the fact that the fathers do not speak with one voice on the date of Revelation. Many favor an early date, while others may not support the late date as clearly as many have supposed. We will here consider a few of the most striking cases.

Clement of Alexandria and Origen. Two of the key witnesses commonly claimed as sources for a Domitianic date are Clement of Alexandria (c. A.D. 150–215) and Origen (c. A.D. 185–254). Mounce takes this view, as do Charles and Swete.<sup>42</sup> However, when actually examined, we find that in neither case is Domitian actually referenced. In both writers, the passages allegedly supporting a Domitianic date simply speak of the banishment of John under the "tyrant,"<sup>43</sup> or the "King of the Romans."<sup>44</sup> The link to Domitian is an arbitrary imposition by modern commentators based on the assumption of a great Domitianic persecution, which, as we shall see, is a highly dubious supposition.

On the other hand, Apollonius of Tyana (b. 4 B.C.) says Nero was "commonly called a Tyrant."<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Lactantius (ca. A.D. 260–330) describes the persecutor whose reign led to the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul, recording that afterwards, "... the tyrant, bereaved of authority, and precipitated from the height of empire, suddenly disappeared."<sup>46</sup> The assumption that the "tyrant" in Clement and Origen must clearly be Domitian is unwarranted.

Also pertinent to the question of whether Clement believed in a Domitianic composition of the Apocalypse is the following quote from his *Miscellanies*: "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."<sup>47</sup> Unless Clement considers John's Apocalypse to be outside of the teaching of the apostles, he seems to imply he believes the Scriptures were completed by the end of Nero's reign.<sup>48</sup>

At the same time, Clement has historical problems of his own, such as his limiting of the ministry of Jesus to a single year.<sup>49</sup> Of course, any element of unreliability based upon an apparently uncaredful handling of historical details does not positively serve either view of the date of the Apocalypse, it merely makes Clement's testimony even less decisive.

In light of all of this, we must ask ourselves: can we really claim Clement of Alexandria as a clear witness to the late date of Revelation?

Origen's quote in and of itself is quite ambiguous as well, and is even less helpful when we recognize he was a student of Clement's tutelage, and may merely be following his master's say on the matter, whether he himself knew the identity of the particular "King" or not.<sup>50</sup> Hort finds the absence of a specific name in both Clement and Origen to be perhaps telling, remarking that the "coincidence is curious."<sup>51</sup> Some scholars are more suspicious than that.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, it seems quite presumptuous to lean too heavily on these two commonly touted sources.

Eusebius and Jerome. Another two witnesses that are claimed for the Domitianic position are Eusebius (ca. A.D. 260–340) and Jerome (A.D. 340–420), both of which are cited by Charles and Swete.<sup>53</sup> However, again, being later, they both reflect Irenaeus tradition, explicitly so in Eusebius' case.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, both witnesses seem to reflect conflicting tradition, elsewhere either implying that John was banished under Nero or approvingly reusing testimonies to such and then recasting them in another light.<sup>55</sup> This at least reveals competing traditions in their times.

The Shepherd of Hermas. One interesting, if somewhat inconclusive, source that might give light to Revelation's date is The Shepherd of Hermas. The date of this work is difficult to establish. The external evidence (specifically the Muratorian Canon) certainly points toward a date of about A.D. 140–155, but the internal evidence may push the book much earlier,<sup>56</sup> and some scholars, such as Edmunson and Robinson, have argued for a date between 85–90.<sup>57</sup>

The relevance of this source is the fact that it bears strong indications of dependence on the Apocalypse in its contents. Charles gives a compelling case for this noting the following similarities:

Thus the Church, Vis. ii.4, is represented by a woman (cf. [Rev] 12:1 sqq.); the enemy of the Church by a beast (qhrivon), Vis. lv.6–10, [Rev] 13: out of the mouth of the beasts proceed fiery locusts, Vis. iv. 1, 6, [Rev] 9:3: whereas the foundation stones of the Heavenly Jerusalem bear the names of the Twelve Apostles, [Rev] 21:14, and those who overcome are made pillars in the spiritual temple, [Rev] 3:12, in Hermas the apostles and other teachers of the Church form the stones of the heavenly tower erected by the archangels, Vis. iii. 5.1. The faithful in both are clothed in white and are given crowns to wear, [Rev] 6:11 etc., 2:10; 3:10; Hermas, Sim. viii. 2.1, 3.58

Again, the date of Hermas is debatable. But if the early date is right, and if literary dependence upon Revelation is present (again, a common conclusion, but not certain), then these factors would press the writing of the Apocalypse into a period significantly earlier than Domitian's reign.

The Muratorian Canon. Having just mentioned the Muratorian Canon (ca. A.D. 170), we should note that it happens to stand as an easily overlooked, yet very important witness to an early date. The key passage relevant to this question is the statement that "the blessed Apostle Paul, following the rule of his predecessor John, writes to no more than seven churches by name."<sup>59</sup> Obviously the Johannine writing being referenced is the Apocalypse (addressed as it is to seven churches), and here it is implied to have been written before the completion of Paul's writings. Whether or not the credibility of the report may be established, this is clearly a very early example of an early-date opinion for Revelation's composition.

Tertullian. Tertullian's (ca. A.D. 160–220) relevance to the matter comes from his account of the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul and the banishment of John. In discussing their fates, he ties the three together as a unit, implying they happened together, amidst the same persecution. He declares that Rome is "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 boiling oil, and suffered nothing, and was afterwards banished to an island."<sup>60</sup> Jerome certainly understood Tertullian to mean John was

banished under Nero,<sup>61</sup> and Schaff states, “Tertullian’s legend of the Roman oil-martyrdom of John seems to point to Nero rather than to any other emperor.”<sup>62</sup> One obvious problem with this testimony is the questionable historicity of the oil-boiling event. And there is, to be sure, an element of ambiguity in the statement (it seems to me that Tertullian’s words could merely be emphasizing similarity between the apostles’ fates, rather than temporal proximity between them), but it is probably a somewhat safe conclusion that Tertullian thought John’s banishment took place under Nero. Victorinus. The fourth-century bishop Victorinus (d. ca. A.D. 304) clearly held to a Domitianic date for Revelation. There is an interesting difficulty with his testimony, however, in the fact that he also tells us that while on Patmos, John was working the labor mines as part of his sentence. The idea of a man in his nineties working the mines under the lash ought to give us pause, though anything is possible. Nevertheless, we should again remember, “[T]he whole concatenation of witnesses in favor of [the Domitianic date] hangs upon the testimony of Irenaeus, and their evidence is little more than a mere repetition of what he has said.”<sup>63</sup>

Epiphanius. Upon first glance, Epiphanius (ca. A.D. 315–403) seems a curious voice in the debate, twice dating John’s banishment to the emperorship of Claudius.<sup>64</sup> However, Guthrie, Moffatt, Robinson, and Mounce all agree that Epiphanius, or at least his source (likely Hippolytus) is merely using Claudius as one of Nero’s other names.<sup>65</sup> Regardless, here exists another clear early-date testimony.

Unfortunately, Epiphanius is also another example of inconsistent credibility in historical matters, in one place, for instance, making the unusual claim that Priscilla was a man!<sup>66</sup> Therefore, this witness, too, must be taken with a grain of salt.

Other early date witnesses. There remain several other historical sources worth noting that attest to a pre-70 date for Revelation. For example, the Syriac History of John, the Son of Zebedee (6th c.) and both Syriac versions of the Apocalypse (6th c., 7th c.) explicitly refer to John’s banishment by Nero.<sup>67</sup> Arethas (A.D. 6th c.? 9th c.), furthermore, taught that the book was written before A.D. 70, and understood it to be largely predictive of the Roman siege on Jerusalem.<sup>68</sup>

There is therefore certainly a very present competing tradition to the Domitianic date throughout the history of the church. Consequently, any claims to an alleged “unanimity” are grossly overstated. Furthermore, as has been said, the Domitianic witnesses are dependent upon Irenaeus’ single testimony, which is not without its own problems. The external witness, then, is far from conclusive for supporting a late date, and can even be cited in some cases as evidence for pre-70 composition.<sup>69</sup>

## *Domitian’s Reign*

The second major proof for most who hold to a Domitianic date for the Apocalypse is the apparent theme of imperial persecution and the assumption that this portrayal fits better against the backdrop of Domitianic persecution of the church. This line of evidence is pivotal to the discussion for two reasons: first, it is most likely the case that this particular issue was the catalyst for the scholarly revolution regarding the date after the nineteenth century, and second, it is being recognized more and more that as far as Domitian being the second great persecutor of the Church, “There is extremely little evidence that such was actually the case.”<sup>70</sup> In fact,

“Most modern commentators no longer accept a Domitianic persecution of Christians.”<sup>71</sup>

To develop these points, we will first briefly look at the role of J. B. Lightfoot in the history of views among commentators. This will show the importance of these issues and the influences that went into a belief in a Domitianic persecution among twentieth-century writers. This will be followed with an examination of the Domitianic persecution evidence itself, as well as the related issue of the imperial cult.

## *The Influence of Lightfoot*

After many decades of agreement among New Testament scholars that the Apocalypse was a pre-70 document, the twentieth century dawned and brought with it very quickly three excellently crafted critical commentaries that would set the tone for Revelation studies for many years to come, namely those by Charles, Swete, and Beckwith.<sup>72</sup> As Wilson writes, “The three, and especially Charles, would profoundly influence all subsequent English language scholarship on Revelation.”<sup>73</sup> Unexpectedly, all three commentaries broke with the previous century’s consensus and dated the Apocalypse to the end of Domitian’s reign. Why the sudden shift?

Part of the answer (in combination with reliance upon the Irenaeus tradition) is a strong emphasis in all three works on the social/historical context of the book, specifically with reference to the major theme of persecution. Sensing that the book has been written against the backdrop of heavy-handed recent persecution, all three commentators found the reign of Domitian to be the most suitable *Sitz im Leben* for its apocalyptic cry, and this line of argument plays strongly into each of their respective cases for a later date.<sup>74</sup> It would seem that what historians had come to know of this heinous Caesar had finally tipped the scales in the argument.<sup>75</sup> Of course, once these key commentaries had set the stage, the majority view quickly followed suit.

The important anomaly in this development, however, is the basis upon which these three commentaries argue for this profound persecution by Domitian. When perused for validation of this historical reconstruction, in all three cases we find invariably that their basic justification of the position is explicitly the influence of nineteenth-century New Testament authority J. B. Lightfoot. Wilson elaborates strikingly:

All three contend that Revelation was written with a historical background of recent persecution of the Christian Church by the Roman authorities. Each points to the persecution under Domitian. All three use Lightfoot’s work as their basis. They accept Lightfoot’s work and refer to it without criticism and without making any significant critical inquiry of their own into the validity of the claims of a Domitianic persecution. Charles merely states in a footnote, “On the persecution under Domitian, see Lightfoot, *Clem. Rom.* 1.1.104–115.” Swete simply notes, “Lightfoot has collected a catena of passages which justify the belief that Domitian was the second great persecutor.” Beckwith writes, “The general testimony of early Christian writers leaves no reasonable question that [Domitian’s] reign became a time of special suffering for the Christians, though details of his measures are for the most part wanting.” At this point Beckwith has a footnote referring to the appropriate pages in Lightfoot.<sup>76</sup>

Ironically, despite Lightfoot’s influence upon these commentators toward a late date view, Lightfoot himself, as

mentioned above, held to a pre-70 date. Nevertheless, his arguments for the persecution of Domitian had a significant impact on these revolutionary commentaries, and it is therefore important to consider his case. If it is found to be unconvincing, of course, this does not in and of itself end the question, since it is merely one scholar's argument. But it must be remembered that the apparent dependence in subsequent authors upon Lightfoot for this point creates a scenario somewhat akin to the former situation involving the Irenaeus tradition. What appears to be a strong consensus may upon closer scrutiny be the mere repetition of a singular voice.

## *The Domitianic Persecution Reconsidered*

The evidence for a Domitianic persecution is largely limited to that which Lightfoot himself expounded, so we may justly focus on his form of the argument, especially in light of its role in future influence. To be sure, later Christian writers after Eusebius claim the historicity of such a persecution, but whether their claim has any real veracity or is merely the corollary of a Domitianic Apocalypse date must be weighed in light of the actual historical record. This, we shall see, even in Lightfoot, is greatly lacking.

The main evidence supplied by Lightfoot stems from the account of the death of Flavius Clemens and his wife Domitilla's exile. Dio Cassius tells us their fates were related to the charge of "atheism," which he further connects with Jewish practices.<sup>77</sup> Lightfoot surmises this must have meant Christianity, and refers to Flavius Clemens as a "Christian martyr."<sup>78</sup> Notably, a century earlier, Suetonius had recorded the same incident with no reference to Judaism, simply attributing the event to "some trivial pretext."<sup>79</sup>

Next, seemingly sealing Lightfoot's argumentation, we learn that a cemetery owned by Domitilla was excavated that contained Christian symbols. However, it has now been shown that none of the remnants of Christianity can be dated before the middle of the second century.<sup>80</sup>

If this evidence were not dubious enough, the account from Dio Cassius only survives in the eleventh-century epitome of Xiphilinus and Zonaras' twelfth-century summary.<sup>81</sup> And regardless, we are still left to suppose that Dio Cassius, writing in the third century, would not know to distinguish between Christians and Jews. Both Bell and Wilson find this unlikely.<sup>82</sup>

In a fascinating move, Lightfoot goes on to speculate, admitting it to be a mere conjecture, that Clement of Rome grew up in Flavius Clemens' household and received his name. Thus, he finds what he considers to be a likely evidence for Christian heritage in this "family," reinforcing his hypothesis that Flavius' "martyrdom" under Domitian was for his Christian faith.<sup>83</sup>

In addition to this major point, Lightfoot gives several pages of texts entitled "Notices of the Persecution under Domitian and of the Family of Flavius Clemens."<sup>84</sup> These "notices" are all either post-Eusebius or exceedingly oblique, consisting in one case, for example, of nothing more than the claim that both Nero and Domitian misrepresented Christians.<sup>85</sup> Yet, despite these weaknesses, the early twentieth-century commentaries took these arguments for a Domitianic persecution very seriously, and combined with the statement of Irenaeus, the late-date position was firmly established, and the shift was underway.

However, most New Testament scholars are now quite aware

of the problem. By the late 1900s, confidence in the existence of a Domitianic persecution was on its last leg. Having reexamined the historical record more closely, few were willing to hold such a position any longer. Collins, a staunch late-date advocate, confidently remarks, "There seems, therefore, to be no reliable evidence which supports the theory that Domitian persecuted Christians as Christians."<sup>86</sup> Similarly, Sweet declares, "The evidence that [Domitian] persecuted the church, as opposed to a few individuals who may or may not have been Christians, dissolves on inspection."<sup>87</sup> And again, "Most modern commentators no longer accept a Domitianic persecution of Christians."<sup>88</sup>

The Neronian persecution of the 60s, on the other hand, is no matter of debate. It is a matter of historical infamy, and should surely, in Wilson's words, "be given at least as much attention in dating Revelation as the possibility of a perceived crisis [under Domitian] is given."<sup>89</sup> This is not to say that the earlier setting solves all the problems either. It is generally recognized that we lack any solid evidence for Neronian persecution beyond Rome itself.<sup>90</sup> This silence in the provinces is undoubtedly a difficulty for an early-date view. But placing the Apocalypse in the 90s only heightens the hurdle, since under Domitian, as we have seen, we do not even have firm evidence for persecution in Rome itself! The critique cuts both ways. If a late date is to be established for the Book of Revelation, it cannot be done on the grounds of the backdrop of persecution.

## *Rise of the Imperial Cult*

One closely related issue to that of Domitianic persecution is the question of whether or not the perceivable presence of emperor worship in the Apocalypse can be anchored to any escalation of such under the Domitian regime. Suffice it to say the evidence for increased demand from the emperor for self-deification fares no better than the evidence for Christian persecution.

The main line of argument used for the claim of a greater imposition of the imperial cult is that we know of an epigram that applies the term *Dominus et Deus Noster* to Domitian. However, we have no evidence that there was any pressure for such deification from the top down, and it may in fact be the case that Domitian actually discouraged divine forms of address.<sup>91</sup> At the very least, most agree that the imperial cult in the 90s was not being advanced in any new or unprecedented manner,<sup>92</sup> and certainly not to the degree it had been under Augustus, Caligula, or Nero.<sup>93</sup> Thus, the issue of emperor worship is much like the related problem of persecution. Domitian's reign simply does not show evidence that either of these practices was unusually rampant to any extent that would lead us to consider his era the prime candidate for the fueling of Revelation, and this is even less tenable vis-à-vis the legendary rule of Nero.

## *Important Internal Considerations*

Looking at the internal evidence concerning the date of the Book of Revelation, we find several key factors that seem to point to a pre-70 setting. These were in fact the primary reasons that nineteenth-century scholarship advocated an early date. However, there is some internal evidence that has been advanced on behalf of a late date, and this is worth examining as well. We will consider the latter first, especially regarding the condition of the seven churches addressed in the letters. Perhaps more helpful, however, are the issues that

follow, namely the identity of the “sixth king” in chapter 17 and the presence of the temple in chapter 11.

## *The Condition of the Churches*

Some have argued that the descriptions of the churches to which John writes do not fit a setting in the 60s and necessarily call for a much later context. There are basically three evidences that are cited in this vein. The first is that not enough time has elapsed since the churches’ establishment for such complacency and sin to have set in.<sup>94</sup> This, of course, is a very subjective argument. How long does backsliding take? On this basis, do we need to reconsider the date of Galatians? What about Corinth?

A more manageable point is raised by some concerning the establishment of the church at Smyrna, which is alleged not to have been set up until after Paul’s death.<sup>95</sup> The evidence for this is supposed to be from Polycarp, the second century bishop of that church, who writes, “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.”<sup>96</sup> However, Robinson is quick to note, “[A]s Lightfoot observed long ago, all that Polycarp actually says is that ‘the Philippians were converted to the Gospel before the Smyrneans ...’ It is astonishing that so much has continued to be built on so little.”<sup>97</sup> In other words, Polycarp adds virtually nothing to the debate.

One final argument that has been advanced from the letters is that the Laodicean church is addressed as a location of affluence, which may be difficult to harmonize with the fact that Laodicea was almost completely decimated by a well-known earthquake around 60–61.<sup>98</sup> However, we know from Tacitus that the city took great pride in the fact that it rebuilt itself quite promptly, without even requiring outside funds from the empire.<sup>99</sup> Thus, this argument does not carry very much weight either, and even late-date advocates such as Collins can concede, “This bit of evidence is of no help in dating the book.”<sup>100</sup>

None of these lines of evidence seem to really lead anywhere. The letters to the churches must be concluded to be of little or no value for establishing a late date of the book. The following internal issues, however, may be more useful to the discussion.

## *The Sixth King*

In chapter seventeen of Revelation, we are told there are “seven kings” (basilei<sup>101</sup> eJptav), and while “five have fallen” (oiJ pevnte e[pesan), “one is” (oJ eil<sup>102</sup> e[stin). This passage has been the subject of much debate. The kings are generally agreed to be Roman emperors, but which seven are in view is a more difficult question. Some writers, struggling to come up with a list that fits their scheme, have preferred to simply consider the list symbolic of pagan world power, not linking the individual kings with any specific emperors.<sup>102</sup> This could possibly correct; like the idealist view of the book overall there is nothing to absolutely rule out such a non-specific handling of the text, but many feel this view does not go far enough for the level of detail and style of description given by John.<sup>103</sup> This difficulty is highlighted by the Jewish parallels of the period such as Sib. Or. 5:1–50 and 2 Esdras 11–12, which use similar head/king imagery in contexts which are

plainly intending specific emperor lists.<sup>104</sup>

The interpretation that seems most tenable is simply to understand the Caesars to be paraded before us in order in this passage. This has been the most common way to attempt to interpret the passage, but many commentators have struggled to find a list that works. There are two basic issues here. First of all, where do we start counting? Julius was the first Caesar, and appears at the front of the list in several ancient sources.<sup>105</sup> However, the empire officially starts with Augustus, and thus some writers begin the list with him.<sup>106</sup> Collins has even suggested beginning with Caligula because he was the beginning of the “beastly” Caesars that gave the Jews such difficulty,<sup>107</sup> though few have found this scenario persuasive.

Even so, once the beginning point is established, a second problem arises as to whether or not we should include Galba, Otho, and Vitellius due to the brief and rebellious nature of their reigns in between Nero and Vespasian. Swete and others prefer to skip them as inconsequential.<sup>108</sup> Obviously, this would shake up the list substantially.

On the matter of where to start, both Julius and Augustus seem viable. The Caligula theory has not won many followers, and being combined as it is in Collins with the omission of the three short-term emperors, it seems perhaps too conveniently structured toward the preservation of an intact backward count from Domitian as the sixth.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, “[P]roposals offering reasons for the exclusion of the three brief reigns have not been persuasive to many.”<sup>110</sup> All of the ancient lists include them.<sup>111</sup>

Starting, however, with either Julius or Augustus, the sixth king who “is” at the time of writing is naturally either Nero or Galba, respectively. Either of these cases would imply a setting in the 60s. Even Beckwith concedes, “It requires then a certain degree of arbitrariness to avoid making the sixth king either Nero or Galba.”<sup>112</sup> It may be that how one handles the infamous Nero redivivus myth<sup>113</sup> at this point with reference to the mortally wounded head in the passage decides which of these two is more likely, but for now we may simply say that this most plausible reading of the text has led many to consider this section to bear clear marks of pre-70 composition.<sup>114</sup> Even many late-date advocates concede this, even to the point of taking a source-critical approach to explain it as the inclusion of early material by a Domitian-era editor.<sup>115</sup> The employment of such a technique in the debate hints at the fact that we have here a very difficult piece of evidence, one which may point quite strongly to an early date for Revelation.

## *The Presence of the Temple*

An issue that has for some been determinative of the date is the presence of the temple in 11:1–2. In fact, this argument was the most persuasive issue to most early-date scholars of the nineteenth century.<sup>116</sup> For them, it seemed unthinkable that such a passage could be written after the leveling of the temple in A.D. 70 without any mention of the event. It certainly does seem that at the time of writing the Herodian temple is still standing. In fact, most late-date scholars even admit these verses must have been written before 70.<sup>117</sup>

How then do these scholars continue to hold to Domitianic composition of the book? There are basically two answers here. The primary response has been, once again, to resort to source criticism. Collins goes so far as to attribute the downfall of the early date to the rise of source-critical

methods, which gave many scholars a way out, so to speak, of this compelling argument.<sup>118</sup> The retort therefore has been to concede the pre-70 writing of 11:1–2, but to then speculate that these verses are simply being incorporated by the Domitian-era author from earlier material. It seems difficult, however, to account for the inclusion of such obsolete material without any updating. This is what Robinson chides as the “resort of commentators to treating anything that will not fit a Domitianic date as the incorporation of earlier material, though (for reasons they do not explain) without subsequent modification.”<sup>119</sup> Seams from such use of a source are not visible, and of course if one holds to the unity of the book as a whole, the pull of this evidence is especially difficult to escape.

Another way to respond to this argument has been to treat these verses as merely symbolic, depicting an ideal temple, not the actual Herodian building.<sup>120</sup> This seems unlikely however for a couple of reasons. First of all the seer is quite explicit in the book when dealing with heavenly versus earthly realities involving Jerusalem and the temple. In chapter 21 of course we vividly have the New Jerusalem descending from heaven itself to earth, and John is careful to note that within it there is no temple. Similarly, in the very passage in question, chapter 11, we are later given a vision of the heavenly temple, in which the ark of the covenant appears.<sup>121</sup> Second, all of this seems to be in contrast with the temple described in 11:1–2, which is to be trampled by Gentiles, and is clearly located in the city of Jerusalem, where the witnesses will prophesy.<sup>122</sup> It would seem John is at great pains to identify for the reader the literal, earthly temple in historic Jerusalem.<sup>123</sup>

One could possibly relate the whole passage to a future, rebuilt temple, but in the context its presence is merely presupposed. Without any informing of a future rebuilding in the text, the author, writing so soon after the Jewish War in a late date paradigm, would have surely confounded his readers. In Gentry’s words, “Where is there any reference to the rebuilding of the Temple in Revelation so that it could be again destroyed? ... If there is no reference to a rebuilding of the Temple and the book was written about A.D. 95, how could the readers make sense of its prophecies?”<sup>124</sup>

While these approaches to the problem are certainly not impossible, they all involve some degree of conjecture for the sake of maintaining late composition, and the most plausible explanation remains that John is speaking of the integrity of the temple in his own day. And if this is the case (and if we find the source-critical pleas unconvincing), then we have a very important piece of evidence pointing to a pre-70 date for Revelation, just as former scholars once widely recognized.

### *Summary of the Evidence*

In light of all the evidence, it seems incredible that so many consider the issue so decisively weighted in favor of Domitianic timing. The two key arguments for this view that are consistently noted by its advocates are the testimony of the church fathers and the grim background of Domitian’s reign. The first of the two, as we have seen, is not the “unanimity” that it is often purported to be, but rather a façade. In reality, it all boils down to the testimony of Irenaeus, which is grammatically ambiguous, and even if translated in the traditional manner remains the word of one writer, and a historically questionable writer at that. Would we really turn the whole matter on the witness of a single voice,

let alone a voice that tells us that Jesus lived into his forties? Moreover, as we have also observed, there are many more historical sources that attest to an early date than are usually admitted.

The second argument, that the setting of Domitian’s great persecution of the Church is a more likely context for the writing of the Apocalypse, cannot be defended. In recent decades the academic community has basically discarded the notion of a Domitianic persecution as a myth, and rightly so. The evidence is simply not there, and therefore this argument too is forceless.

On the other hand, certain internal factors we have noted strongly imply a pre-70 date for Revelation, especially the identity of the sixth king who “is” at the time of writing, which can most plausibly be understood as either Nero or Galba, and the present integrity of the temple in Jerusalem in 11:1–2.

But the case for a late date of Revelation is a three-legged stool. While the first two legs are seriously compromised by the actual evidence, we must now consider the third argument, which we have saved due to its relevance to this thesis. This is the question of the identity of the harlot, Babylon. Many scholars use the application of this name to Rome as proof that the work must have been composed after A.D. 70, after Rome, like Babylon, had razed the temple, and several Jewish sources of the period are noted examples of this particular polemic.<sup>125</sup> The presupposition that Babylon = Rome in the Apocalypse is of course the very issue that is questioned by this thesis. If this leg is undermined, the stool falls.

For our purposes, it is sufficient to say that the early date is still very much an option; the late date argument cannot be used to preempt the view that Babylon represents Jerusalem from the outset. At the least, the evidence for deciding the date may be considered inconclusive. At most, the evidence may be taken by some (as it has by many prominent names we have above noted) to tilt in favor of a date somewhere in the 60s, before the fall of Jerusalem. The only major question that remains is the subject of this study, the identity of “Babylon,” and to this we now turn.

1 Note, for example, the somewhat reactionary comments of D. A. Carson regarding David Chilton’s preterist commentary on Revelation, *The Days of Vengeance*: “... Chilton ties his interpretation of the entire book to a dogmatic insistence that it was written before A.D. 70, and that its predictions are focused on the destruction of Jerusalem. Although there are some excellent theological links crafted in this book, the central setting and argument are so weak and open to criticism that I cannot recommend the work very warmly” (D. A. Carson, *New Testament Commentary Survey*, 5th ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001], 129).

2 Iain Provan, “Foul Spirits, Fornication and Finance: Revelation 18 From an Old Testament Perspective,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 64 (1996): 81–100; Eugenio Corsini, *The Apocalypse: The Perennial Revelation of Jesus Christ*, trans. Francis J. Moloney (Wilmington, DE: Gazier, 1983), 313–40.

3 Adela Yarbro Collins, “Myth and History in the Book of Revelation: The Problem of Its Date,” in *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith*, ed. Baruch Halpern and Jon D. Levenson (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 388.

4 Similarly, Gregg (compelled by Gentry’s arguments): “At the very least, the possibility of the early date keeps the preterist approach legitimately in the debate” (Steve Gregg, ed.,



Revelation: Four Views, A Parallel Commentary [Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1997], 18).

5 D. B. Wallace, "John 5,2 and the Date of the Fourth Gospel," *Biblica* 71 (1990): 177–205.

6 Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII*, Anchor Bible, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, vol. 29 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), xxiv–xl.

7 See discussion in Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 3d ed. (London: Macmillan, 1911), clxxvi.

8 Though hesitantly: "The Apocalypse may be before A.D. 70" (C. F. D. Moule, *The Birth of Christianity*, 3d ed. [San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1982], 174).

9 J. A. Fitzmyer, Review of Redating the New Testament, by J. A. T. Robinson, *Interpretation* 32, no.3, (July 1978): 309–13.

10 F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 411.

11 E. Earle Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament Documents*, Biblical Interpretation Series, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and Rolf Rendtorff, vol. 39 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 210–16.

12 J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1976), 221–53.

13 It is an interesting side note that while the discipline of New Testament studies has inclined toward a late date in the past century, modern classicists seem to continue to be persuaded of the earlier date position (See intriguing discussion by Robinson, *Redating*, 225).

14 J. Christian Wilson, "The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation," *New Testament Studies* 39 (October 1993): 587.

15 Robinson, *Redating*, 224. Robinson goes on to cite Peake regarding the "remarkable consensus of 'both advanced and conservative scholars' who backed it," (*ibid.*, 225) and even remarks wittily that, "It must have been one of the few things on which Baur and Lightfoot agreed!" (*ibid.*, 225, n. 25)

16 *Ibid.*, 224.

17 J. B. Lightfoot, *Essays on the Work of Supernatural Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1889), 132 (*italics mine*), citing the anonymous author of *Supernatural Religion*.

18 R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, vol. 1, *International Critical Commentary*, ed. S. R. Driver, A. Plummer, and C. A. Briggs (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), xci.

19 Swete, *Apocalypse*, xcix.

20 Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 956.

21 For much of this section I am indebted to the detailed study on the matter in Kenneth L. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, rev. ed. (Atlanta, GA: American Vision, 1998), 41–109, which provides the most comprehensive survey of the relevant historical sources I have found. In fact, I have found no pertinent testimony cited in the wider secondary literature that is not also examined in Gentry. This does not mean all of his arguments can be fully endorsed, but his work in this area is an invaluable guide for the subject.

22 J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation*, Westminster Pelican Commentaries (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1979), 27.

23 Irenaeus 5.30.3 (translation given is that of Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, ed., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 [New York: Christian Literature, 1885], 559–60).

24 Eusebius *The Ecclesiastical History* 3.18.3.

25 So Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 48–57.

26 F. J. A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John: I–III* (London: Macmillan, 1908), 42.

27 Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 5.30.1. This is not to deny that the "apocalyptic vision" is also seen/beheld in the preceding line, but simply to point out the legitimate plausibility in this passage of John being the referent.

28 S. H. Chase, "The Date of the Apocalypse," *Journal of Theological Studies* 8 (1907):431.

29 Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 2.22.5 and 3.3.4, although there may be some question as to whether John's death and the time of his being "seen" in this context (i.e., available to the audience/Irenaeus to preach on the matter) would have been the same thing; in other words, these passages may not be contradictory on this interpretation at all anyway. It should also be added that there is perhaps another curious piece of evidence in his statements elsewhere worth noting. Eusebius records Irenaeus' words regarding the number of the beast: "As these things are so, and this number is found in all the approved and ancient copies" (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. C. F. Cruse [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998], 5:8:5–6). Gentry argues that this implies that to Irenaeus, the writing of the *Apocalypse* was more than "ancient," in that many of the copies were to him "ancient," even though he considers the end of Domitian's reign "almost in our day." "Ancient copies" suggests for Gentry at least two, if not more generations of scribal reproduction—i.e., some copies are earlier copies and some are more recent. If we allow time, then, for the *Apocalypse* to be written, circulated, and copied through multiple scribal cycles so that the earlier ones can be called "ancient," we might well ask whether Irenaeus would write this way of a work composed less than a hundred years earlier. While far from conclusive, the question is certainly intriguing (see Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 58–59).

However, the term translated here "ancient," *ajrcai'o* has a fairly wide semantic range, stretching from the meaning "[having] existed from the beginning" to merely "old," or, "for a long time" (Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker, 3d ed. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], s.v. "*ajrcai'o*", 137). In light of this lexical flexibility, it seems hasty to make as much of Irenaeus' comments here as Gentry would like.

30 Though we may want to be careful how much stock we place in this when we consider Schaff's judgment that this extant translation employs "barbarous Latin." (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2 [New York: Scribner, 1889], 753) Similarly, Stuart refers to it as "a dead literality" (Moses Stuart, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, vol. 1 [New York: Newman, 1845], 119), and the translators of Irenaeus for the Ante-Nicene Fathers (Roberts and Donaldson) claim, "... the Latin version adds to these difficulties of the original, by being itself of the most barbarous character ... Its author is unknown, but he was certainly little qualified for his task" (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, 311–12).

31 Stuart, *Apocalypse*, 1:263; Robinson, *Redating*, 221.

32 G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, *Black's New Testament Commentary*, ed. Henry Chadwick (London: Black, 1966), 4.

33 Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 2.22.5.

34 *Ibid.*, 3.12.14.

35 Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 24.

36 James Moffatt, "The Revelation of St. John the Divine," in *The*

Englishman's Greek Testament, vol. 5, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910), 319.

37 Albert A. Bell, Jr., "The Date of John's Apocalypse: The Evidence of Some Roman Historians Reconsidered," *New Testament Studies* 25 (October 1978): 93.

38 Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1883), 237.

39 T. Randell, *Revelation, The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. 22 (London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1909), iv.

40 Adela Yarbro Collins, "Dating the Apocalypse of John," *Biblical Research* 26 (1981): 33, 35.

41 It could also be noted that this is very similar to the situation behind the persistent historical testimony to a Semitic language origin of the Gospel of Matthew, a tradition which has likely come down to us as a mere repetition among the church fathers of Irenaeus' questionable interpretation of Papias (see Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 44–48).

42 Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., *New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 16; Charles, *Revelation* 1:xciii; Swete, *Apocalypse*, xcix.

43 Clement of Alexandria, *Who is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 42.

44 Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 16.6.

45 Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 4.38. Interestingly, this passage also repeatedly describes Nero as a great and wild "beast" (see Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 70). It should also be noted that these quotations of course do not prove Nero is the tyrant in question for Clement or Origen, but they do show that evidence for which emperor would have been regarded as such by early writers is divided at best. "Tyrant" allusions cannot be assumed as referring to Domitian.

46 Lactantius *On the Death of the Persecutors* 2.2 (translation given is that of William Fletcher in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7 [italics mine]).

47 Clement of Alexandria *Miscellanies* 7.17 (translation given is that of William Wilson in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2 [italics mine]). The Greek of the last sentence reads *hJ deE tw'n ajpostovlwn ajutou' mevcri ge th' Pavlou leitourgiva' ejpiV Nevrwno' teleiouvta*.

48 Gentry further notes that Clement elsewhere recounts an incident after John's release from exile in which he allegedly pursued a young apostate on horseback "with all his might" (Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 83–84, with reference to Clement of Alexandria, *Who is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved* 42), which might appear unusually vigorous for a man perhaps well into his nineties (in the late-date scenario). Granted, the historicity of the event may not be verifiable, but it is at least clear that Clement believed such. Therefore, for Gentry, harmonizing Clement's thought at this point is much easier if he was thinking of release from a Neronian banishment. In fact some, such as Ratton, consider this strong evidence that Clement is "a firm believer in the Neronian date of the Book" (J. L. Ratton, *The Apocalypse of St. John* [London: Washbourne, 1912], 27).

However, this argument seems empty in light of a couple of factors. For one thing, John is described in terms of his advanced age throughout the passage. Moreover, his riding of a horse involves being led by another. This is probably not the striking curiosity Gentry wants it to be.

49 Clement of Alexandria *Stromata* 1.21.146. Cf. Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand

Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 46.

50 So Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 99.

51 Hort, *Apocalypse*, xv.

52 See the comments of Stuart, *Apocalypse*, vol. 1, 272, which reach a crescendo with the claim, "We cannot well come to any conclusion here, than that Origen knew of no way in which this matter [of the "King's" identity] could be determined."

53 Charles, *Revelation*, 1:xciii; Swete, *Apocalypse*, xcix, c.

54 The passage cited by Charles and Swete climaxes with, "Irenaeus, in his fifth book against the heresies ... spoke in the following manner respecting [John]" (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.18 [translation given is that of C. F. Cruse in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, rev. ed., trans. C. F. Cruse (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998)]).

55 Eusebius connects John's banishment with Peter and Paul's executions in *Evangelical Demonstrations* (see discussion by Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 103–4); Jerome repeats Tertullian's account of John's torture and banishment, which, as we shall discuss below, is indicative of a Neronian dating of these events. Jerome, however, then ties this tradition to the Domitianic banishment tradition (Jerome *Against Jovinianum* 1.26).

56 Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 703.

57 George Edmundson, *The Church in Rome in the First Century* (London: Longman's Green, 1913), 203–21; Robinson, *Redating*, 322.

58 Charles, *Revelation*, 1:xcvii; Many voices of agreement could be noted including Swete, *Apocalypse*, cx and Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 929.

59 Canon Muratorianus 3 (translation given is that of S. D. F. Salmond in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5).

60 Tertullian *The Prescription Against Heretics* 36 (translation given is that of Peter Holmes in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3).

61 Jerome *Against Jovinianum* 1.26.

62 Schaff, *History*, vol. 1, 428; see also Ellis, *Making of the New Testament Documents*, 213.

63 Stuart, *Apocalypse*, vol. 1, 269.

64 Epiphanius *Heresies* 51.12, 33.

65 Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 956; Moffatt, "Revelation," 505; Robinson, *Redating*, 224; Mounce, *Revelation*, 15, n. 74.

66 *Index discipulorum* 125.

67 See William Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 2 (London: Philo, 1871), 55; the references in the Syriac versions of Revelation are given in the title.

68 See discussion in A. R. Fausset, *Revelation* in Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*, vol. 2 (Hartford, CT: Scranton, n.d.), 548.

69 Summarizing the same sentiment, Wilson poignantly asks, "Why should we prefer the date of Irenaeus to that in the prefaces of both the Old Syriac versions and also in Theophylact, all three of which ascribe the banishment of John to the reign of Nero?" (J. Christian Wilson, "The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation," *New Testament Studies* 39 [October 1993]: 599). Still, Wilson's confidence in Theophylact is probably misplaced. His citation here is in reference to the fact that Theophylact states that John was banished thirty-two years after Christ's ascension, which of course would lead to a date in the 60s. However, Theophylact's late date (d. 1107) and contradictory statements

elsewhere that Revelation was written under Trajan (certainly an anomalous claim!) make him of little use (see Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 108).

70 Collins, "Dating the Apocalypse of John," 34.

71 Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 16.

72 Charles, *Revelation*, 1:cxv; Swete, *Apocalypse*, chap. 9; I. T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of St. John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 204.

73 Wilson, "The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation," 588.

74 See Charles, *Revelation*, 1:xcv; Swete, *Apocalypse*, chap. 9; Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 204.

75 Again, this is particularly true of English scholarship. German scholars have tended to default to the evidence of Irenaeus' quote (Wilson, "The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation," 588–9), for which, see above.

76 Wilson, "The Problem with the Domitianic Date of Revelation," 588.

77 Dio Cassius *Roman History* 67.14

78 J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers: Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp: Revised Texts with Introduction, Notes, Dissertations, and Translations* (London: Macmillan, 1890), part 1, 1.34–37. It should be noted that the importance of this example cannot be overstated because it is the only specific instance that can be produced of such alleged Domitianic martyrdoms of Christians, and the evidence that it even is an example of this at all is quite scanty.

79 Suetonius *Domitian* 15.

80 Wilson, "The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation," 590–91.

81 *Ibid.*, 591; The epitome, by the way, was considered by Cary, translator of Dio's *Roman History* for the Loeb Classical Library, to have been made "very carelessly," apparently involving frequent rhetorical embellishment, (Dio's *Roman History*, trans. Earnest Cary, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 1 [London: Heinemann, 1914], xxiii).

82 Bell, "The Date of John's Apocalypse," 94; Wilson, "The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation," 591.

83 Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, part 1, 1.61–62.

84 *Ibid.*, pt. 1, 1.104–15.

85 Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.26.7.

86 Collins, "Dating the Apocalypse of John," 38.

87 John Sweet, "Revelation, The Book of," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford, 1993), 653.

88 Thompson, *Revelation*, 16; to this list of skeptics of a Domitianic persecution could be added Moule, *Birth of Christianity*, 153; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, vol. 2, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 374; F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History*, 412; D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 474; et al.

89 Wilson, "The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation," 597 (italics mine). The reference to a "perceived crisis" alludes to Collins' position that, in light of the fact that we know there was no Domitianic persecution, the *Apocalypse* must have been written under the tension of a "perceived" potential for one (Collins, "Dating the Apocalypse of John").

90 G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, *New International Greek Testament Commentary*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 12; Beale does note, however, that it remains possible that "John may have seen the outbreak of persecution in Rome as the first step of expanding persecutions elsewhere in the Empire." While plausible, this is of course simply a conjecture. Going further, Gentry actually attempts to demonstrate that there may in fact be some evidence of empire-wide persecution, but his arguments likewise are little more than speculation (see Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 297–98).

91 Wilson, "The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation," 596, citing unspecified evidence from Statius.

92 Note Warden's blunt statement: "In fact there is no evidence that emperor worship was promoted with any particular fervor during the time of Domitian" (Duane Warden, "Imperial Persecution and the Dating of 1 Peter and Revelation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34 [June 1991]: 207).

93 See Robinson, *Redating*, 236–37 for a thorough discussion of the prominence of the imperial cult under the rule of these emperors.

94 Such as that in *Rev* 2:4–5 and 3:15–19. For this argument, see Beale, *Revelation*, 15; also, Swete, *Apocalypse*, c–ci.

95 So Charles, *Revelation*, 1:xciv; Moffatt, *Revelation*, 317; et al.

96 Polycarp *Philippians* 11.3 (translation provided is that of J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer in *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2d ed., ed. Michael W. Holmes [London: Macmillan, 1891], 128.

97 Robinson, *Redating*, 229–30; so Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 954; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 323–24.

98 Mounce, *Revelation*, 19 represents this approach.

99 Tacitus *Annals* 14.27.

100 Collins, "Myth and History," 402.

101 *Rev* 17:9–10.

102 E.g., Beale, *Revelation*, 870.

103 See the thorough discussion by Robinson, *Redating*, 245–49.

104 *Ibid.*, 247. This is of course not conclusive, but must be taken as corroborating evidence.

105 E.g., Suetonius *Lives of the Twelve Caesars: the Divine Julius* 76; Dio Cassius *Roman History* 5.

106 Tacitus *Annals* 1.1 is the most common example, though see Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 154.

107 Collins, "Myth and History," 389; Collins does point to two other writers who have held to this position, namely, A. Strobel and Lyder Brun.

108 Swete, *Revelation*, 220.

109 See defense in Collins, "Myth and History," 389.

110 Beale, *Revelation*, 873.

111 See Bell, "The Date of John's Apocalypse," 99.

112 Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 705. In fact, the difficulty of reconciling this phenomenon with a Domitianic date has actually been the catalyst for many scholars to give up on counting "heads" and to simply go instead with the symbolic interpretation; see, e.g., Caird, *Revelation*, 217–19, who finds it too complicated to harmonize the list with the statement of Irenaeus and proceeds to move to the symbolic solution as the safest alternative. In response to this approach, note the indictment of Robinson, *Redating*, 247–48: "The contortions to which the commentators have been driven in the interpretation of

ch. 17 are I am convinced self-imposed by the 'discrepancy', as Beckwith calls it, between the clear statement that the sixth king is now living and what Torrey called their 'stubborn conviction' that the book cannot be earlier than the time of Domitian. Drop this conviction and the evidence falls into place" (italics mine).

113 Which, by the way, arose much earlier in the first century than is sometimes asserted (see Bell, "The Date of John's Apocalypse," 98; Ellis, Making of the New Testament Documents, 212).

114 Collins in fact admits that she feels the Galba theory makes most sense of the text, but then rejects it outright on the grounds that Galba reigned before 70 and the book could not have been written then. Interestingly, her primary contention for this is the "fact" that chapters 17 and 18 use "Babylon" as a moniker for Rome. This issue will of course be the very point disputed in chapter four of this thesis.

115 E.g., Charles, Revelation, 2:69–70; Arthur S. Peake, The Revelation of John (London: Johnson, 1919), 348. One serious problem with this view is the question of why the later writer

would not have updated his source; obviously he would have known which king "now is" in his day.

116 Collins, "Dating the Apocalypse of John," 36.

117 Wilson, "The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation," 604.

118 Collins, "Dating the Apocalypse of John," 37.

119 Robinson, Redating, 242.

120 E.g., Caird, Revelation, 130–32.

121 Rev 11:19.

122 Rev 11:2–8.

123 So Gentry, Before Jerusalem Fell, 169–74.

124 Ibid., 173–74.

125 Even Beale, otherwise an idealist who prefers trans-temporal interpretation to historical references, argues this as "one of the strongest pieces of internal evidence that the book is to be dated after 70 A.D." (Beale, Revelation, 25).