

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

**A Defense of the Neronic Date of the Book of Revelation**

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## **Abstract**

There are two primary dates for Revelation that are generally accepted: the early or Neronian date (A.D. 64-68) and the late or Domitianic date (A.D. 95-96). In this dissertation, the early date of the book of Revelation is defended against the commonly accepted late date. The study engages with two major texts: Kenneth L. Gentry Jr.'s *Before Jerusalem Fell*, supporting the Neronian date, and Mark L. Hitchcock's dissertation "A Defense of the Domitianic Date of the Book of Revelation," defending the Domitianic date. This present study discusses the central arguments of both Gentry and Hitchcock as it defends the Neronian date across five chapters.

In each chapter, arguments are presented by advocates representing contrasting viewpoints, with particular emphasis being placed on the perspectives of Gentry and Hitchcock. The dissertation offers a rationale supporting the choice of the Neronian date while rebutting the claims put forth by advocates of the Domitianic date. The study concludes that the Domitianic theory relies on external evidence and such evidence is not definitive. Conversely, the internal evidence, when examined in conjunction with the earliest available external source materials, compellingly suggests a date preceding the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple in A.D. 70.



**Table: Summary of External Sources**

Source	Extant	Pre-70	Issue
Papias of Hierapolis (c. A.D. 60-130)	Fragments	Yes	Authenticity disputed. Preserved in Irenaeus & Eusebius. Pertinent statement in a MS. of Georgius Hamartolus (ninth century).
The Shepherd of Hermas (c. A.D. 85)	Complete	Unclear	Authorship and date disputed. Greek original incomplete. In the Codex Sinaiticus, the original Greek is extant up to Mandate IV. Additionally, in the Mount Athos manuscript, the Greek text extends up to Similitude IX. The remaining portions of the text are available in Latin, found in both the <i>Versio Vulgata</i> and the <i>Versio Palatina</i> .
Hegesippus (c. A.D. 110-180)	Fragments	Unclear	Preserved in Eusebius.
Irenaeus (c. A.D. 120-202)	Complete	No/Unclear	Partially in Greek, complete in Latin Translation. Recorded in Eusebius; Erasmus (Basle, 1526). Migne's <i>Patrologia Latina</i> .
Clement of Alexandria (c. A.D. 150-215)	Partial	Unclear	Loss of portions of the original texts. <i>Stromateis</i> preserved in Florence MS. Laur. V. 3 (saec. xi). <i>Quis Dives Salvetur?</i> , with fragment, ed. G. W. Butterworth, Loeb, 1919.
Tertullian (c. A.D. 160-220)	Complete	Yes/Unclear	13 of 31 extant works are preserved in Codex Agobardinus (Par. lat. 1622; 9 <sup>th</sup> cent.); 5 works are in Codex Trecensis (Troyes, Bibliothèque Municipale, 523; 12 <sup>th</sup> cent.); etc.
The Muratorian Canon (c. A.D. 170)	Fragments	Unclear	First published by Lodovico Antonio Muratori in <i>Antiquitates Italicae Medii Aevi</i> , III (Milan, 1740). Located in the Bibliotheca Ambrosiana at Milan (Cod. J 101 sup.).
Origen (c. A.D. 195-253)	Fragments	Unclear	Preserved in Rufinus' Latin translation found in Migne's <i>Patrologia Latina</i> . Greek works in P. D. Huet, Bishop of Avranches (2 vols., Rouen, 1668).
Victorinus (c. A.D. 234-304)	Fragments	No	Commentary on Revelation recorded in 15 <sup>th</sup> century Vatican Manuscript (Ottob. lat. 3288 A).
Eusebius (c. A.D. 260-340)	Complete	No/Unclear	Preserved in the original Greek, in Latin, Syriac, and Armenian versions. It has been reprinted in various sources including Migne's <i>Patrologia Graeca</i> .
Epiphanius (c. A.D. 315-403)	Complete	Yes/Unclear	Preserved in Migne's <i>Patrologia Graeca</i> . Critical text of <i>Panarion</i> in <i>Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller</i> , ed. K. Holl, 1915-1933.
Jerome (c. A.D. 340-420)	Partial	Yes	Earliest collected ed. by Erasmus (9 vols., Basle, 1516). Also preserved in Migne's <i>Patrologia Latina</i> .
Andreas of Cappadocia (c. A.D. 600)	Complete	No	Preserved in Migne's <i>Patrologia Graeca</i> .
The Acts of John (c. A.D. 650)	Partial	Unclear	Large portions preserved in numerous MSS., all incomplete. References to the Acts of John can be found in Eusebius's <i>Eccl. Hist.</i> and Epiphanius' <i>Panarion</i> . The text is available Lipsius-Bonnet, <i>Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha</i> II (1898).
Syriac Witnesses (A.D. 6 <sup>th</sup> and 7 <sup>th</sup> Centuries)	Fragments	Yes	The Philoxenian version of the New Testament is preserved only in fragments and partial manuscripts.
Arethas (c. A.D. 850-944)	Partial	Yes	Preserved in Migne's <i>Patrologia Graeca</i> .

## Chapter One: Introduction

### *Introduction*

The composition date of the book of Revelation has been widely accepted as falling in the latter part of the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian (r. A.D. 81-96).<sup>1</sup> This time frame of authorship is commonly referred to as the “late date” or the “Domitianic date.” However, there has been an increase in the number of scholars who are in favor of placing Revelation’s composition date much earlier, during the reign of Emperor Nero (r. A.D. 54-68). This time frame is typically referred to as the “early date” or “Neronic date.” These two dates, being the most commonly held of theories, will exclusively constitute the range of consideration in this study.

Although the late date is currently favored by the majority, numerous scholars have attributed an earlier composition date to the book of Revelation. For instance, Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. is a notable scholar and author who has written extensively about the composition date of the book. He is regarded as one of the most prominent advocates of the early date theory.<sup>2</sup> His most recognized contribution to this field of study is his book *Before Jerusalem Fell*, which originated as his doctoral dissertation at Whitefield Theological Seminary.<sup>3</sup> Gentry’s work has

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<sup>1</sup> Walter A. Elwell, *Baker Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 1199.

<sup>2</sup> R. C. Sproul, Jay E. Adams, Carl W. Bogue, W. Gary Crampton, and George W. Knight III have highlighted the contribution of Gentry’s publication to the ongoing debate concerning the dating of the book of Revelation. See R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 152; Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1998), vi.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. is a retired Presbyterian minister and theologian ordained in the Reformed Presbyterian Church, General Assembly. As such, his theological background consists of Reformed Theology as set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. Whitefield Theological Seminary affirms the imminent return of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of both believers and non-believers for final judgment, resulting in eternal life for the saved and eternal damnation for the non-believers. The Seminary emphasizes the current duty of Christians to advance the Kingdom of Christ, where He reigns supreme over all. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, ix-xi; See also Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., “Biographical Notes About Dr. Kenneth Gentry,” Chalcedon, accessed November 13, 2023, <https://chalcedon.edu/resources/articles/biographical-notes-about-dr-kenneth-gentry>; Whitfield Theological Seminary, accessed November 13, 2023, <https://whitefield.edu/>.

been highly influential in the preterist interpretation of Revelation. His arguments have played a major role in shaping much of the modern debate surrounding Revelation's date.

In addition to Gentry, several other notable scholars have advocated for an earlier dating of the book. This includes Greg L. Bahnsen, Wilhelm Bousset, F. F. Bruce, Rudolf Bultmann, David Chilton, Adam Clarke, Samuel Davidson, Alfred Edersheim, George Edmundson, Johann Eichorn, Frederic W. Farrar, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, J. B. Lightfoot, C. F. D. Moule, John A. T. Robinson, Philip Schaff, R. C. Sproul, Moses Stuart, and Milton S. Terry, among many others.<sup>4</sup> Although this list of names does not prove the theory of the early date, it does demonstrate that the Neronic date has been advocated by many scholars and warrants serious consideration as a viable option for the composition date of Revelation.<sup>5</sup> The Neronic date is a well-supported theory that should not be dismissed merely for the sake of adhering to a traditional and commonly held opinion, especially when that tradition stems from a degree of ambiguity.<sup>6</sup> Further research and study are necessary to definitively answer the question of Revelation's composition date.

In opposition to Gentry and situated among the distinguished advocates of the prevailing consensus, Mark L. Hitchcock surfaces as a prominent scholar and author who challenges the Neronic date theory.<sup>7</sup> Hitchcock's position is expressed in his academic dissertation titled "A

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<sup>4</sup> A similar list is also provided by Sproul who observes that Gentry references a collective of 138 scholars that endorse an earlier dating of Revelation in his book. See Sproul, *The Last Days*, 153, 247; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 30-38.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>6</sup> Some argue that the late date of Revelation originates from an ambiguous statement made by Irenaeus. This statement is analyzed in chapter two of this present dissertation. See James Glasgow, *The Apocalypse Translated and Expounded* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1872), 43; Milton S. Terry, *The Apocalypse of John: A Preterist Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Chesnee, SC: Victorious Hope Publishing, 2021), 4-5.

<sup>7</sup> Mark L. Hitchcock serves as the Senior Pastor at Faith Bible Church in Edmond, Oklahoma. Additionally, he holds the position of Research Professor of Bible Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary, having obtained his PhD from the institution in 2005. Hitchcock is a self-proclaimed "4-point Calvinist" and Faith Bible Church's Doctrinal Statement's reflect these theological standards. Regarding eschatology, Dallas Theological Seminary

Defense of the Domitianic Date of the Book of Revelation.” This work was undertaken during his time at Dallas Theological Seminary and serves as a response to Gentry’s publication.<sup>8</sup> In the framework of his dissertation, Hitchcock critiques Gentry’s arguments for the Neronic date while arguing for and supporting the Domitianic date.

It is the position of this present author that while the prevailing viewpoint holds that the book of Revelation was written in the latter part of Domitian’s reign, the theory proposing an earlier date holds greater plausibility as to the true composition date of the book. This is due to the internal evidence strongly favoring the early date, the unreliability of external evidence supporting the later date, and the additional evidence from other texts within Scripture that indicate the Neronic period as the likely setting of Revelation. These points indicate that Revelation was authored during Nero’s reign rather than that of Domitian.

### *Importance*

There are several reasons why it is necessary to examine the date of Revelation. First, Revelation’s date can provide insight into the book’s historical and cultural context. The events, issues, and concerns that influenced the author’s message can be better understood by

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holds to a climactic return of Jesus Christ, descending personally on the clouds with power and glory, ushering in the millennial age. The Seminary asserts that this event will involve binding Satan, lifting the curse on creation, restoring Israel to its land, fulfilling God’s covenant promises, and spreading global knowledge of God. Mark L. Hitchcock, “5 Points of Calvinism: Intro & Background,” Faith Bible Church, February 16, 2013, video, 30:01, <https://faithbibleok.com/media/d8vcxpc/intro-background/>; Mark L. Hitchcock, “Mark L. Hitchcock,” Dallas Theological Seminary, accessed November 13, 2023, <https://www.dts.edu/employee/mark-hitchcock/>; See also Dallas Theological Seminary, “Doctrinal Statement,” Dallas Theological Seminary, accessed November 13, 2023, <https://www.dts.edu/about/doctrinal-statement/>.

<sup>8</sup> This study chooses to interact with Hitchcock’s defense of the late date for three reasons: (1) his work is a direct response to Gentry’s *Before Jerusalem Fell*, (2) it presents the most relevant arguments in support of the late date, and (3) Hitchcock has collaborated with other prominent late date advocates such as Thomas Ice, Ed Hindson, and Tim LaHaye (co-author of the *Left Behind* series). Mark L. Hitchcock, “A Defense of the Domitianic Date of the Book of Revelation,” PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2005, iii; For examples of Hitchcock’s collaboration with other late date supporters, see Mark Hitchcock and Thomas Ice, *The Truth Behind Left Behind* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2004); Ed Hindson, Mark Hitchcock, and Tim LaHaye, *The Harvest Handbook of Bible Prophecy: A Comprehensive Survey from the World’s Foremost Experts* (Eugene OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2020).

understanding how his message would have been received by his intended audience. Second, understanding the date of Revelation can help one better appreciate its role in Christian thought and its place in the New Testament. For instance, if the book of Revelation was written earlier than the traditional view, it may have influenced subsequent New Testament writings such as the Gospel of John or 1 Peter.<sup>9</sup> Third, understanding Revelation's date can also aid in interpreting its message and symbolism. For example, if Revelation was written during the reign of Emperor Nero, it could affect how one interprets the book's depiction of the beast and the persecution of the early Christian church.

For instance, Hitchcock, being a prolific writer on the subject of the end times, has authored several books promoting the notion that the world will soon be ruled by a Babylonian anti-Christ or that the Great Tribulation is imminent.<sup>10</sup> Some of his works include *Is the Antichrist Alive Today?*, *What Jesus Says About Earth's Final Days*, and *The Second Coming of Babylon*, among others. If one accepts the notion that Revelation's author wrote the book with Emperor Nero and the Roman Empire in mind, it will lead to the conclusion that these events took place in the first century. The fulfillment of the terrifying events depicted in Revelation would not require the futurist interpretation popularized in media such as the *Left Behind* series.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Scholars have noted similarities between 1 Peter and Revelation, such as the use of the term "Babylon" and common themes and imagery (e.g., 1 Peter 5:13; Revelation 14:8). Some scholars argue that these similarities point to a post-Neronian persecution date of composition for 1 Peter. See J. Ramsey Michaels, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, vol. 49 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), lxiii-lxvi.

<sup>10</sup> Mark L. Hitchcock, *The Second Coming of Babylon* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2003), 117-118.

<sup>11</sup> The *Left Behind* series is a collection of Christian fiction novels authored by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. These books are centered around the concept of the pre-tribulation Rapture, which holds that believers in Christ will be taken to heaven prior to a period of great tribulation. Scholars have noted that the pre-tribulation Rapture view was not widely held within evangelicalism prior to the mid-twentieth century. See John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question: Revised and Enlarged Edition* (1957, reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), 50.

Instead, a preterist interpretation of Revelation could be considered reasonable, aligning with the author's intended meaning, the historical context, and the literary context of the book.<sup>12</sup>

### *Need for the Study*

Hitchcock asserts that modern preterists have confined themselves in a “very narrow corner” when attempting to date the book of Revelation.<sup>13</sup> He references Gentry's perspective, which posits that the book has anticipatory references to the “formal imperial engagement of the Jewish War” (spring, A.D. 67), the death of Nero (June, A.D. 68), and the destruction of Jerusalem (August, A.D. 70).<sup>14</sup> Hitchcock also notes that Gentry's arguments suggest that Revelation was written after the initial outburst of tribulation, which began with the Neronian persecution in November, A.D. 64.<sup>15</sup>

Hitchcock contends that the validity of the preterist interpretation hinges upon the book of Revelation being written no later than spring, A.D. 67, suggesting that the whole eschatological system of preterism would collapse if Revelation was not written by that time.<sup>16</sup> Milton S. Terry, an early date advocate, also recognizes that the Neronian date of the book is essential to the preterist system:

The great importance of ascertaining the historical standpoint of an author is notably illustrated by the controversy over the date of the Apocalypse of John. If that prophetic book was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, a number of its particular allusions must most naturally be understood as referring to that city and its fall. If, however, it was written at the end of the reign of Domitian (about A.D. 96), as many have believed, another system of interpretation is necessary to explain the historical allusions.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> A discussion of the various approaches to interpreting Revelation will be provided below.

<sup>13</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 3.

<sup>14</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Beast of Revelation* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2002), 245.

<sup>15</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>17</sup> Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (New York, NY: Phillips & Hunt, 1885), 237. Also cited in Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 20.

Other late date proponents have identified the reliance of an early date for Revelation as the central weakness to the preterist position.<sup>18</sup> As a consequence, there is a need for presenting a thoughtful defense of the Neronic date that analyzes the major arguments from both date theories. This defense is crucial to addressing the opposition to the Neronic date of Revelation which is seen as foundational to the preterist system.

### *Approaches to Revelation*

There are four basic approaches to interpreting the book of Revelation: historicism, preterism, futurism, and idealism.<sup>19</sup> Historicism interprets Revelation as a pre-written history spanning from John's time to the world's culmination.<sup>20</sup> This view suggests that Revelation is an unfolding narrative detailing God's plan. Preterism interprets the book's prophecies as past events, though future for the original author, and having been mostly fulfilled in the first century with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple.<sup>21</sup> This viewpoint contends that the major events documented in the book of Revelation have already transpired, and the passage of time has, in large part, seen the fulfillment of the majority of its prophecies.

Futurism focuses on God's triumph, with Revelation symbolizing successive church ages leading to the "rapture" and future events.<sup>22</sup> The core idea behind the futurist perspective is that

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas D. Ice, "The Date of the Book of Revelation," *Article Archives*, 75 (May 2009): 1. [https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/pretrib\\_arch/75](https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/pretrib_arch/75)

<sup>19</sup> Hitchcock posits five basic approaches, although it is worth noting that one of these, eclecticism, is essentially a modified version of idealism and is not typically considered as a basic approach. Similarly, both full-preterism and partial-preterism can be seen as variations within the broader preterist approach. See Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 7-8.

<sup>20</sup> Steve Gregg, *Revelation: Four Views, Revised & Updated: A Parallel Commentary* (1997, reprint, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 13.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Stephen S. Smalley, *Thunder and Love: John's Revelation and John's Community* (1994, reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), 146.

the majority of the prophetic events described in the book of Revelation are anticipated to occur in the future, with a literal fulfillment. Idealism views Revelation as symbolizing principles conveying timeless truths rather than specific historical events.<sup>23</sup> Essentially, Idealism maintains that Revelation offers universal truths and not just a record of facts.

### **Comments Regarding Full-Preterism**

As this present study contends that the book of Revelation predates A.D. 70 and that its symbolic events are representative of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple, it is necessary to offer a brief discussion of the preterist interpretive framework adopted within this dissertation. Sam Storms, a prominent New Testament scholar, notes that some proponents of an extreme preterist interpretive approach, often referred to as hyper or full-preterism, assert that the Second Coming of Christ occurred in A.D. 70.<sup>24</sup> According to their view, the *Parousia*, the Second Coming of Christ, constituted a judgment against Israel, leading to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple, but it did not involve a visible return of Jesus to the earth. They contend that this event also encompassed the fulfillment of the final resurrection, final judgment, and the establishment of the new heavens and new earth.<sup>25</sup> For example, J. Stuart Russell, a full-preterist advocate, explains:

We conclude, therefore, that all the parts of our Lord's prediction refer to the same period and the same event; that the whole prophecy is one and indivisible, resting upon the same foundation of divine authority. Further, that all that was cognisable by the human senses is proved to have been fulfilled, and, therefore, we are not only warranted, but bound to assume the fulfillment of the remainder as not only credible, but certain... We are compelled, therefore, by all these considerations, and chiefly by regard for the authority of Him whose word cannot be broken, to conclude that the *Parousia*, or second coming of Christ, with its connected and concomitant events, did take place, according to the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor Imprint, 2020), 261.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 262.



Saviour's own prediction, at the period when Jerusalem was destroyed, and before the passing away of 'that generation.'<sup>26</sup>

Keith Mathison observes that some authors have provided thorough critiques of full-preterism, characterizing it as a heretical belief system situated outside the boundaries of "orthodox Christianity."<sup>27</sup> He notes that this critique seems to be "valid," as traditional Christian eschatology has consistently encompassed the belief in the "future visible coming of Jesus" for the universal judgment of humanity and the "future bodily resurrection" of all individuals.<sup>28</sup> In light of their rejection of these theological doctrines, full-preterists have effectively positioned themselves outside the theological framework of historic Christianity and are accordingly regarded as holding heretical beliefs.<sup>29</sup> The preterist perspective advocated in this dissertation aligns with orthodox Christianity and specifically falls within the partial-preterist category of the preterist approach as it sees the Second Coming of Christ, the final resurrection, and the final judgment as future events.

### *Methodology and Chapter Outline*

To adequately refute the arguments presented by Hitchcock and other proponents of the late date, while simultaneously affirming the authenticity of the Neronian date, this study will concentrate on two key argumentative aspects. First, it will develop upon the arguments that lend support to the early date and will substantiate them with additional research. Second, this study

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<sup>26</sup> James Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: A Critical Inquiry Into the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming* (London, UK: Daldy, Isbister & Co., 1878), 548-549.

<sup>27</sup> P. Andrew Sandlin contends that the rejection of essential biblical principles places full-preterism in line with historical groups like the ancient Gnostics and anti-supernaturalistic liberals. This positioning signifies a divergence from the doctrinal consensus set by mainstream Reformation confessions. Keith A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1999), 244; P. Andrew Sandlin, *A Postmillennial Primer: Basics of Optimistic Eschatology* (1997, Chalcedon Foundation, reprint, 2023), 56. For a thorough critique of full-preterism, see Keith A. Mathison, *When Shall These Things Be?: A Reformed Response to Hyper-Preterism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

will systematically address and dismantle the arguments against the early date, leaving no room for ambiguity. Through this approach, the dissertation endeavors not only to present the rationale underlying the preference for the Neronian date but also to provide a steadfast defense against the assertions made by proponents of the Domitianic date, specifically that of Hitchcock.

## **Methodology**

Regarding the methodology to interpreting biblical books, Gentry posits that the fundamental principle of hermeneutics is the precise determination of a written work's original date of composition.<sup>30</sup> He notes that this principle applies equally to the sacred texts found in Scripture as it does to any other piece of literature.<sup>31</sup> By accurately determining the date of a work's composition, scholars can better interpret and understand its original context and intention. As mentioned in Louis Berkhof's manual on hermeneutics:

A word is never fully understood until it is apprehended as a living word, i.e., as it originated in the soul of the author... It is impossible to understand an author and to interpret his words correctly unless he is seen against the proper historical background... It will be incumbent on [the Exegete] to reconstruct, as far as possible, from the historical data at hand, and with the aid of historical hypotheses, the environment in which the particular writings under consideration originated.<sup>32</sup>

The essence of the Berkhof's principle is that in order to comprehend an author and interpret their words accurately, it is essential to place them within their appropriate historical context. Those engaged in exegetical work must strive to reconstruct, utilizing historical evidence and plausible conjectures, the setting in which the specific writings they are examining came into being. Berkhof further observes:

For the correct understanding of a writing or discourse, it is of the utmost importance to know for whom it was first of all intended... The writer of necessity took into account

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<sup>30</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 19.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation: Sacred Hermeneutics* (1950, reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1964), 114-115. See also Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 19. Brackets not my own.

their geographical, historical, and social position, their industrial and commercial relations, their educational and social advantages, crasies, prejudices, and peculiar habits of thought... The condition of the original readers not only determines the general character of the writing, but also explains many of its particulars.<sup>33</sup>

To truly understand a piece of writing, it is essential to determine its primary audience.

The writer, in creating his work, inevitably considered the specific context of his readers, including their geographical, historical, and social circumstances, as well as their economic, educational, and cultural backgrounds. The condition of the original readers plays a fundamental role in shaping the overall nature of the writing and also accounts for many specific details within it. In essence, Berkhof emphasizes that the audience's context is key to comprehending the purpose and nuances of a written work.

As noted by Hitchcock, the dating of biblical books involves the evaluation of two main categories of evidence: internal and external.<sup>34</sup> External evidence, as its name implies, encompasses source material beyond the specific book in question.<sup>35</sup> In the context of this study, external evidence refers to sources other than the book of Revelation itself. Given that the support for the Domitianic date heavily relies on external evidence, this study must conduct an examination of external sources alongside an analysis of the book of Revelation. It will be concluded that a thorough examination of both the relevant internal and external evidence points to the Neronic date as the most plausible theory.

## **Chapter Outline**

Concerning the structure being utilized, this study comprises five chapters that aim to provide a well-reasoned defense of the Neronic date and a critical analysis of the Domitianic

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 124-125.

<sup>34</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 9.

<sup>35</sup> Sproul, *The Last Days*, 152.

date. The defense of the Neronian date will involve addressing Hitchcock's criticisms of Gentry's argumentation.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the dissertation will scrutinize Hitchcock's key arguments for the Domitianic date and provide a critique of these arguments. This first chapter serves as the introduction and outlines the methodology and assumptions that will guide the research in subsequent chapters and includes a literature review of the pertinent arguments made by advocates of both dating theories.

Chapter two of this dissertation will provide an analysis of the five earliest external sources from the first and second centuries that pertain to the date of Revelation. These sources include Papias of Hierapolis (c. A.D. 60-130), *The Shepherd of Hermas* (c. A.D. 85), Hegesippus (c. A.D. 110-180), Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (c. A.D. 120-202), and Clement of Alexandria (c. A.D. 150-215). Since these sources are among the earliest relevant to the topic at hand, an examination of their input is vital to the debate on the date of Revelation.<sup>37</sup> The external evidence for the dating of the book is generally considered the most persuasive argument in favor of a Domitianic date.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, it is imperative to assess the reliability of these sources to determine their significance to the debate.

The third chapter of this dissertation will provide an examination of eleven additional external sources, which date from the late-second century to the early-tenth century. These sources are often featured in scholarly discussions surrounding the date of Revelation and

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<sup>36</sup> According to Hitchcock, *Before Jerusalem Fell* is considered as the "standard presentation" for the Neronian date and therefore it must be adequately defended in its assertions. See Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 9.

<sup>37</sup> The date of *The Shepherd of Hermas* is widely disputed and is discussed in detail below in the relevant section of this study. However, Jonathan Bernier, an early date advocate, argues that *The Shepherd* was likely completed no earlier than A.D 60 and no later than A.D 125. See Jonathan Bernier, *Rethinking the Dates of the New Testament: The Evidence for Early Composition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022), 266.

<sup>38</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 41.

therefore require consideration.<sup>39</sup> The chapter will support Gentry's arguments for an early date by enhancing his argumentation with further evidence related to these sources. Additionally, the study will engage with Hitchcock's critiques of the Neronic date, as well as his defense of the Domitianic date. Each external source will be assessed and evaluated for their reliability and credibility to determine their potential contribution to the debate.

Chapter four of this study will provide an analysis of the essential internal evidence that supports the Neronic date for the book of Revelation. To accomplish this, the chapter will explore various relevant topics, including the dual imagery of the beast in Revelation. For instance, some passages apply the beast to a specific individual, such as Revelation 13:18, which exhorts the audience to "calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man" (ESV). In contrast, other passages apply the beast generically to represent a kingdom, as in the description of the beast having seven heads that symbolize seven kings (Rev. 13:1; 17:10-11). This chapter will present evidence supporting Gentry's assertion that Nero Caesar represents the specific identity of the beast, while the Roman Empire embodies its generic identity.<sup>40</sup>

Moreover, this chapter will focus on additional internal evidence supporting the early date theory including a detailed examination of Revelation's thematic emphasis, its relevance to its intended audience, the various elements that appear to indicate that the Second Temple was still standing during Revelation's composition, and other relevant topics central to the ongoing

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>40</sup> Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 10-14.

debate.<sup>41</sup> This chapter holds a critical place in the study, as the internal evidence is widely viewed as the “fundamental” basis for advancing the early date theory.<sup>42</sup>

Chapter five summarizes the internal and external evidence and concludes that the early date theory is the most probable date of Revelation’s composition. It encompasses an examination of additional arguments posed by Hitchcock, followed by a defense in favor of the Neronian date. Additionally, it includes a brief exposition of the millennium in Revelation 20 from the postmillennial perspective. Ultimately, this chapter serves as a summary of the evidence presented throughout the study.

### *Assumptions*

This dissertation is concerned with the specific topic of the composition date for the book of Revelation. As a result, certain assumptions regarding the text must be made. For the purpose of this study, three key assumptions will be established: (1) that Revelation is an inspired and canonical text, (2) that the author of the book is the Apostle John, and (3) that there is a sense of unity in the book.<sup>43</sup> It is essential to consider the rationale behind the establishment of these assumptions in this dissertation.

First, if Revelation is not to be considered as a divinely inspired document within the canon of Scripture, it could be argued that proving a Neronian date for the book is irrelevant. The significance of determining the composition date of Revelation hinges upon its status as a

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<sup>41</sup> The chapter will also briefly analyze additional texts from the Old and New Testaments, including Daniel’s prophecies and the Olivet Discourse to illustrate the unity of both Testaments in prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple in A.D. 70.

<sup>42</sup> David Chilton argues that the internal evidence is important as it demonstrates a composition date of Revelation prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 113; David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (1985, reprint, Tyler, TX: Dominion Press, 1994), 4.

<sup>43</sup> Hitchcock’s dissertation relies on the same three assumptions. See Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 10. Gentry also incorporates these assumptions into his work. See Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 21-24.

divinely inspired document. If it is not considered as such, then the importance of establishing its date diminishes in comparison to other texts that have the consensus of being regarded as divinely inspired books. For example, whether John's references point to Emperor Nero, the Roman Empire, or another literal beast thousands of years into the future, without its canonical status, Revelation would essentially be relegated to the realm of Christian fiction.

Second, if the author of the book is not the Apostle John, then much of the external source material would be rendered irrelevant as they hinge on the Apostle's authorship.<sup>44</sup> If the book was not written by the Apostle, and if it is not considered divinely inspired, then the book could have been composed after the events it describes or it could have undergone revisions after those events.<sup>45</sup> The apocalyptic genre, in which Revelation belongs, is usually pseudonymous and often purports to have been written prior to the events it depicts.<sup>46</sup> In essence, without embracing the initial two assumptions of this study, it is likely that the book of Revelation was not written to portray events yet to come. Instead, it would solely function as a depiction of historical occurrences and attempt to present itself as having been composed prior to those very events.<sup>47</sup> This dissertation operates under the assumption that the book of Revelation was

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<sup>44</sup> Elwell's commentary offers a concise argument for the Apostle John as the author: The author of Revelation identifies himself as John, mentioning his exile to Patmos due to his faith (Rev. 1:1-9). Various attempts have been made to pinpoint his identity within the New Testament. The possibilities include John the Baptist, the son of Zebedee, the father of Peter and Andrew, and John Mark. Among these, John the apostle emerges as the most probable candidate. External evidence supports this hypothesis: John's presence in Asia Minor, similarities between Revelation and the Gospel of John (assuming both were written by John the apostle), the Greek style in Revelation suggesting a non-native Greek speaker, and early church fathers linking the author of Revelation to the Apostle John. See Elwell, *Commentary*, 1198.

<sup>45</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, a prominent New Testament scholar who does not identify as a Christian, posits that the author of Revelation was not the Apostle John. Instead, he believes it was a different Christian who also bore the name John. He also notes that some scholars argue that portions of Revelation were composed in the A.D. 60s. However, he believes it was completed around A.D. 95. See Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 469-470.

<sup>46</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 260.

<sup>47</sup> While this argument could potentially strengthen the preterist perspective, which interprets the events in Revelation as pertaining to Nero and the Jerusalem's destruction, it is worth noting that the objective of this study is

composed in the first century by the Apostle John and it addresses contemporary events historical to that period prior to them actually having occurred.

Third, the assumption of unity in the book will be maintained throughout this study. The significance of this assumption lies in the presence of recurring motifs, consistent themes, and a clear narrative arc that enables readers to comprehend the author's intended meaning and purpose.<sup>48</sup> Given the narrow focus of this dissertation, it is necessary to make these three key assumptions, as the investigation of each topic is beyond the scope of this study. To ensure that the findings of this dissertation are valid and reliable, these assumptions are essential to the success of the research.

### *Literature Review*

The purpose of this literature review is to examine and evaluate the existing body of scholarly work related to the dating of the book of Revelation. Through a concise survey of relevant literature, this review intends to highlight some of the pertinent publications of prominent scholars from both the late date and early date advocacy. While conducting a review of all publications regarding the dating of Revelation exceeds the scope of this current study, it is necessary to provide a general overview of the perspectives held by these two groups. This combination of scholarly viewpoints will serve as a foundation for the subsequent research and analysis presented in the dissertation, contributing to a deeper understanding of the dating of Revelation and its implications within the field of biblical scholarship.

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not to engage in arguments regarding the book's inspiration or its canonical status. Instead, this study will operate under the assumption that Revelation was composed prior to the events it portrays.

<sup>48</sup> According to Elwell, Revelation exhibits a remarkable unity throughout, with approximately 350 allusions, or more, to the Old Testament, which contribute to its coherence from start to finish. See Elwell, *Commentary*, 1197.



## Late Date Advocates: Alphabetical by Last Name

David E. Aune proposes a synthesis of the late and early date views for the book of Revelation. He suggests that the final edition was likely completed during the end of Domitian's reign or early in Trajan's reign.<sup>49</sup> However, Aune also argues that the book's initial edition had its origins a "generation earlier," drawing on "written and oral apocalyptic traditions" dating back to the A.D. 60s or earlier.<sup>50</sup> From Aune's perspective, this points out Revelation's intricate history, merging late and early date elements within its composition.

G. K. Beale, in his commentary of the Greek text of Revelation, emphasizes the absence of decisive singular arguments favoring either the early or late date for the book. Instead, he contends that while the early date remains a possibility, most of the evidence collectively leans towards supporting the late date theory.<sup>51</sup> Beale's inclination is towards the late date, primarily owing to the traditions of the early church.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, he recognizes the possibility that the early date may indeed be the correct date.

R. H. Charles, on the other hand, contends that the late date for the book of Revelation is to be preferred primarily based on his belief that the book lacks internal unity.<sup>53</sup> Charles suggests that if the book exhibited a clear and absolute unity, a date around A.D. 67 would be plausible.<sup>54</sup> However, he disputes the presence of such unity within the text and asserts, "In the New

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<sup>49</sup> David E. Aune, *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation 1-5*, vol. 52A (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), lviii.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>51</sup> Beale points out that the historical context of Christians living under Domitian's rule raises questions, as evidence suggests that Domitian's reign may have been benevolent and less tyrannical than previously believed. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 4.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> R. H. Charles, *Studies in the Apocalypse* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1913), 58.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 57.

Testament Apocalypse there is not that rigid unity of authorship and consistency of detail that the past has presupposed.”<sup>55</sup> Consequently, Charles opts for a later composition date for the book of Revelation.

Donald Guthrie holds to the late date theory because of the weight of external evidence supporting it.<sup>56</sup> However, he states in his *New Testament Introduction* that determining the exact date of the book of Revelation remains uncertain.<sup>57</sup> While most scholars lean towards a date during the reign of Domitian, primarily due to Irenaeus’ testimony, this perspective is contingent on the reliability of external sources for dating. He posits that if such external testimony is deemed unreliable, then there “would seem to be no conclusive reason for not dating the book at a time shortly after the suicide of Nero.”<sup>58</sup> In essence, Guthrie is saying that the date of Revelation remains a topic of debate and cannot be definitively dated one way or another.

Thomas D. Ice firmly advocates for the late date of Revelation. His rationale stems from the lineage of historical transmission: Irenaeus, a disciple of Polycarp (c. A.D. 69-155), who, in turn, was a disciple of the Apostle John.<sup>59</sup> Ice continually places substantial reliance on Irenaeus as the justification for supporting the late date. He emphasizes the direct connection between the author of Revelation and Irenaeus, which, he argues, bolsters the credibility of Irenaeus and his account.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>56</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (1961, reprint, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 956.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 962.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ice, “The Date,” 1. See also H. Wayne House and Thomas D. Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1988), 250-258.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

William Milligan argued in favor of the late date for Revelation, citing the tradition stemming from early church fathers, notably Irenaeus, who may have suggested that John received his apocalyptic vision at the end of Domitian's reign.<sup>61</sup> According to Milligan, the external evidence, as represented by Irenaeus' testimony, is so compelling that any argument for an early date must primarily draw from internal textual evidence.<sup>62</sup> As a result, Milligan maintains that the prevailing church tradition and the consensus view supporting the later date of Revelation is accurate.

Leon Morris argues that one of the reasons for dating the book of Revelation during the reign of Emperor Domitian is the presence of indications within the text that suggest the practice of emperor worship (Rev. 13:4, 12, 15-16; 14:9,11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4).<sup>63</sup> He notes that the prevalent belief is that emperor worship had become widespread during Domitian's reign. However, Morris acknowledges the complexity of accurately dating these references. He points out that the worship of emperors, such as Julius Caesar and Augustus, had existed before Domitian's time.<sup>64</sup> Emperors like Caligula even demanded to be worshipped. Moreover, from the time of Nero onward, the Roman imperial cult seemed to grow. Morris grants that the references to emperor worship in Revelation could potentially be understood within the context of Nero's reign, but that they most likely refer to Domitian.<sup>65</sup>

Robert H. Mounce, in his commentary, supports the late date theory for the book of Revelation due to two main factors: external evidence provided by Irenaeus' statement and

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<sup>61</sup> William Milligan, *Discussions on the Apocalypse* (London, UK: MacMillan and Co., 1893), 83.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>63</sup> Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John: An Introduction and Commentary* (1969, reprint, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 35.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

internal evidence pointing to the presence of emperor worship.<sup>66</sup> While he acknowledges that emperor worship had already taken root during Nero's reign, Mounce contends that Nero's persecution of Christians was not motivated by religious reasons but rather as a scapegoat for the Rome fire incident.<sup>67</sup> He concludes by emphasizing the significance of Irenaeus' statement, which reinforces his preference for the late date theory.<sup>68</sup>

Arthur S. Peake acknowledges that the argument in favor of the book of Revelation being composed during Domitian's reign may have been somewhat exaggerated, but he ultimately concedes that it is "probably" accurate.<sup>69</sup> Peake interprets Irenaeus' statement as suggesting that the apocalyptic vision occurred toward the conclusion of Domitian's rule.<sup>70</sup> This interpretation appears to be the factor influencing Peake's preference for the later dating of Revelation, as he asserts that the external evidence mostly supports the later date while the early date can nearly only rely on internal evidence.<sup>71</sup>

J. P. M. Sweet, in his commentary, expresses reservations about the conclusiveness of the evidence regarding the date of Revelation. He contends that the idea that the book clearly identifies the reigning emperor by decoding the seven-headed beast is not a definitive conclusion.<sup>72</sup> Sweet interprets the numbers as being symbolic, representing the entirety of Roman power historically, rather than pinpointing a specific emperor.<sup>73</sup> Sweet refers to Irenaeus'

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<sup>66</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of Revelation, Revised* (1977, reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 16.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>69</sup> Arthur S. Peake, *The Revelation of John* (London, UK: Holborn Publishing House, 1919), 96.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-77.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>72</sup> J. P. M. Sweet, *Westminster Pelican Commentaries: Revelation* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1979), 21.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

testimony, recognizing it as the unanimous view in early Christian tradition, however, he acknowledges the possibility that Irenaeus may have been mistaken.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, Sweet, like many proponents of the late date theory, ultimately concludes that while “the earlier date *may* be right [emphasis his],” the internal evidence is not strong enough to offset the tradition passed down from Irenaeus.<sup>75</sup>

### **Early Date Advocates: Alphabetical by Last Name**

F. F. Bruce suggests that the identification of the emperors in the book of Revelation, symbolized by the seven-headed beast, remains uncertain, but it is probable that the text was composed during Vespasian’s reign (A.D. 69-79).<sup>76</sup> He argues that many people at that time expected Nero to make a return and challenge Vespasian’s rule. However, it was Domitian who succeeded Vespasian and later came to be linked with the “eighth” emperor in the book. From Bruce’s perspective, it is necessary to emphasize that Revelation itself anticipates the arrival of this “eighth” and ultimate emperor in the future.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, it could not have been written under Domitian, if Domitian was intended to be understood as the “eighth” emperor.

George Edmundson suggested that the use of “incendiary language” in Revelation during this period would lead to harsh reprisals by those responsible for maintaining order after A.D. 69.<sup>78</sup> Referring to Tertullian, Edmundson notes that John narrowly escaped death and was exiled from Rome in early A.D. 70 under a sentence passed in Domitian’s name, who was serving

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>76</sup> F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (New York, NY: Doubleday Publishing Company, 1980), 411.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> George Edmundson, *The Church in Rome in the First Century* (London, UK: Longmans, Green and Co., 1913), 170-171. See also John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000), 249-253.

temporarily as Caesar while his father was occupied in Alexandria.<sup>79</sup> In June, Domitian left Rome, and shortly thereafter, Vespasian arrived, intending to govern with “moderation and clemency.” The following year, he appointed M. Cocceius Nerva, a future emperor, as his consul. Edmundson suggests that Vespasian sought a skilled lawyer like Nerva to handle the numerous sentences of exile. He proposes the possibility that one of the sentences revoked by Nerva was the one exiling John to Patmos. John was banished by Domitian and reinstated by Nerva around A.D. 70. If Nerva had indeed ordered his release, John’s exile would have lasted approximately one year. Edmundson concludes that the external evidence, initially seen as unfavorable to the early date for Revelation, now supports this date.<sup>80</sup>

Frederic W. Farrar argued in favor of the earlier dating of Revelation for three main reasons. First, he questioned the interpretation of Irenaeus’ statement and suggested that Irenaeus might have been mistaken.<sup>81</sup> Second, Farrar pointed to Nero’s evil character, which he believed aligned well with the description of the beast in Revelation.<sup>82</sup> Third, Farrar contended that the eleventh chapter of Revelation implied that the Second Temple was still standing at the time of the book’s composition.<sup>83</sup> This suggests that Revelation had to have been written before A.D. 70 when the Temple was destroyed.

F. J. A. Hort posits that the timing of the book of Revelation and its authorship are interconnected. His argument suggests that the events, particularly the fall of Jerusalem,

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 171; Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heretics*, 36; See also Tacitus, *Histories* 4.2; Suetonius, *Domitian* 1.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Frederic W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity* (1884, reprint, London, UK: Cassell and Co., Limited, 1909), 408.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 411.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 412.

necessitate a considerable passage of time between the writing of the book of Revelation and the Gospel of John.<sup>84</sup> Hort finds it plausible to believe that an unknown John wrote Revelation than to attribute both the Gospel of John and Revelation to the same extreme old age of the apostle.<sup>85</sup> In light of this, he argues that considering an early date for Revelation negates the requirement for such a strict timeline constraint.

J. B. Lightfoot, in his response to the author of *Supernatural Religion: An Inquiry into the Reality of Divine Revelation*, strongly supports an early date for the composition of the book of Revelation.<sup>86</sup> He criticizes the idea that the book of Revelation makes a reference to the Apostle Paul in the context of evaluating individuals who claim to be apostles but are not genuine within the Church of Ephesus.<sup>87</sup> Lightfoot contends that this interpretation is problematic because it contradicts the widely held consensus that Revelation was written after the death of Paul, specifically around A.D. 68.<sup>88</sup>

John A. T. Robinson agrees with the traditional rendering of Irenaeus' statement which indicates that Revelation was written during the later part of Domitian's reign.<sup>89</sup> However, Robinson points out three key issues raised by Irenaeus, which, he states, modern scholars find

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<sup>84</sup> F. J. A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John: I-III* (London, UK: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1908), xl.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> The work under discussion, *Supernatural Religion: An Inquiry into the Reality of Divine Revelation* (Detroit, MI: Rose-Belford Publishing Co., 1879), was initially released without an identified author. However, over time, it has come to be associated with Walter Richard Cassels, and in later editions and reprints of the book, his name is frequently included as the author.

<sup>87</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, *Essays on the Work Entitled Supernatural Religion* (London, UK: MacMillan and Co., 1893), 14.

<sup>88</sup> Notably, Lightfoot believed the Apostle John to be the author of both the Fourth Gospel and Revelation. He highlights a substantial chronological gap between them and notes that Revelation, being written around A.D. 68, represents the end of John's "Hebraic period," which was characterized by Eastern and Aramaic-speaking contexts. On the contrary, he remarks that the Fourth Gospel, per tradition, was written later, possibly twenty to thirty years afterward, during John's residence in Ephesus which was a center of Greek culture. Therefore, this would account for the differences and similarities between the texts, but it also supports the early date of Revelation. Ibid., 132; See also J. B. Lightfoot, *Biblical Essays* (London, UK: MacMillan and Co., 1893), 52.

<sup>89</sup> Robinson, *Redating*, 221-222.

challenging to accept collectively: (1) the claim that the same author wrote both the Fourth Gospel and Revelation, (2) the attribution of authorship to the Apostle John, and (3) the dating of Revelation at the conclusion of Domitian's rule.<sup>90</sup> Robinson also raises doubts about the possibility of a "nonagenarian," even one ten years younger than Jesus, producing a work as "vigorous" as Revelation.<sup>91</sup> Consequently, Robinson posits that Irenaeus' tradition presents a trade-off of credibility: "So if Irenaeus' tradition on authorship is strong, his tradition on dating is weakened, and *vice versa*."<sup>92</sup>

Philip Schaff, in his *History of the Christian Church*, contends that while some external evidence (Irenaeus) points to a later date for the book of Revelation, internal evidence and historical context make a stronger case for an earlier composition, specifically between the years A.D. 68 and A.D. 70.<sup>93</sup> This argument is based on factors such as the existence of the Second Temple at the time of writing, the timing relative to Nero's death as the fifth Roman emperor, and the thematic alignment of the book with historical events of the time.<sup>94</sup> Schaff further argues that this earlier timeframe offers a plausible explanation for the contrasting styles between the fiery energy of Revelation and the calm tone of the Fourth Gospel, attributing this difference to the aging process of John, the presumed author of both texts.<sup>95</sup>

Stephen S. Smalley suggests dating the book of Revelation to Vespasian's reign just before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, attributing its apocalyptic message to the political

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols. (1910, reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 1:834.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 1:835-837.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 1:834.



context.<sup>96</sup> He argues that even scholars favoring a later date admit elements in the text, like references to Nero's persecution in Revelation 13 and 17, indicate possible origins during Vespasian's time, possibly with subsequent editing.<sup>97</sup> Alternatively, it might have been written during Domitian's rule with references to an earlier era. Yet, Smalley suggests that if John began during Vespasian's reign, these alternative theories become unnecessary, except for the potential of later editorial contributions.<sup>98</sup>

R. C. Sproul maintained the early dating of the book of Revelation for several reasons. First, he interpreted the time-frame references as alluding to the destruction of Jerusalem. He argued that the book must have been authored before this event; otherwise, it would be considered as a "fraud," as it would have been composed after the predicted events occurred.<sup>99</sup> Second, Sproul initiated his list of Roman kings with Julius Caesar and identified the sixth king as Nero.<sup>100</sup> This interpretation suggests that the book was written during the mid-late A.D. 60s. Third, Sproul contended that the presence of the Second Temple in Revelation 11 indicates that John had to have written Revelation prior to its destruction in A.D. 70.<sup>101</sup>

J. Christian Wilson argues that in the 19th century, most scholars, including J. B. Lightfoot, believed that the book of Revelation was written before A.D. 70.<sup>102</sup> He notes that in the early 20th century, some scholars argued for a later date, referencing Lightfoot's arguments

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<sup>96</sup> Smalley, *Thunder and Love*, 49; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 3.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Sproul, *The Last Days*, 151.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 158-160.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 160-161.

<sup>102</sup> John Christian Wilson, "The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation," *New Testament Studies* 39, no. 4 (October 1993): 587.

about Domitian's persecution of Christians.<sup>103</sup> However, this later dating theory is questioned because while there is ample historical evidence of Christian persecution under Nero, there's little documentation for Domitian's persecution, despite Lightfoot's research. Roman and early Christian historians hardly mention Domitian's persecution, and Eusebius, writing later, only vaguely refers to it, lacking the detailed accounts of Nero's persecution.<sup>104</sup>

## Summary

The late date perspective for the book of Revelation is supported by several scholars (listed above as Late Date Advocates) who argue that the book was likely composed toward the end of Domitian's reign or early in Trajan's reign. They rely heavily on external evidence, particularly the testimony of early church fathers like Irenaeus, who suggest a connection between the author and the later date. Proponents of this view emphasize the presence of indications within the text suggesting emperor worship, which aligns with the historical context of Domitian's rule.<sup>105</sup> While some acknowledge the possibility of references to Nero, they contend that the prevailing evidence favors the late date. Additionally, scholars in favor of the late date point to the book's perceived lack of internal unity and argue that a later composition better accounts for the intricate history of Revelation's development, which merges elements from both late and early traditions.<sup>106</sup>

Conversely, several scholars and theologians (listed above as Early Date Advocates) present compelling arguments for adhering to an early date for the composition of Revelation. Their reasons include the anticipation of Nero's return during Vespasian's reign, John's exile

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 587-588.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 589.

<sup>105</sup> Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, 35; Mounce, *Revelation*, 16.

<sup>106</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 19-20; Charles, *Studies*, 58.

during Domitian's rule but subsequent reinstatement, questions about Irenaeus' interpretation, alignment of Nero's character with the beast's description, implications regarding the existence of the Second Temple, the need for a considerable time gap between Revelation and the Gospel of John, doubts about Irenaeus' tradition, internal evidence, and thematic alignment with historical events. These arguments collectively challenge the traditional late date of Revelation, highlighting the complexity and debate surrounding the book's origin. The earliest external source material for dating the book will be discussed in the following chapter.

## Chapter Two: Earliest External Evidence

### *Papias of Hierapolis (c. A.D. 60-130)*

Both Gentry and Hitchcock acknowledge that most scholars begin their examination of external evidence with the writings of Irenaeus, who is considered the earliest witness for the Domitianic date of Revelation.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Hitchcock deviates from this approach and chooses to begin with Hegesippus, whose writings precede Irenaeus by roughly thirty years.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the original writings of Hegesippus are no longer extant. However, the church historian Eusebius (c. A.D. 260-340) has preserved some of Hegesippus' works in his own *Ecclesiastical History*.<sup>3</sup>

This present study begins the examination of external evidence with the testimony of Papias, who predates Hegesippus by nearly fifty years, and is considered the earliest witness for the Neronian date of Revelation. The fact that Papias predates Irenaeus by approximately eighty years is notably more remarkable than Hegesippus, who predates Irenaeus by roughly thirty years. Unfortunately, Papias' original works are also lost, but they are likewise recorded in the writings of other church fathers, including Eusebius.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, this study establishes Papias as

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<sup>1</sup> Gentry outlines four reasons why most scholars choose to begin with Irenaeus: (1) Irenaeus appears to directly address the issue of Revelation's date, (2) he holds importance as a church father whose insights are valuable, (3) his writings date to approximately a century after the destruction of Jerusalem, (4) Irenaeus claims to have had a connection with Polycarp, who, in turn, had a connection to the Apostle John, the author of Revelation. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 45-46; Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 11.

<sup>2</sup> Hitchcock does not interact substantially with Papias or *The Shepherd of Hermas* in his dissertation. Similarly, Gentry does not thoroughly engage with Hegesippus as a witness for the Domitianic date. However, Gentry cites Hegesippus' statements concerning the destruction of the Second Temple to support his assertion that early Christian literature perceived the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple as crucial events. Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 11; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 190.

<sup>3</sup> The pertinent statement made by Irenaeus is also no longer extant in its original Greek form. Instead, Eusebius has preserved Irenaeus' statement in its original language in his *Ecclesiastical History* (3.18.3).

<sup>4</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 92. See also J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers: The Early Christian Writings of Church Leaders Who Followed Soon After the Apostles of Jesus Christ* (1885, reprint, Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House, 2020), 205.

the earliest evidence for the Neronian date of Revelation, using the same criteria that Hitchcock employs in his dissertation to establish Hegesippus as the earliest witness for the Domitianic date.

### **Usefulness of Papias**

It is noteworthy that Papias, who served as the bishop of Hierapolis, may have been a disciple of the Apostle John and a close friend of Polycarp. Despite the loss of his original works, as stated above, a few crucial fragments of his writing relevant to the topic at hand have been preserved. In them, Papias asserts that the Apostle John died “at the hands of the Jews,” which occurred before the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> If Revelation was authored by the apostle, which is the position assumed in this dissertation, the implication would be that it was written before his death, thus placing its composition prior to A.D. 70.

### **Papias as a Disciple of John**

The debate over whether Papias was a disciple of John the apostle will now be briefly considered. Irenaeus claims Papias learned directly from John (*Against Heresies* 5.33.4), while Eusebius argues that Papias was likely not an apostolic disciple (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39). Papias himself states that he received teachings from “the elders.” According to Lightfoot, the term “elders” clearly implies learning from the apostles as its usage is attested elsewhere in this

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<sup>5</sup> There has been ongoing discussion about the credibility of certain passages in Papias’ writings from a MS. of Georgius Hamartolus (ninth century), which assert that John was slain by the Jews prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that respected scholars, including Lightfoot, have affirmed the authenticity of these passages. Additionally, James Moffatt notes that ancient calendars from the fourth century Syriac attest to the martyrdoms of John and James by the Jews in Jerusalem. Henry B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Indices*, 3rd ed. (London, UK: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1911), clxxx. See also J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers: Revised Texts with Short Introductions and English Translations* (London, UK: MacMillan and Co., 1891), 519, 531; James Moffatt, “The Revelation of St. John the Divine,” In *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, vol. 5, edited by W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951), 596-608; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 92-23.

same manner.<sup>6</sup> Even Eusebius concedes that Papias referred to the apostles as “elders” (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.7).<sup>7</sup> Additionally, Theodore Zahn argues that Papias’ assertion that he was a disciple of John was believed by the Syrian (c. A.D. 350), Rufinus (c. A.D. 400), and Jerome (*Lives of Illustrious Men* 18).<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, this author’s conclusion is that Papias most likely learned from the Apostle John. However, due to uncertainties, and the absence of original texts, the evidence that John died before the destruction of Jerusalem should not be considered as conclusive, although it may be true. Nevertheless, it does provide support to the early date theory, indicating that Papias did not subscribe to the belief that John authored Revelation during the reign of Domitian.

#### *The Shepherd of Hermas (c. A.D. 85)*

One of the most widely read early Christian works was *The Shepherd of Hermas*. During the second and third centuries, this text was reproduced and circulated more extensively than any other noncanonical book, surpassing many of the texts that were later incorporated into the New Testament.<sup>9</sup> The book is structured into three distinct sections, which are traditionally identified as a series of *Visions*, *Mandates*, and *Similitudes*. Ehrman notes that although these sections are

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<sup>6</sup> Lightfoot, *Essays*, 145.

<sup>7</sup> Eusebius also states that Papias learned from the aged daughters of the Apostle Phillip. Edward C. Selwyn, however, rejects the belief that Papias was a disciple of John the apostle. Instead, Selwyn argues that Papias was a hearer of John the Elder. Samuel G. Green, *A Handbook of Church History from the Apostolic Era to the Dawn of the Reformation* (London, UK: The Religious Tract Society, 1904), 122; Edward Carus Selwyn, *The Christian Prophets and the Prophetic Apocalypse* (London, UK: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1900), 237-238. See also Paul L. Maier, *Eusebius: The Church History* (1999, reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2007), 111-114; Robinson, *Redating*, 309.

<sup>8</sup> Theodore Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 3 vols. Translated by John Moore Trout, et.al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1953), 2:452.

<sup>9</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 2 (2003, reprint, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 162.

distinct, there is some overlap among them, with revelatory parables appearing not only in the final section but also in the preceding two sections.<sup>10</sup>

Concerning the topic at hand, *The Shepherd* potentially alludes to an early dating for the book of Revelation if it was written in the first century. While it cannot provide definitive proof, its significance should not be underestimated in the context of the broader evidence presented within this study. In other words, *The Shepherd* may be considered as a contributing piece of evidence for establishing the date of the book of Revelation, but its value is mostly contingent upon the assumption of an early date for *The Shepherd* itself.

### **Date of The Shepherd**

To begin, Origen, Eusebius, and Jerome ascribe the authorship of *The Shepherd* to the Hermas that is mentioned in Romans 16:14 which would likely date to the last two decades of the first century.<sup>11</sup> However, Bernier states that the theory of the Hermas mentioned in *The Shepherd* as being the same Hermas mentioned in Romans should not be employed as grounds to establish a precise dating for the book.<sup>12</sup> J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer propose a date between A.D. 140 and A.D. 150, although they acknowledge that internal evidence most likely suggests a date in the late first century.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, Schaff supports the earlier date and agrees with Origen that the work was likely written by the same Hermas mentioned in Romans.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>11</sup> Notably, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen considered the work to be divinely inspired Scripture. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1867), 319. See also Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 86-89; Robinson, *Redating*, 319-320.

<sup>12</sup> Bernier, *Rethinking*, 271.

<sup>13</sup> Lightfoot and Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 294; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 86-87.

<sup>14</sup> Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 2:688.

Schaff's analysis offers a coherent and logical assessment of the date and authorship of *The Shepherd*, as demonstrated in the following excerpt:

Five opinions are possible. [First,] The author was the friend of Paul to whom he sends greetings in Rom. 16:14, in the year [A.D.] 58. This is the oldest opinion and accounts best for its high authority. [Second,] A contemporary of Clement, presbyter-bishop of Rome, A.D. 92-101. Based upon the testimony of the book itself. [Third,] A brother of Bishop Pius of Rome [c. A.D. 140]. So asserts an unknown author of [c. A.D.] 170 in the Muratorian fragment of the canon. But he may have confounded the older and younger Hermas with the Latin translator. [Fourth,] The book is the work of two or three authors, was begun under Trajan before [A.D.] 112 and completed by the brother of Pius in [A.D.] 140. [Fifth,] Hermas is a fictitious name to lend apostolic authority to the Shepherd. [Sixth,] Barely worth mentioning is the isolated assertion of the Ethiopian version that the apostle Paul wrote the Shepherd under the name of Hermas which was given to him by the inhabitants of Lystra. We adopt the second view, which may be combined with the first. The author calls himself Hermas and professes to be a contemporary of the Roman Clement, who was to send his book to foreign churches. This testimony is clear and must outweigh every other. If the Hermas mentioned by Paul was a young disciple in [A.D.] 58, he may well have lived to the age of Trajan, and he expressly represents himself as an aged man at the time when he wrote.<sup>15</sup>

Lightfoot and Harmer have commented on the statement made by the author of the Muratorian Fragment, as mentioned by Schaff above, and have suggested that it is inconsistent with the mention of Clement as a contemporary.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, they argue that the original Greek text could not have stated that Pius was actually the bishop at the time it was written.<sup>17</sup> Bernier points out that merely mentioning the name Clement does not definitively imply that he was referring to Clement of Rome (c. A.D. 35-99), as Clement was a commonly used name.<sup>18</sup> Simply put, the evidence points to an earlier date for *The Shepherd* than that suggested by the author of the Muratorian Fragment.

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<sup>15</sup> Brackets added by the present author. Ibid., 2:687-689.

<sup>16</sup> Lightfoot and Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 293.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 294.

<sup>18</sup> Bernier, *Rethinking*, 272.



Edmundson places the date of *The Shepherd* during the first decade of the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81-91).<sup>19</sup> As noted by Robinson, Edmundson highlights the correlation between references to “past sufferings” in the text and historical accounts of the “Neronian persecution,” as evident in *Visions* 3.2.1, *Similitudes* 8, 9.19.1, and 9.28.<sup>20</sup> Edmundson argues that Clement, as described in Hermas’ writings, held a subordinate position due to his secretarial duties.<sup>21</sup> He notes that this would imply that Clement was a younger member of the presbyterate before he became the “venerated bishop” of A.D. 96, indicating that his career had not yet peaked during the period in question.

Arthur S. Barnes, a scholar trained at both Oxford and Cambridge, likewise contends for an early dating of *The Shepherd*, approximately A.D. 85, based on the authoritative usage of the work by the early Church.<sup>22</sup> He also questions the reliability of the author of the Muratorian Fragment in supporting a later date. Barnes states, “This book of Hermas has, unfortunately, been assigned to an impossibly late date through an ignorant blunder of the illiterate author of the so-called ‘Muratorian Fragment.’”<sup>23</sup> Barnes asserts that *The Shepherd* should be considered a work of an associate of the apostles because Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Tertullian (c. A.D. 160-220), each referencing it as inspired Scripture, have lent it a certain degree of legitimacy.<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, the dating of this text could be placed within the period of A.D. 75-85.

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<sup>19</sup> Edmundson, *The Church in Rome*, 203.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 215-221; Robinson, *Redating*, 321.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>22</sup> Arthur S. Barnes, *Christianity at Rome in the Apostolic age: An Attempt at Reconstruction of History* (1938, reprint, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1971), 213; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 87-88.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 213.

Moreover, *The Shepherd* ([Visions 3.5.1](#)) contains language that may suggest that some of the apostles were still alive when it was written:

The stones that are square and white and fit at their joints, these are the apostles and bishops and teachers and deacons who have walked according to the holiness of God and have ministered to the elect of God as bishops and teachers and deacons with purity and reverence; some have fallen asleep, while others are still living.<sup>25</sup>

Bernier, however, argues that the ambiguity in the statement makes it difficult to determine whether it refers to some of the apostles as still living.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, Robinson suggests that the passage implies the continued presence of some “church leaders” from the “original generation.”<sup>27</sup> Despite their disagreement, Bernier observes that the ecclesiological principles within *The Shepherd* align closely with those of the first century than the second.<sup>28</sup> He highlights that the passage above mentions apostles, bishops, teachers, and deacons, drawing a connection to Philippians 1:1. Bernier also points out the presence of references to elders who oversee the church but no mention of a monarchical bishop, which would have been characteristic of the mid-second century.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Shepherd’s Use of Revelation**

If one ascertains that *The Shepherd* predates A.D. 95, it will indicate a probable scenario wherein Revelation was authored several decades earlier, specifically during the reign of Nero. This assertion is based upon the fact that *The Shepherd* employs similar imagery to that of Revelation, and it can be inferred that the author of the former had knowledge of the latter’s

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<sup>25</sup> Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (1992, reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 479. Also cited in Bernier, *Rethinking*, 268. See also Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 90.

<sup>26</sup> Bernier, *Rethinking*, 268-269.

<sup>27</sup> Robinson, *Redating*, 321-322.

<sup>28</sup> Bernier, *Rethinking*, 270.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

existence.<sup>30</sup> In fact, it is widely accepted that the author of *The Shepherd* was, indeed, influenced by the book of Revelation, owing to the presence of numerous commonalities between the two texts.<sup>31</sup> Gentry supports this view by citing Charles' observation on the connections between *The Shepherd* and Revelation:

The fact that Hermas used the same imagery as [the Apocalypse] may be rightly used as evidence that he knew it. Thus the Church, *Vis.* ii. 4, is represented by a woman (cf. [Rev] 12:1 sqq.); the enemy of the Church by a beast (θηρίον), *Vis.* 1v. 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.<sup>32</sup>

In sum, *The Shepherd of Hermas* and the book of Revelation share numerous similarities, indicating that Revelation influenced the writer of *The Shepherd*. It is reasonable to assume that *The Shepherd* was composed after Revelation. Likewise, assuming a composition date of the A.D. 80s for *The Shepherd* supports an earlier date for the book of Revelation. This is because for Revelation to have been written, transmitted, and widely circulated in Rome by the A.D. 80s so that it might have an impact on *The Shepherd's* composition, it would imply a date of authorship of Revelation prior to A.D. 70.<sup>33</sup> Although it lends support to the early date theory, the evidence is not conclusive enough to definitively establish the Neronian date for the book.

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<sup>30</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 91.

<sup>31</sup> Moses Stuart, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 2 vols. (Andover, MA: Allen, Morrill and Wardwell, 1845), 1:113; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 931-933; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 90-91.

<sup>32</sup> R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1920), xcvi; Cited in Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 90-91.

<sup>33</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 91-92.

*Hegesippus (c. A.D. 110-180)*

Hegesippus is thought to have been a converted Jew, likely from Palestine, and was an early Christian writer who gathered “memorials” from both oral traditions and written sources from the apostolic and post-apostolic churches.<sup>34</sup> His best-known works are the five books that make up his *Recollections* or *Memoirs* and only exist in fragments. Most of which are recorded by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History*. As mentioned above, Hitchcock asserts that Hegesippus should be regarded as the earliest external source supporting the Domitianic date, considering that he predates Irenaeus by approximately thirty years.<sup>35</sup>

He argues that Hegesippus is meaningful to the study of Revelation’s composition date because Eusebius cites him as a source for the section of his *Ecclesiastical History* that discusses the banishment of the Apostle John to the island of Patmos under Emperor Domitian.<sup>36</sup> Since John is the assumed author of Revelation, this information is germane to the debate regarding its composition date. However, there are some issues with Hitchcock’s arguments that need to be addressed.<sup>37</sup>

For instance, Hitchcock claims that Eusebius “heard or read a story from some source” that prompted him to make statements regarding the cruelty of Domitian.<sup>38</sup> He then states that because Eusebius mentions Hegesippus by name twenty-eight lines later, that must make him the

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<sup>34</sup> Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 2:743.

<sup>35</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 11.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>37</sup> As mentioned in chapter one, Edmundson suggested that John was exiled by Domitian in A.D. 70. However, when Vespasian came to power and appointed Nerva as consul, it is possible that Nerva revoked John’s exile sentence among others. This would mean that John was banished in Domitian’s name and reinstated by Nerva around A.D. 70. While this argument is speculative, it will receive further consideration in chapter three of this dissertation. Edmundson, *The Church in Rome*, 170-171; See also Robinson, *Redating*, 249.

<sup>38</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 13.

source in question. However, the specific passage of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* that mentions John's exile to the island of Patmos reads as follows:

Tradition has it that the apostle and evangelist John was still alive at this time and was condemned to live on the island of Patmos for his testimony to the divine Word. Writing about the number of the name given the Antichrist in Revelation [666 in 13:18], Irenaeus says this about John in Book 5 of his *Against Heresies*.<sup>39</sup>

Eusebius then quotes from Irenaeus immediately after making this statement. It is likely that Eusebius drew this piece of information from Irenaeus, not from Hegesippus. The emphasis of where he drew the information is also placed upon "tradition" and not upon a specified source.

Even if the information was derived from Hegesippus, there is an issue of continuity regarding the cruel actions against Christians. To elaborate, Eusebius first writes on the cruelty of Domitian:

The same Domitian ordered the execution of all who were in David's line, and an old tradition alleges that some heretics accused the descendants of Jude—the brother of the Savior, humanly speaking—claiming that they were of David's family and related to Christ himself. Hegesippus reports this as follows (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.19).<sup>40</sup>

He then proceeds to quote the following information, specifically from Hegesippus, that diminishes the cruelty of Domitian:

Still surviving of the Lord's family were the grandsons of Jude, who was said to be his brother according to the flesh, and they were informed on as being descendants of David. The *evocatus* brought them before Domitian Caesar, who, like Herod, was afraid of the coming of Christ. Domitian asked them if they were descended from David, and they admitted it. Then he asked them how much property and money they had, and they replied that they had only nine thousand denarii between them, half belonging to each. And this, they said, was not in the form of cash but the estimated value of only thirty-nine *plethra* of land, from which they paid taxes and supported themselves from their own labor (3.20).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Maier, *Eusebius*, 93. See Eusebius, [\*Ecclesiastical History\*, 3.18](#).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 94-95.

Eusebius goes on to write that they (the grandsons of Jude) showed their hands and bodies to Domitian to prove their story. After seeing the calluses on their hands and the effects of hard labor on their bodies, “Domitian did not condemn them but, despising them as simple sorts, let them go free and ordered that the persecution against the church cease” (3:20).<sup>42</sup> It is also noteworthy that Eusebius never mentions the deaths of any Christians during Domitian’s persecution.<sup>43</sup>

Overall, Hitchcock’s objective is to establish Hegesippus as the earliest authority supporting the Domitianic date. He constructs his argument around the ambiguous remarks made by Eusebius, who potentially implies the use of Hegesippus as a source in his *Ecclesiastical History*, particularly in the sections concerning Domitian’s practices of banishment. While Hitchcock presents a thoughtful case for this theory, it is also plausible that Eusebius relied on information provided by Irenaeus, as he is also mentioned as a source in those segments.

In fact, Hugh J. Lawlor, a scholar frequently quoted by Hitchcock in support of the argument, maintains that the identification of Hegesippus as the source for Eusebius is not “incontrovertible.”<sup>44</sup> Lawlor asserts that the fragment of Papias carries “great weight,” and if Hegesippus believed his assertions “then he could not have stated that the Apostle was sent to Patmos by Domitian.”<sup>45</sup> Consequently, the attribution of Hegesippus as the earliest source for the Domitianic date, at best, remains a possibility rather than a definitive conclusion. This could explain why most scholars typically cite Irenaeus as the earliest witness for the Domitian date, as mentioned above.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>43</sup> Smalley, *Thunder and Love*, 43.

<sup>44</sup> Hugh J. Lawlor, “Hegesippus and the Apocalypse,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, 8, no. 31 (April 1907): 443.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 444.

*Irenaeus (c. A.D. 120-202)*

Irenaeus was the Bishop of Lyons and is typically considered to be the most important external witness for the proponents of the Domitianic date of Revelation.<sup>46</sup> Notably, it is recorded that he was an acquaintance of Polycarp who *may* have known the Apostle John.<sup>47</sup> This implies that Irenaeus should have received an accurate apostolic tradition through the instruction of Polycarp. Although this claim is possible, some scholars, such as Thomas B. Slater, have questioned its authenticity, pointing out that Polycarp would have been rather young when John died, and Irenaeus would have been exceptionally young when Polycarp died.<sup>48</sup> Slater suggests, “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.”<sup>49</sup>

Hitchcock counters Slater’s assertions by claiming that they lack a substantive foundation for drawing such a conclusion.<sup>50</sup> He contends that when Irenaeus was taught by Polycarp he must have been no less than sixteen years old, considering that Polycarp’s martyrdom occurred in A.D. 156 in Smyrna.<sup>51</sup> Gentry, however, offers an alternative perspective, suggesting that the passage of extensive time might have eroded Irenaeus’ memories of his interactions with Polycarp.<sup>52</sup> While Hitchcock acknowledges the plausibility of this argument, he remains

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<sup>46</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 16; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 45. See also Ice, “The Date,” 1; Milligan, *Discussions*, 93; Peake, *The Revelation of John*, 70-77.

<sup>47</sup> Moffatt argues that Polycarp never refers to the Apostle John as his teacher; in fact, Moffatt states that there is no mention of John whatsoever in Polycarp’s writings. Selwyn posits that Polycarp’s birth year is A.D. 70, thereby suggesting that his association with the Apostle John is tenuous at best. Moffatt, *Revelation*, 609; *The Christian Prophets*, 237; See also Sproul, *The Last Days*, 154.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas B. Slater, “Dating the Apocalypse to John,” *Biblica* 84, no. 2 (2003): 253.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 18.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 62.

skeptical that Irenaeus could have been mistaken about the date of Revelation by nearly three decades.

Hitchcock further supports his position by highlighting that Irenaeus explicitly affirms in his correspondence with Florinus (c. A.D. 120-150) that his memories of the events involving Polycarp are vivid.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, it is worth noting that in this same letter, Irenaeus *specifically* mentions that he did *not* take any written notes but rather relies upon his memory.<sup>54</sup> This raises the issue of the reliability of Irenaeus as a witness. In other words, Irenaeus' reliance on memory, without written notes, presents concerns about the accuracy of his recollections, given the considerable passage of time.

### **The Reliability of Irenaeus**

Given Hitchcock's assessment of Irenaeus as possessing "outstanding" credibility, this study will now scrutinize the reliability of Irenaeus as a trustworthy source, considering his tendency for making inaccurate historical assertions.<sup>55</sup> In his work, *Against Heresies* (2.22.5), Irenaeus states that Jesus was fifty years old at His crucifixion which is inconsistent with

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<sup>53</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 19.

<sup>54</sup> Maier, *Eusebius*, 177.

<sup>55</sup> For example, (1) Irenaeus mistakenly associates the Apostle James with James, the brother of Jesus, in his work *Against Heresies* (3.12-14), (2) Irenaeus claims that after Jesus died on the cross, "Christ was not forgetful of his Jesus" and that Christ came back to resurrect Jesus from the dead (*Against Heresies* 1.30.17), (3) Irenaeus asserted that Satan neither blasphemed against God nor possessed knowledge of his own fate prior to the coming of Christ (*Against Heresies* 5.26.2), (4) he exaggerated the beliefs and practices of heretical groups such as the Gnostics and Valentinians, and (5) he confused Jesus with Peter and attributed the context of Acts 15:5 to Him. Mathison emphasizes the need for a critical evaluation of Irenaeus' testimony and stresses that his evidence should be viewed as inconclusive. See Albert A. Bell Jr., "Date of John's Apocalypse: The Evidence of Some Roman Historians Reconsidered," *New Testament Studies* 25, no. 1 (1978): 93; A. J. Berkovitz and Mark Letteney, *Rethinking 'Authority' in Late Antiquity: Authorship, Law, and Transmission in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 162; G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John* (1966, reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 4; Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 125; Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 16; Keith A. Mathison, *From Age to Age: The Unfolding of Biblical Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2014), 645; Moffatt, *Revelation*, 609-610.



historical facts.<sup>56</sup> The widely accepted belief places Jesus' birth around 6 B.C., His crucifixion in A.D. 30, and the length of His public ministry at approximately three and a half years.<sup>57</sup>

Hitchcock admits, "Irenaeus was clearly mistaken at this point. No credible modern scholar would accept this view of the duration of Christ's earthly ministry."<sup>58</sup>

Part of Hitchcock's argument rests on the premise that Irenaeus should be trusted due to the consensus of scholars in church history. It is worth noting, however, that Irenaeus' historical claims do *not* enjoy unanimous agreement among all early church fathers. Gentry highlights that many of the church fathers did not regard Irenaeus' statements as undeniable facts. He highlights, for instance, that Tertullian contradicted Irenaeus by placing John's banishment after his immersion in a cauldron of burning oil, an event which Jerome places in Nero's reign.<sup>59</sup> Thus, while Irenaeus commands respect as an early church father, his works should not be regarded as definitive proof favoring a late date for the book of Revelation. One should remember that Irenaeus is not a divinely inspired author, and therefore, his writings should not be deemed infallible or exempt from errors.

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<sup>56</sup> Selwyn, *The Christian Prophets*, 230-231; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 63-64.

<sup>57</sup> Walter A. Elwell, and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 107. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 1:135.

<sup>58</sup> Hitchcock attempts to defend Irenaeus by noting that the idea of this extended ministry stems from Irenaeus' interpretation of John 8:52-59. To support Irenaeus' credibility in advocating the late date, Hitchcock presents four arguments: (1) His intense focus on studying Revelation, (2) the inclusion of specific time references, (3) his geographical roots in Asia and mentorship by Polycarp, and (4) widespread scholarly consensus. Despite claims supporting Irenaeus' reliability through his association with Polycarp, there are no surviving original writings on Revelation by Polycarp. However, it is worth noting that Irenaeus, in *Against Heresies* 5.33.4, attests that Papias was both taught by the Apostle John and was a companion of Polycarp. As previously mentioned, Papias believed that John died before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Furthermore, Papias' testimony predates Irenaeus' by nearly eight decades and may be a direct link to the Apostle John. Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 31-34.

<sup>59</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 54. See also Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heretics*, 36; Jerome, *Against Jovinianum* 1.26.

## Irenaeus' Statement

The argument frequently invoked in support of the Domitianic date is derived from an ambiguous statement attributed to Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 5.30.3). Regrettably, the original text has not survived. However, Eusebius has preserved the statement in the Greek form in his *Ecclesiastical History* (3.18.3):

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

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>60</sup>

The statement presented above is situated at the conclusion of a section in which Irenaeus addresses the matter of identifying 666 in Revelation 13, as noted by Gentry.

The issue that concerns this statement is a translational problem, which hinders a definitive determination regarding whether Irenaeus' statement refers to seeing John the apostle or the vision of the Apocalypse. In other words, the point of consideration pertains to the re-evaluation of the Greek verb ἑωράθη ("that was seen"). Thus, this study will seek to determine whether the antecedent of "that" is the vision or John. In short, to understand Irenaeus' statement, one must consider whether he is asserting that John's vision occurred during the latter part of the reign of Domitian or if he is indicating that John was observed during that period.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.30.3; Eusebius, [\*Ecclesiastical History\*, 3.18.3](#). Cited in Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 46-47. See also Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 19.

<sup>61</sup> Sproul, *The Last Days*, 155.

J. J. Wetstein noted that while most interpreters believed Revelation to have been written after the destruction of Jerusalem, opposing opinions existed.<sup>62</sup> He argued that the translation of Irenaeus' statement should take the form of "he was seen," thereby signifying that John remained alive and observable until the end of Domitian's reign. Wetstein concluded that the book of Revelation was written before the destruction of Jerusalem and argued that this was the most likely interpretation due to the context of Irenaeus' statement.<sup>63</sup>

Conversely, Peake, while acknowledging the validity of this interpretation, deems it "improbable."<sup>64</sup> He contends that in the antecedent clause, the focal point of sight lies upon the Apocalypse itself. Peake further posits that when the same verb transitions from the active voice to the passive voice in the subsequent clause, the most logical agent would be the object referenced in the preceding clause.<sup>65</sup> Consequently, Peake advocates for the conventional rendering, namely "it was seen," denoting that the vision was bestowed upon John at the end of Domitian's reign.

Hitchcock, likewise, suggests that the context in Irenaeus' statement leans towards focusing on the Apocalypse rather than John. To support his argument, he refers to Eusebius' authoritative explanation, which aligns with the interpretation that identifies the Apocalypse as the intended reference for the term ἑωράθη.<sup>66</sup> However, a critical examination by S. H. Chase suggests that if the focal point of the term ἑωράθη pertains to the vision, it presents an inconsistency with the established pattern of the use of γάρ typically found in Irenaeus'

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<sup>62</sup> J. J. Wetstein, *Novum Testamentum Graecum*, vol. 2 (Amsterdam, 1751), 746.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Peake, *The Revelation of John*, 73.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 22.

writings.<sup>67</sup> On the contrary, if the subject of ἐωράθη is identified as John, then the use of γάρ aligns with the typical phrasing patterns utilized by Irenaeus.<sup>68</sup> Simply put, Chase argues that when considering Irenaeus' typical use of the term γάρ, it is reasonable to infer that he intended John to be the subject of ἐωράθη.

Gentry agrees that the statement attributed to Irenaeus ought to be phrased as “he was seen,” indicating that it was the Apostle John that was observed at the end of Domitian’s reign, not the vision of the Apocalypse.<sup>69</sup> To support his position, he cites the argument put forth by 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 ἐωράθη 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>70</sup>

The fact that the vision happened at the end of Domitian’s reign does not inherently justify why John did not provide an explanation. However, if it was John that was seen at the end of

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<sup>67</sup> S. H. Chase, “The Date of the Apocalypse,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 8, no. 31 (April 1907): 431.

<sup>68</sup> James M. MacDonald agrees that applying the verb to John is typical for Irenaeus’ phraseology. James M. MacDonald, *The Life and Writings of St. John* (Broadway, NY: Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1877), 169-170.

<sup>69</sup> This view was also shared by Henry Cowles who believed that it was John that seen at the close of the first century, not the vision of the Apocalypse. Additionally, Cowles thought that Irenaeus did not want to mention the name Nero because Rome was still a persecuting power at that time. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 48-59; Henry Cowles, *The Revelation of John* (New York, NY: D. Appleton and Co., 1877), 24.

<sup>70</sup> Chase, “The Date of the Apocalypse,” 431-432; Also cited in Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 50-51; Sproul, *The Last Days*, 155.

Domitian's reign, the events of the vision would have already passed, meaning that John did not provide an explanation because it was no longer relevant.

The second key issue with the common translation ("it was seen") is that it contradicts Irenaeus' other remarks about Revelation. To illustrate, Eusebius documents the following account from Irenaeus:

These statements Irenaeus made in Book 3 of the cited work. In Book 5 he says this about the Revelation of John and the number in Antichrist's name: This number is found in all good and ancient copies.<sup>71</sup>

Gentry establishes an argument around the use of the adjective "ancient" (ἀρχαίως) in relation to the "copies" (ἀντιγράφους) of the book of Revelation.<sup>72</sup> He contends that the term "ancient" implies that the original manuscript of Revelation must predate the copies themselves. The existence of these surviving "approved" copies suggests the presence of numerous other copies during that time, implying a period for widespread dissemination and reproduction of the book.

In response, Hitchcock raises the question of whether a gap of about three decades, if Revelation were indeed written before A.D. 70, would substantially affect its classification as an "ancient" work.<sup>73</sup> He challenges whether the passage of thirty years would truly alter the designation of an object as being "ancient." Considering the intricate nature, in the first century, of transmitting and reproducing the book of Revelation in various versions, culminating in the creation of "authorized" copies, it is likely that this process would take quite some time to

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<sup>71</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.30.1; Eusebius, [\*Ecclesiastical History\*, 5.8.5-6](#); Maier, *Eusebius*, 164; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 58.

<sup>72</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 58-59.

<sup>73</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 24.

complete. It is probable that the original manuscript was composed earlier to allow ample time for subsequent copying and transmission processes to take place.<sup>74</sup>

Hitchcock also maintains that the Latin translators interpret Irenaeus' statement as referring to the timing of the vision.<sup>75</sup> He further argues that the absence of this issue among other church fathers suggests their understanding of Irenaeus' intended meaning, positing that the early church fathers possessed a superior understanding of Greek compared to recent interpretations.<sup>76</sup> While this line of reasoning is logical, the reliability of Irenaeus as a trustworthy source is called into question due to inaccuracies in his historical remarks and the contradiction with Papias' claim of a pre-70 date. Given that Papias is believed to have been a direct disciple of John, one must question why Irenaeus' account should be prioritized over Papias'.

Even though Irenaeus' statement has been the basis for the late date theory, the challenges of translation, historical inaccuracies, and the inconsistencies present in Irenaeus' remarks concerning the date of Revelation collectively cast doubt upon the reliability of his statement.<sup>77</sup> Irenaeus' unreliability undermines the usefulness of his statement for definitively assigning a date to the book of Revelation. The ambiguity surrounding the subject of ἐωράθη allows for multiple interpretations that could potentially align with either a Domitianic or

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<sup>74</sup> The authority of Irenaeus was not regarded as decisive even if his meaning were to be undisputed. For example, as stated above, Tertullian places the banishment of John to Patmos immediately after the deliverance from the cauldron of boiling oil, and Jerome says that the boiling oil episode took place during the reign of Nero. Thus, there is a discontinuity of how exactly these historical events took place. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 54; See also Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heretics*, 36; Jerome, *Against Jovinianum* 1:26.

<sup>75</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 26.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

<sup>77</sup> Farrar concludes, "we cannot accept a dubious expression of the Bishop of Lyons as adequate to set aside an overwhelming weight of evidence, alike external and internal, in proof of the fact that the apocalypse was written. At the latest, soon after the death of Nero." Farrar, *The Early Days*, 408.

Neronian dating, failing to definitively support the argument for either case. Moreover, his allusion to “ancient copies” may imply an earlier composition date for Revelation, but it also lacks the unequivocal support for either proposed date. Therefore, relying on Irenaeus’ statement to establish the composition date of Revelation would be unwise as he is an unreliable source for such determination.

*Clement of Alexandria (c. A.D. 150-215)*

Clement of Alexandria was a Christian teacher and theologian at the church of Alexandria and is considered the father of Alexandrian Christian philosophy.<sup>78</sup> The following statement in [\*Quis Salvus Dives\*](#) (*Who Is The Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?*) is relevant to the topic at hand:

And to give you confidence, when you have thus truly repented, that there remains for you a trustworthy hope of 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.<sup>79</sup>

Hitchcock notes that the relevant phrase in this text is the indicator of John’s return from Patmos to Ephesus following the death of a “tyrant.”<sup>80</sup> Since Clement does not identify the specific ruler in question, there is an obvious problem with his statement as the tyrant could refer to either Nero or Domitian.

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<sup>78</sup> Schaff, however, suggested that his theology was a “confused eclectic mixture of true Christian elements with many Stoic, Platonic, and Philonic ingredients.” Nevertheless, he is considered by late date advocates as an essential witness for the Domitianic date. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 2:782-783; See also Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 68; Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 41.

<sup>79</sup> G. W. Butterworth, *Clement of Alexandria* (1919, reprint, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 357.

<sup>80</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 41.

## Considering the Political Motivations of Ancient Sources

Gentry presents an argument to demonstrate how Nero better fits the depiction of a tyrant than Domitian.<sup>81</sup> However, Hitchcock, while acknowledging Nero's tyrannical nature, posits that Domitian should be identified as the tyrant in Clement's text. To substantiate this, Hitchcock relies on evidence derived from the Roman historians Cassius Dio (c. A.D. 150-235) and Suetonius (c. A.D. 70-160).<sup>82</sup> It is worth noting, however, that these two historians exhibited biases towards Domitian, potentially leading to the exaggeration or even fabrication of certain accusations against him.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, it remains a possibility that some of the allegations made by these historians were inflated or distorted.<sup>84</sup>

It is likely that Suetonius was influenced by the viewpoints expressed by earlier historians, notably Tacitus (c. A.D. 56-120), who held a disapproving stance towards Domitian (*Agricola* 3). This influence could potentially account for Suetonius' critical portrayal of Domitian in his own writings. It is worth noting that Tacitus, in order to secure his own career under Emperor Trajan (r. A.D. 98-117), depicted Domitian unfavorably.<sup>85</sup> Suetonius likely adopted and included criticisms that matched these negative opinions about Domitian.

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<sup>81</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 69-83.

<sup>82</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 42-43.

<sup>83</sup> German theologian Robert Mucha concedes that Roman authors exaggerated the negative portrayal of Domitian. However, he suggests that this unfavorable depiction "seems" (*scheint*) to have some historical basis. Robert Mucha, "Ein flavischer Nero: Zur Domitian-Darstellung und Datierung der Johannesoffenbarung," *New Testament Studies*; Cambridge 60, no. 1 (January 2014): 89. See also Brian W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London, UK: Routledge, 1992), 196-198.

<sup>84</sup> Bernard W. Henderson disputes Cassius Dio's assertion that Domitian had "many" victims, characterizing it as "uncorroborated." Noting that this contention does not establish that Christians were the primary targets of persecution during Domitian's reign. Bernard W. Henderson, *Five Roman Emperors* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1927), 45.

<sup>85</sup> A. J. Woodman, *The Cambridge Companion to Tacitus* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 87-89.



Furthermore, ancient evidence against Domitian reveals notable shortcomings. As the final ruler of his dynasty, he became a target of vilification by those who assumed power in the aftermath of his death. Alan K. Bowman, Peter Garnsey, and Dominic Rathbone, assert that “The rulers that followed justified their usurpation by treating [Domitian’s] reign as a tyrannical aberration after which the tradition set by good *principes* would be resumed. Writers under Nerva and Trajan were only too happy to elaborate on the theme... How can we trust any of them?”<sup>86</sup> In other words, the subsequent rulers tried to legitimize their claim to leadership by depicting Domitian’s reign as a period of tyranny, promising a return to the virtuous rule of earlier emperors. Consequently, the reliability of ancient literature concerning Domitian does not provide an accurate depiction of the emperor. It is also possible that Clement may have borrowed from anti-Domitian rhetoric.

As a result, some historians have been reassessing the legacy of Domitian and reconsidering his role in the Roman Empire. For instance, Brian W. Jones highlights the challenging nature of character assessment in the case of Domitian, attributing it to two chief factors: the inherent bias prevalent in literary sources and the subjective judgmental criteria applied by the aristocratic class.<sup>87</sup> For example, during the reign of Domitian, Marcus Valerius Martialis (c. A.D. 38-104) initially expressed admiration for the emperor’s newly constructed palace, even comparing it favorably to the pyramids of Egypt (*Epigrammata* 8.36.1). However, after Domitian’s death, Martialis changed his perspective, dismissing the palace as a testament to the excessive and arrogant wealth of a monarch (12.15.4-5).<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Alan K. Bowman, Peter Garnsey, and Dominic Rathbone, *The Cambridge Ancient History: The High Empire, A.D. 70-192*, vol. 11 (2000, reprint, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 55.

<sup>87</sup> Jones, *Domitian*, 196.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

## The Unreliability of Clement of Alexandria

In his analysis, Hitchcock critiques Gentry's assertion that Clement considered Nero as the "tyrant" in *Quis Salvus Dives*, drawing from Clement's remarks concerning the chronological development of apostolic revelation.<sup>89</sup> This is based upon the statement made in Clement's *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>90</sup> Gentry's argument, as noted by Hitchcock, hinges on the idea that Clement believed that all apostolic revelation came to an end during Nero's reign. In other words, Gentry is arguing that Clement believed all revelation given through the apostles ceased under Nero. His point, "How could he have made this statement if John's Revelation had been written about 25 years after Nero?"<sup>91</sup> Essentially, Gentry is arguing that if the apostolic revelation ceased under Nero, then John had to have received the Apocalypse before the cessation.

In defense of the Domitianic date, Hitchcock posits that Clement's statement in *Miscellanies* should not be used as evidence for the early date of Revelation due to several historical inaccuracies in his account.<sup>92</sup> First, he points out a historical discrepancy in Clement's work, where Clement mistakenly dates the beginning of Christ's earthly ministry to the time of Augustus, when in fact it took place during the reign of Tiberius.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 45; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 84-85.

<sup>90</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 7.17; Cited in Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 84; Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 45.

<sup>91</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 85.

<sup>92</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 46.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

Second, Hitchcock highlights Clement's error regarding Marcion's age. He notes that Marcion was not born until around A.D. 110, whereas Valentius "flourished" in the first half of the second century.<sup>94</sup> He then notes Clement's sequencing of Simon Magus after Marcion, asserting that this arrangement appears to contradict the events in Acts 8 which, he states, transpired approximately seventy-five years prior, during the A.D. 30s.<sup>95</sup> Again, Hitchcock is emphasizing the unreliability of Clement as a credible source.

Third, Hitchcock draws attention to Clement's claim that Christ's earthly ministry lasted only one year, implying that He was baptized and crucified within the same year. He argues that Clement's assertion is "clearly in error" which diminishes his reliability as a historical witness.<sup>96</sup> In light of these historical inaccuracies, Hitchcock argues that Clement's testimony cannot be considered dependable evidence for the early date advocated by Gentry. He suggests that if similar errors are seen as disqualifying Irenaeus' testimony, then they should also cast doubt on Clement's credibility.<sup>97</sup> This present author concurs with Hitchcock's evaluation of the credibility and utility of Clement of Alexandria. The evidence from both Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria should not be considered decisive of either date as they are demonstrably unreliable sources.

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<sup>94</sup> According to Frederick D. Kershner, the exact birthdate of Marcion remains unknown. However, historical records from his opponents indicate that he arrived in Rome from Pontus shortly after A.D. 140. Frederick D. Kershner, *Pioneers of Christian Thought* (1930, reprint, Freeport NY: Books For Libraries Press, 1968), 73; Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 47.

<sup>95</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 47.

<sup>96</sup> According to Harold W. Hoehner, there is substantial evidence supporting the three-year ministry theory in both the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John. Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (1977, reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 59-60; Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 48.

<sup>97</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 48-49.

## Nero as the Tyrant

Nero and Domitian are notorious figures in Roman history and are often labeled as tyrants due to their oppressive rule and extravagant lifestyles.<sup>98</sup> When comparing the two, however, Nero's reign stands out as far more ruthless and tyrannical.<sup>99</sup> He infamously persecuted Christians, orchestrated the A.D. 64 fire in Rome, and lavishly squandered resources during a period of economic hardship, before committing suicide following a Senate and military revolt.<sup>100</sup>

On the other hand, Domitian displayed authoritarianism without reaching the same levels of cruelty and extravagance as Nero. Though he was criticized for his censorship and the execution of political rivals, his commitment to strengthening the Roman Empire's borders and establishing an efficient administration could be interpreted as a practical governing strategy.<sup>101</sup> Not to overlook the fact that, after his demise, historians intentionally tarnished his reputation due to their prioritization of job (and life) security and the inclination to appease succeeding rulers, rather than striving for an accurate portrayal of his reign.

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<sup>98</sup> Mucha highlights several similarities between Nero and Domitian: both emperors are linked to instances of familicide, as seen in Cassius Dio's *Roman History* (61.7.4; 62.13) for Nero and Suetonius' *Domitian* (2.3) for Domitian. Their similar trajectory from being good rulers to being depicted as tyrants, evident in Cassius Dio's *Roman History* (61.4.3-5.1) for Nero and Suetonius' *Domitian* (3.2) for Domitian. The fear of enemies and conspiracies is documented by Suetonius in *Nero* (56) and *Domitian* (14.3-4). Finally, their friendliness towards the Parthians, found in Suetonius' *Nero* (30.2) and *Domitian* (2.2). Mucha, "Ein flavischer Nero," 87.

<sup>99</sup> Nero was a historically notorious tyrant, committing heinous acts such as kicking his pregnant wife to death, orchestrating family murders, castrating a young boy whom he later "married," and brutally killing Christians and random individuals on the streets. According to Wilson, "Christian historians affirm that the two most prominent apostles, Peter and Paul, were both executed during the Neronian persecution. No similar documentation exists for any persecution of Christians under Domitian. No Roman historian, though most despise this last of the Flavians, ever gives so much as a hint that he persecuted Christians." Wilson, "The Problem," 589. See also Suetonius, *Nero* 16, 26, 28-29, 33-35; Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 14-17.

<sup>100</sup> Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44; Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 62.16; Suetonius, *Nero* 31, 49. See Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 81-83.

<sup>101</sup> According to Jones, evidence indicates that Domitian took an active role in governance, and his approach appeared to be reasonably efficient and fair. While his strictness in dealing with senators and the formation of an exclusive inner circle were not popular, they played a role in revitalizing the aristocracy. Additionally, his policy of promoting senators from the eastern regions was recognized as praiseworthy. Jones, *Domitian*, 197.

In sum, Hitchcock's analysis calls into question Clement of Alexandria's reliability as a historical source, casting doubt on the validity of his testimony regarding the date of Revelation. After meticulously demonstrating the unreliability of Clement, Hitchcock suggests that Gentry *refrain* from appealing to his authority on the matter for the early date.<sup>102</sup> However, Hitchcock then immediately *utilizes* Clement in support of the late date in his concluding statements.<sup>103</sup> Regardless, it is the opinion of this present author that not much weight can be placed on the ambiguous statement in *Quis Salvus Dives*. Furthermore, when comparing Nero to Domitian, it is better to consider Nero as the tyrant due to well-documented history of his tyranny, specifically targeting the Christian community, whereas most scholars acknowledge that Domitian did not engage in any systematic persecution of the church.<sup>104</sup>

#### *Summary of the Earliest External Evidence*

In examining the earliest external sources related to the date of the book of Revelation, a brief recap is warranted. Papias claims that John the apostle died in Jerusalem before A.D. 70, but doubts surround the authenticity of this account and his connection to Apostle John. The possibility of John's death before Jerusalem's destruction is possible but not conclusively established. Moving on, *The Shepherd of Hermas* displays similarities with Revelation, suggesting potential influence. However, this hinges on the uncertain early dating of *The Shepherd*, which fails to firmly support either the Neronian or Domitianic dating of Revelation.

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<sup>102</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 46.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>104</sup> Cowles argued that Clement's reference to the "tyrant" is better attributed to Nero. Additionally, late date advocates D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris agree that, under Domitian, there is not sufficient evidence to support a "systematic persecution of Christians. In contrast, evidence for a persecution of Christians under Nero is clear and irrefutable." Cowles, *Revelation*, 25; D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 474; See also M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), 17.

Concerning Hegesippus and Eusebius' account of John's banishment to Patmos under Domitian, the association is not definitively proven. Even if Hegesippus was the source, the perceived cruelty of Domitian is tempered by the release of Jude's grandsons, making this source inconclusive for dating Revelation. Irenaeus's statement remains ambiguous, possibly alluding to John being seen at the end of Domitian's reign or the vision of the Apocalypse occurring at that time. Regardless, Irenaeus' credibility is questioned due to numerous erroneous assertions, rendering his testimony unreliable for dating the book of Revelation.

Clement of Alexandria, without naming the "tyrant" in question, invites speculation about the referred Roman emperor. The present author leans toward Nero as a potential fit for the tyrant description, yet this remains speculative and inconclusive. Clement of Alexandria has also been demonstrated as being an unreliable source by Hitchcock. In summary, the earliest external sources incline toward a Neronian date for Revelation, but this inclination is not definitive. Further exploration of external sources is necessary, and internal arguments must be considered to better establish a date for the book of Revelation.

### Chapter Three: Additional External Evidence

*Tertullian (c. A.D. 160-220)*

Tertullian, a prominent Christian author of the second century, is considered a witness for the early date theory by Gentry. He highlights Tertullian's contribution to the Neronian date by drawing attention to a statement in his work *Prescription Against Heretics*:

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 boiling oil, and suffered nothing, and was afterwards banished to an island.<sup>1</sup>

The proponents of the early date theory tend to see this statement as implying that the exile of John to the island of Patmos was contemporary with the martyrdom of Peter and Paul during Nero's reign.<sup>2</sup> Hitchcock, however, contends that Tertullian's statement only pertains to geographical proximity and does not have any direct implications for the chronological aspect.<sup>3</sup> In other words, according to Hitchcock, Tertullian's statement is about physical distance, not the order or timing of events.

To defend his position, Hitchcock, referring to Jerome's *Against Jovinianus* 1.26, asserts, "While Tertullian does not specifically say that John was banished to Patmos during the reign of Domitian, he is credited by Jerome with doing so."<sup>4</sup> However, Gentry, in reference to the same text by Jerome, contends that Jerome's interpretation suggests that Tertullian attributed John's exile to Nero's reign, not Domitian's.<sup>5</sup> Stuart, Robinson, and Swete further advance the argument

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<sup>1</sup> Tertullian, [\*Prescription Against Heretics\*, 36](#). Cited in Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 95. See also Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 50.

<sup>2</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 95.

<sup>3</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 51.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-50.

<sup>5</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 95.

that Jerome's understanding of Tertullian's statement aligns with the idea that John's exile actually transpired under Nero.<sup>6</sup> Stuart elaborates on this perspective by stating, "Now it strikes me, that Tertullian plainly means to class Peter, Paul, and John together, as having suffered at nearly the same time and under the same emperor."<sup>7</sup>

Lending further support, Schaff posits that the reference to John's immersion in boiling oil can be linked to the period of Nero's reign. He notes, "If there is some foundation for the early tradition of the intended oil-martyrdom of John at Rome, or at Ephesus, it would naturally point to the Neronian persecution, in which Christians were covered with inflammable material and burned as torches. The unmistakable allusions to imperial persecutions apply much better to Nero than to Domitian."<sup>8</sup> In essence, if there is any truth to the tradition of John's intended "oil-martyrdom," then it likely happened during Nero's persecution where Christians were burned alive and used as torches.<sup>9</sup>

Hitchcock further argues that Tertullian, in *Apology* 5.4, mentioned the liberations of those who were banished by Domitian:

Consult your histories. There you will find that Nero was the first to rage with the imperial sword against this school in the very hour of its rise in Rome. But we glory — nothing less than glory — to have had such a man to inaugurate our condemnation. One who knows Nero can understand that, unless a thing were good — and very good — it was not condemned by Nero. Domitian too, who was a good deal [or portion] 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.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Stuart, *Apocalypse*, 1:284; Robinson, *Redating*, 223-224; Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, c.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 1:428.

<sup>9</sup> According to Tacitus, Nero ordered the burning of Christians as a means to provide illumination during the night. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44.

<sup>10</sup> Brackets added by the present author. Tertullian, [Apology 5.3-4](#); T. R. Glover and Gerald H. Rendall, trans., *Tertullian: Apology and De Spectaculis. Minucius Felix: Octavius* (1931, reprint, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 28-31.



The text describes Domitian as having a “portion” of Nero’s cruelty (*portio Neronis de crudelitate*), implying that Domitian’s tyranny was less severe. Tertullian further notes that Domitian allowed the return of those who had been banished but it does not indicate that the Apostle John was among them.

As mentioned in chapter one, Edmundson suggested that John was exiled from Rome in early A.D. 70 under a sentence passed by Domitian, who was serving temporarily as Caesar while his father was occupied in Alexandria, and that John might have been released from exile around the same time by Nerva.<sup>11</sup> At any rate, the available evidence falls short of establishing that Tertullian believed John to have been banished during Domitian’s reign. Instead, the existing evidence lends stronger support to the notion that Tertullian believed John was banished under Nero, around the same time as the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul. Nevertheless, the present author acknowledges the absence of a direct reference to John’s exile to Patmos by Nero. Consequently, though this scenario appears to be the most likely, it remains inconclusive.

#### *The Muratorian Canon (c. A.D. 170)*

The Muratorian Canon is an ancient Christian document from the second century, discovered in the Ambrosian Library in Milan. It provides insight into the early Christian Church’s recognition of certain texts as authoritative or canonical. According to Gentry, this manuscript strongly supports the early date theory for the book of Revelation.<sup>12</sup> The statement in the Muratorian Canon considered relevant to the topic is as follows: “Since the blessed apostle Paul himself—following the pattern (*ordo*) of his predecessor John—writes, giving their names,

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<sup>11</sup> Edmundson, *The Church in Rome*, 170-171; See also Robinson, *Redating*, 249; Tacitus, *Histories* 4.2; Suetonius, *Domitian* 1.

<sup>12</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 93-94.

to not more than seven churches... For also John, in his Apocalypse, while writing to seven churches, yet speaks to all (lines 47-59).”<sup>13</sup>

From this statement, Gentry argues that the author of the Muratorian Canon explicitly indicates that John wrote to the seven churches prior to Paul.<sup>14</sup> Hitchcock, however, presents an opposing view, asserting that Paul’s letter to the Philippians was composed no later than A.D. 62. Consequently, if this were true, the writing of Revelation would need to precede even that date. It is worth noting that Nero’s persecution did not commence until A.D. 64. Thus, Hitchcock argues that Gentry’s own argument contradicts itself.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, he argues that the essence of the statement is not in John’s writing to the seven churches prior to Paul but in John’s earlier appointment to apostleship.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, Bruce states,

This making Paul follow the precedent of John is chronologically preposterous; it probably indicates, however, that for the compiler the primary criterion of inclusion in the list was prophetic inspiration. In the early church as a whole the predominant criterion appears to have been apostolic authority, if not apostolic authorship; for this writer, however, even apostolic authorship evidently takes second place to prophetic inspiration.<sup>17</sup>

The author of the Muratorian Canon may have incorrectly dated Paul’s letters, leading to the belief that they were written after John’s writings. Nevertheless, this is speculative, and it is the opinion of this author that it should be concluded that the Muratorian Canon does not definitively establish either an early or late date for Revelation and it should not be regarded as a relevant source for this issue.

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<sup>13</sup> William Klassen and Graydon F. Snyder, *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation* (London, UK: SCM Press LTD, 1962), 239.

<sup>14</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 94.

<sup>15</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 52.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 164.

*Origen (c. A.D. 195-253)*

Origen was a disciple of Clement of Alexandria and is considered by late date advocates as a witness for the Domitianic date of Revelation. Origen's pertinent testimony regarding the date of Revelation arises from his commentary on Matthew 16:16, which states:

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. John, moreover, teaches us things respecting his testimony [or martyrdom], without saying who condemned him when he utters these things in the Apocalypse. He seems also to have seen the Apocalypse [i.e., the visions of the Apocalypse] in the island.<sup>18</sup>

However, like the issue that occurs with the evidence from Clement of Alexandria, Origen's statement is ambiguous and permits interpretation that may also favor the Neronic date.

Gentry asserts that Clement believed Nero to be the tyrannical ruler in his own statement, and suggests that Origen would have been influenced by his mentor.<sup>19</sup> The argument that Gentry presents is summarized as follows: if Clement of Alexandria had Nero in mind as the tyrannical king that banished John, and since Clement was Origen's mentor, then it could be reasonably assumed that Origen followed suit and also had Nero in mind as the Roman king that exiled John to the island of Patmos as he does not mention him by name.

On the contrary, Hitchcock presents a different argument based on Origen's assertion that the information was derived from "tradition." Hitchcock maintains that this tradition must have originated from Irenaeus or Hegesippus, given the absence of any other established tradition within the church during that period.<sup>20</sup> He believes that Origen deliberately refrained from

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<sup>18</sup> Brackets belong to Stuart. Origen, *Commentary on Matthew 16:6*. Cited in Stuart, *Apocalypse*, 1:271; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 98.

<sup>19</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 99.

<sup>20</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 53.

explicitly naming the Roman king, assuming that it was universally understood to refer to Domitian.

Nevertheless, this argument falls short as Origen, as noted by Stuart, does not make any definitive reference to Irenaeus or a tradition providing conclusive information about which emperor was responsible for the banishment of John.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, there is a possibility that Origen's source was not derived from a tradition stemming from Irenaeus, but rather from a tradition associated with Tertullian, as proposed by Robinson.<sup>22</sup> In fact, it could be argued that John the apostle died prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, as suggested by Papias.<sup>23</sup>

Consequently, if this claim holds true, it follows that John could not have been exiled by Domitian, as he would have already been deceased by the time Domitian ascended to power. Considering Origen's extensive knowledge base, it is reasonable to assume that he had access to the writings of Papias, including this information about his death. Given that a large portion of Eusebius' collection was derived from Origen's library, it is conceivable that Papias' works could have been among those preserved in Origen's collection and potentially consulted by Origen himself.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the value of Origen's statement is equal to that of Clement of Alexandria's, given their inherent ambiguity, as they could potentially allude to either Nero or Domitian, with the former being the most likely option.

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<sup>21</sup> Stuart, *Apocalypse*, 1:271-272; See also Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 99.

<sup>22</sup> Robinson, *Redating*, 223.

<sup>23</sup> Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, clxxx; See also Lightfoot and Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 519, 531; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 92-23.

<sup>24</sup> Stephen C. Carlson, "Origen's Use of Papias," in B. Bitton-Ashkelony, et al., *Origeniana Duodecima: Origen's Legacy in the Holy Land - a Tale of Three Cities: Jerusalem, Caesarea and Bethlehem. Proceedings of the 12th International Origen Congress, Jerusalem, 25-29 June 2017* (Leuven, BE: Peeters Publishers, 2019), 535.

*Victorinus (c. A.D. 234-304)*

Victorinus, an esteemed figure in the early Latin Church, held the position of Bishop of Pettau during the end of the third century.<sup>25</sup> It is worth noting that Cassiodorus' (c. A.D. 485-585) assertion, attributing Victorinus with a background in rhetoric before his episcopal role, stems from a confusion between Victorinus of Pettau and C. Marius Victorinus Afer, a Roman rhetorician of the fourth century.<sup>26</sup> Victorinus of Pettau died as a martyr during the persecution under Diocletian (r. A.D. 284-305). While he likely hailed from a Greek origin, he predominantly composed his works in Latin, as far as available records indicate.<sup>27</sup> His *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, specifically at Revelation 10:11, contains a relevant statement which reads as follows:

When John said these things he was in the island of Patmos, condemned to the labour 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.<sup>28</sup>

Gentry presents a compelling argument questioning the plausibility of John, who was approaching the age of one hundred, undertaking the arduous journey from Ephesus to Rome, enduring public scourging, subsequent exile to Patmos, and bearing the grueling work in the mines, only to eventually return to Ephesus and dedicate several years to the reorganization of the Churches of Asia.<sup>29</sup> Gentry asserts that the presence of such challenges strains the credibility

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<sup>25</sup> Otto Bardenhewer, *Patrology: The Lives and Works of the Fathers of the Church* (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1908), 227.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 99.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 100.

of this account to its utmost limit.<sup>30</sup> On the contrary, Hitchcock sees the clear testimony as “another strong plank of support to the Domitianic date.”<sup>31</sup>

Ultimately, the central issue pertains to the practicality of John undertaking a strenuous journey and enduring substantial challenges in his advanced age. Gentry posits uncertainties regarding the credibility of this narrative, while Hitchcock asserts that it lends support to the argument favoring the late date of Revelation. However, the working conditions within the first century mines were deplorable, characterized by difficult labor that Pliny the Elder (c. A.D. 23-79) noted, “surpasses the labours of the Giants.”<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the pervasive risk of collapses was a prevalent concern, rendering it improbable for an elderly individual to endure such an environment.<sup>33</sup>

Barnes also expresses skepticism about the plausibility of John, in his nineties, undertaking such a journey and emphasizes that the entire narrative of John’s later life hinges on the statement made by Irenaeus.<sup>34</sup> If Barnes’ assertion holds true, then it follows that Victorinus is essentially reiterating the sentiments of the tradition associated with Irenaeus without contributing any substantial corroborative evidence. Therefore, the present author holds the view that the likelihood of John surviving such a journey is nonexistent, rendering the account fictitious.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 55.

<sup>32</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 33.21.

<sup>33</sup> Pliny the Elder notes, “Clefts are formed on a sudden, the earth sinks in, and the workmen are crushed beneath; so that it would really appear less rash to go in search of pearls and purples at the bottom of the sea, so much more dangerous to ourselves have we made the earth than the water!” Pliny the Elder, [\*Natural History\* 33.21](#).

<sup>34</sup> Barnes, *Christianity at Rome*, 166.

*Eusebius (c. A.D. 260-340)*

Eusebius, commonly acknowledged as the “Father of Church History,” continues to be a source of information within contemporary scholarship, due to his *Ecclesiastical History*. His birth predates the death of Dionysius of Alexandria, occurring prior to the autumn of A.D. 264. Notably, Eusebius was a friend and disciple of Pamphilus (c. A.D. 250-310).<sup>35</sup> Pamphilus, celebrated for his profound comprehension of Origen’s theological teachings and his advocacy of Origen’s perspectives, hailed from Alexandria and established an impressive Christian library, situated in Caesarea.<sup>36</sup> Following the death of Pamphilus, and the declaration of peace by Constantine and Licinius, Eusebius assumed the episcopal office as the Bishop of Caesarea.<sup>37</sup>

Within his *Ecclesiastical History*, specifically in the section that is frequently cited as evidence of the late date, the following passage is encountered:

With terrible cruelty, Domitian put to death without trial great numbers of men at Rome who were distinguished by family and career, and without cause banished many other notables and confiscated their property. Finally, he showed himself Nero’s successor in hostility to God. He was the second to organize a persecution against us, though his father, Vespasian, had no such evil plans.

Tradition has it that the apostle and evangelist John was still alive at this time and was condemned to live on the island of Patmos for his testimony to the divine Word. Writing about the number of the name given the Antichrist in Revelation [666 in 3:18], Irenaeus says this about John in Book 5 of his *Against Heresies* (3.17-18).<sup>38</sup>

In a later section, Eusebius continues:

After Domitian had ruled fifteen years, Nerva succeeded. By decree of the Roman Senate, the honors of Domitian were annulled and those banished unjustly returned and

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<sup>35</sup> D. S. Wallace-Hadrill, *Eusebius of Caesarea* (London, UK: A. R. Mowbray & Co. Limited, 1960), 11.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> Maier, *Eusebius*, 93; Eusebius, [\*Ecclesiastical History\*, 3.17-18](#). See also Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*,

had their property restored. At that time also, early Christian tradition relates, the apostle John, after his island exile, resumed residence at Ephesus (3:20).<sup>39</sup>

Hitchcock initiates his defense of Eusebius as a witness to the late date of the book of Revelation by highlighting Eusebius' silence on alternative viewpoints concerning the date of Revelation.<sup>40</sup>

However, it is essential to note that Eusebius explicitly attributes his statements about John's exile to Irenaeus (3:18; 5:8).<sup>41</sup> This attribution does not imply the absence of other perspectives but rather signifies that Eusebius was specifically citing Irenaeus as his source.

Moreover, Eusebius departs from Irenaeus in his stance on the authorship of Revelation as Eusebius did not believe that the Apostle John was the author.<sup>42</sup> Hitchcock contends that Eusebius' personal belief regarding the authorship of Revelation, whether he believed John wrote it or not, is not a crucial factor in this context.<sup>43</sup> However, it highlights Gentry's point regarding the inconsistency in Eusebius' treatment of the authority of Irenaeus.<sup>44</sup>

On one hand, Eusebius relies on Irenaeus to establish the longevity of the Apostle John, using Irenaeus' account to support the idea that John lived well into the second century (3:18). On the other hand, Eusebius questions Irenaeus' assertion when it comes to the identity of Papias as being a disciple of John (3:39). Eusebius appears to be selective in his trust of Irenaeus' testimony, which raises questions about the credibility of Eusebius and his sources.

It is worth acknowledging that Eusebius' rationale for disputing Papias' status as a direct hearer of John is based on Papias' lack of explicit self-designation (3:39). However, it is also

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>40</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 56.

<sup>41</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 102.

<sup>42</sup> According to MacDonald, Eusebius' perspective was likely influenced by Dionysius of Alexandria (c. A.D. 200-265). MacDonald, *The Life and Writings*, 169-170; Farrar, *The Early Days*, 408.

<sup>43</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 57.

<sup>44</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 103.



worth considering Papias' own statements, which suggest that John's death occurred in A.D. 70 before the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>45</sup> Again, it should be remembered that Papias wrote his work nearly a century prior to Irenaeus' writings.

Hitchcock then takes issue with proponents of the Neronic date theory who suggest that Eusebius merely echoes Irenaeus without subjecting his account to critical analysis or discernment.<sup>46</sup> Hitchcock defends his position by noting that Eusebius drew from the works of not only Irenaeus but also Clement of Alexandria and Hegesippus. However, it is worth remembering that Hitchcock has previously demonstrated Clement to be historically inaccurate.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, Clement's statement that is used to support the Domitianic date is ambiguous, as the term "tyrant" mentioned therein could potentially allude to either Nero or Domitian, with the former being the most likely candidate, as argued above.<sup>48</sup>

Additionally, Gentry points out a possible contradiction in Eusebius' accounts regarding John's banishment. In *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius claims John was banished under Domitian, but in *Evangelical Demonstrations*, he suggests a Neronic banishment, aligning it with the contemporaneous executions of Peter and Paul.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, relying on Eusebius as a dependable witness for the late date theory of Revelation is problematic for a number of reasons. For instance, his selective use of sources, inconsistencies in handling Irenaeus' testimony, potential biases from his selective reliance on specific sources, skepticism towards conflicting perspectives, the possible contradiction related to John's banishment, and interpretations

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<sup>45</sup> Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, clxxx.

<sup>46</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 58.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 46-49.

<sup>48</sup> Butterworth, *Clement*, 357.

<sup>49</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 103-104.

favoring his preferred theories undermine his reliability as a consistent witness for dating the book of Revelation.

*Epiphanius (c. A.D. 315-403)*

Epiphanius was born in southern Palestine (c. A.D. 315) and was the Bishop of Salamis on the eastern coast of Cyprus. He is best known for his role in combating various heresies and for his extensive writings on theology and church history.<sup>50</sup> He is frequently cited as a witness supporting the early date of the book of Revelation, primarily because he places the banishment of John to Patmos within the reign of Claudius (r. A.D. 41-54). However, the prevailing consensus firmly rejects the notion of such an early banishment due to the lack of substantial merit supporting this idea.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, many scholars contend that Epiphanius was referring to Emperor Nero, as Nero's full name included the name "Claudius" (Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus).<sup>52</sup> The following excerpts from Epiphanius' *Panarion* are germane to the topic at hand:

Later, therefore, though from caution and humility he had declined to be an evangelist, the Holy Spirit compelled John to issue the gospel in his old age when he was past ninety, after his return from Patmos under Claudius Caesar and several years of his residence in Asia... Don't you people see that he means the women who are deceived by a false conception of prophecy, and will deceive many? I mean that he is Speaking of Priscilla, Maximilla and Quintilla... whose imposture the Holy Spirit did not overlook. He foretold it prophetically by the mouth of St. John, who prophesied before his falling asleep, during the time of Claudius Caesar and earlier, when he was on the isle of Patmos. Even the

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<sup>50</sup> Epiphanius is known to have written against the teachings of Origen and it is presumed that he was raised in an "anti-Originist monastery" in Egypt. Hubertus R. Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 304-305.

<sup>51</sup> E. B. Elliot, *Horae Apocalypticæ; Or, A Commentary on the Apocalypse, Critical and Historical; Including Also an Examination of the Chief Prophecies of Daniel*, 4 Vols., 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (London, UK: John Childs and Son, Printers, 1862), 1:38.

<sup>52</sup> According to Hort, historical inscriptions frequently used the name "Claudius" as an alternative reference to Nero, thereby reinforcing the plausibility that Epiphanius was referring to Nero. Hort, *Apocalypse*, xviii; See also Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 104; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 956; Robinson, *Redating*, 224.

people of Thyatira admit that this has come true... John, then, wrote prophetically to those who were living in Christ there at the time.<sup>53</sup>

Hitchcock firmly disputes the idea that Epiphanius was referring to Nero and argues that there is no evidence to support this claim.<sup>54</sup> He then constructs his defense based on this assumption with three key arguments.<sup>55</sup> First, he argues that Epiphanius is an inaccurate writer and is therefore unreliable. Second, he posits that it is likely that only one of the churches in Asia Minor existed during the period of A.D. 41-54 and emphasizes the absence of any evidence indicating John's presence in the region at such an early stage. Third, Hitchcock highlights that there were no documented instances of imperial persecution during the reign of Claudius. Therefore, he concludes that the evidence provided by Epiphanius should be treated as an "anomaly" and "rejected."<sup>56</sup>

However, the validity of Hitchcock's argument hinges upon whether Epiphanius was, in fact, referring to Claudius as opposed to Nero. Numerous scholars, as mentioned above, have concurred otherwise. One such scholar, namely Hort, claimed that Epiphanius derived his information from the works of Hippolytus (c. A.D. 170-236) and notes:

The emperor whom we call Claudius died in [A.D.] 54, ten years before the persecution of Nero. A banishment of St John at that time is incredible, and it is not likely that he was the emperor really meant. But as one of his names was Nero, so also our Nero was likewise a Claudius, and is often called on inscriptions Nero Claudius or Nero Claudius Caesar. It seems probable therefore that, whatever Epiphanius may have meant, his authority meant and perhaps said Nero.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 51:13, 33; Frank Williams, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis* (Leiden, NY: Brill, 1987), 36, 65-66.

<sup>54</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 61.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Hort, *Apocalypse*, xviii.

Moreover, there is little reason to suggest that Epiphanius would have been so disconnected from contemporary knowledge, particularly considering the diverse range of sources he had at his disposal within the *Panarion*.<sup>58</sup> With the extensive amount of source material he had access to, it is highly unlikely that he was referring to Claudius as opposed to Nero. Nevertheless, the present author concedes the point that Epiphanius does not explicitly state Nero's name. While it is highly likely that Nero was intended, it is not conclusive.

*Jerome (c. A.D. 340-420)*

Jerome was a Christian theologian and historian renowned for translating the Bible into Latin, known as the Vulgate. His input is typically considered as evidence for the late date advocacy.<sup>59</sup> However, according to Edmundson, the resemblance between Victorinus' version of the Patmos tradition and Jerome's suggests that both authors likely drew from a shared written source.<sup>60</sup>

Based on the evidence outlined by Edmundson, Robert Hillegonds suggests that while there is a possibility that Domitian played a role in the banishment of prisoners in A.D. 70, a plausible scenario is that John had already been exiled during Nero's reign and was residing on the island of Patmos at that time.<sup>61</sup> When Domitian delegated legal cases to Nerva, his

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<sup>58</sup> The *Panarion* contains much information, comprising source materials drawn from previous heresiological writings, texts from various groups, and Epiphanius' personal observations. Unfortunately, most of these sources are no longer extant. Ingvild Saelid Gilhus, "The Construction of Heresy and the Creation of Identity: Epiphanius of Salamis and His Medicine-Chest against Heretics," *Numen* 62, no. 2/3 (2015): 154-155.

<sup>59</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1967), 721.

<sup>60</sup> Additionally, Edmundson suggests that Victorinus' account was most likely *not* influenced by Eusebius. Edmundson, *The Church in Rome*, 167.

<sup>61</sup> Robert Hillegonds, *The Early Date of Revelation and the End Times* (Fountain Inn, SC: Victorious Hope Publishing, 2016), 68.

association with these cases extended to include those individuals who had been banished by Nero, implying a connection between these events.<sup>62</sup>

### **Alteration of the Text**

There are two statements by Jerome that hold the most relevance in the debate concerning the date of Revelation. The first statement, documented in his *Lives of Illustrious Men*, completed in A.D. 392, reads as follows: “In the fourteenth year then after Nero, Domitian having raised a second persecution, [John] was banished to the island of Patmos, and wrote the Apocalypse.”<sup>63</sup> The second statement, found in his work *Against Jovinianum*, completed in A.D. 393, asserts that John was “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 the boundless mysteries of the future. Tertullian, moreover, relates that he was sent to Rome, and that having been plunged into a jar of boiling oil he came out fresher and more active than when he went in.”<sup>64</sup> These remarks have led some, such as Hitchcock, to confidently regard Jerome as a “strong link in the steady chain of late-date supporters for Revelation.”<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, there are certain issues that require careful consideration.

As pointed out by Hillegonds, Francis X. Gumerlock brings to light an interesting observation regarding the editors of Jerome’s work *Against Jovinianum*. He highlights the alterations that were made to Jerome’s text in the 1564 edition, which is of particular significance:

About the year 393, Jerome in his work *Against Jovinian* commented upon that passage of Tertullian, saying, “Moreover, Tertullian relates that he [John] was sent by Nero into

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>64</sup> Jerome, *Against Jovinianum* 1.26; Cited in Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 105.

<sup>65</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 63.

boiling oil.” The words “by Nero” (*a Nerone*) are contained in the ancient editions of Jerome’s work, including the 1524 edition by Erasmus of Rotterdam. However, in the 1564 edition by Vittori the words “by Nero” were changed to “at Rome” (*Romae*). In that edition a note says that for “‘by Nero,’ as was read previously, from Tertullian himself we have put ‘at Rome.’ For, this was in the time of Domitian not Nero, and Tertullian himself did not report that it happened ‘by Nero’ but ‘at Rome’, there being no mention of Nero.” Vittori’s change was reproduced in the editions of Vellarsi in 1767 and Migne in the next century.<sup>66</sup>

In other words, the editor of the 1564 edition justifies altering Jerome’s text due to two key assumptions: first, like Eusebius, he assumes that Domitian banished John, despite Tertullian’s omission of the tyrant’s name.<sup>67</sup> Second, he interprets Domitian’s “time” as his reign, rather than considering the time of his temporary role as Caesar in A.D. 70. Additionally, the editor finds Jerome’s link between Nero’s actions and Domitian’s reign unbelievable, leading to his decision to modify the text.<sup>68</sup> Thus, the editor of the 1564 edition made alterations to Jerome’s text based on personal presuppositions rather than relying on acceptable justifications for such edits.

### Three Stages of Development

Interestingly, Jerome appeared to have believed that Nero was the Antichrist. In his commentary on Daniel, Jerome wrote, “And so there are many of our viewpoint who think that Domitius Nero was the Antichrist because of his outstanding savagery and depravity.”<sup>69</sup>

According to Hillegonds, this information highlights that Jerome modified his opinion over a development of three key stages:

- 1) Prior to January of AD 393, which is the latest date for completion of Jerome’s *Lives of Illustrious Men*, Jerome adheres to the position of Eusebius that John was banished by Domitian. Based on Eusebius’ *Chronology*, Jerome determines this to be in the fourteenth year after the death of Nero.

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<sup>66</sup> Francis X. Gumerlock, *Revelation and the First Century: Preterist Interpretations of the Apocalypse in Early Christianity* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision Press, 2012), 123; Also cited in Hillegonds, *The Early Date*, 70.

<sup>67</sup> Hillegonds, *The Early Date*, 70.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Gumerlock, *Revelation and the First Century*, 123. Also cited in Hillegonds, *The Early Date*, 72.

- 2) As discussed above, in AD 394 there seems to be, in the thinking of Jerome, a shift in the timing as to when John was banished under Domitian. After this date Jerome associates the banishment of John under Domitian to AD 70, shortly after the death of Nero.
- 3) Four years later, in AD 398, Jerome writes his update to the commentary of Victorinus and also writes his commentary on Matthew. We notice a third stage in the development of Jerome's thought in his *Commentary on Matthew* (20:23). Jerome now adds the word "immediately" to the banishment of John after the attempted execution of John by Nero when Nero had John plunged into burning oil.<sup>70</sup>

Jerome suggests, "If we read the ecclesiastical histories, we will see that John did not lack the spirit of martyrdom and drank the cup of confession which the three children in the fiery furnace drank (Dan. 3), although a persecutor did not shed his blood, for they note that he was placed in a vat of burning oil to be martyred and thence proceeded to receive the crown of a Christian athlete and immediately was dispatched to the isle of Patmos."<sup>71</sup> Jerome, it seems, came to believe that John was banished to Patmos *immediately* after he was plunged into oil under Nero. Therefore, Jerome's testimony lends stronger support to the early date of Revelation than it does for the late date.

#### *Andreas of Cappadocia (c. A.D. 600)*

Andreas of Cappadocia (Andrew of Caesarea) was a bishop of Caesarea around A.D. 600 and advocated for the Domitianic date in his commentary on Revelation. However, Gentry posits that his stance was part of a broader debate in his time, where some favored an earlier dating of Revelation.<sup>72</sup> He notes that there were interpreters during Andreas' period who associated some of the prophecies in Revelation with the Jewish War under Vespasian and Titus. Hitchcock, on the other hand, states that this point does not matter when held to the testimony of Victorinus,

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<sup>70</sup> Hillegonds, *The Early Date*, 73-74.

<sup>71</sup> R. Alan Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 2000), 165. Also cited in Hillegonds, *The Early Date*, 74.

<sup>72</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 106-107.

Jerome, Irenaeus, and Eusebius.<sup>73</sup> However, it has been demonstrated above that these sources are not as weighty to the argument as Hitchcock purports: Victorinus' account of John journey as an elderly man is questionable, while Jerome seems to have actually supported an early date for Revelation. Irenaeus was unclear and unreliable, and Eusebius demonstrated inconsistency and selectivity in his use of sources. Nevertheless, the presence of earlier date proponents during Andreas' period supports the Neronian date argument by highlighting the lack of unanimous consensus for the late date at that time.

*The Acts of John (c. A.D. 650)*

Dating from the fifth or sixth century, *The Acts of John* is an apocryphal work that supports the idea of John's exile taking place during the reign of Domitian. The relevant portion of this text concerning this topic reads as follows:

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 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 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.<sup>74</sup>

Gentry suggests that the text implies the existence of the book of Revelation, prior to John's banishment by Domitian.<sup>75</sup> This implication stems from the reasoning that no other Johannine work can be interpreted as predicting the fall of Rome. However, Hitchcock presents two

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<sup>73</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 66-67.

<sup>74</sup> Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. 8 (1867-1872, reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1951), 560-562. Also cited in Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 100; Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 67-68.

<sup>75</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 100-101.



counterarguments.<sup>76</sup> First, he posits that even if this statement lends support to the notion that Revelation predates John's exile by Domitian, there is no textual evidence to definitively establish its composition during Nero's reign. Second, he argues that the text does not explicitly state that John "wrote" about the destruction of Rome but rather that he was "teaching" and "spread a report" concerning it, implying an oral form of dissemination.<sup>77</sup>

In responding to Hitchcock's counterarguments, it is worth remembering that Edmundson demonstrated that it is possible that Nerva, appointed by Vespasian, revoked John's exile.<sup>78</sup> Hillegonds suggests a scenario where John was initially banished under Nero and was later recalled by Nerva around A.D. 70.<sup>79</sup> This suggests that John may have written Revelation during Nero's reign, but history attributed his banishment and subsequent release to Domitian and Nerva. Although *The Acts of John* does not explicitly establish the composition of Revelation under Nero, the historical context surrounding these banishments seems to have caused a great deal of confusion but may also indicate an earlier composition date for Revelation. Nevertheless, the present author's stance is that *The Acts of John* does not conclusively endorse any specific date for the composition of the book of Revelation.

### *Syriac Witnesses (A.D. 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Centuries)*

While the Peshitta version of the Syriac New Testament, originating from the fifth century, did not contain the book of Revelation, later editions like the Philoxenian version, which

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<sup>76</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 68.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Edmundson, *The Church in Rome*, 170-171.

<sup>79</sup> As mentioned earlier, Hillegonds notes that when Domitian delegated legal cases to Nerva, it may have included individuals who had been previously banished by Nero. Hillegonds, *The Early Date*, 68; See also Robinson, *Redating*, 249-253; Tacitus, *Histories* 4.2; Suetonius, *Domitian* 1.

emerged in the sixth and seventh centuries, did include it.<sup>80</sup> These later editions explicitly state that John authored Revelation while on Patmos, having been sent there by Nero Caesar.<sup>81</sup> Hitchcock, however, dismisses the significance of this witness, contending that it arrives too late in history to provide substantial weight to the argument concerning Revelation's date.<sup>82</sup> Instead, he continues to rely on the accounts of Hegesippus, Irenaeus, Eusebius, Jerome, and Victorinus to support his position. As shown in this study, these witnesses Hitchcock relies on have been shown to provide less than substantial evidence for the late date theory. As it stands, the Syriac Witnesses explicitly support the Neronic date.

*Arethas (c. A.D. 850-944)*

Arethas, who served as the archbishop of Caesarea, holds significance as an advocate for the early date of Revelation. Born in Greece around A.D. 850, he is known for composing a commentary on Revelation that draws from Andreas' earlier work. Arethas' remarks, particularly those found in Revelation 6:12 and 7:1-8, unambiguously lend support to a date of composition for Revelation prior to A.D. 70.<sup>83</sup> Hitchcock, repeating his argument made against the Syriac Witnesses, contends that Arethas' testimony arrives too late to carry relevance in the date of Revelation debate.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, Arethas' testimony is supportive of a Neronic date.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), 69-71.

<sup>81</sup> Peake, *The Revelation of John*, 76-77.

<sup>82</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 66.

<sup>83</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 107-108.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>85</sup> For more information on Arethas' support of the Neronic date of Revelation, see Gumerlock, *Revelation and the First Century*, 44.

### *Summary of Additional External Evidence*

Hitchcock, in his analysis, explicitly asserts that the external evidence overwhelmingly favors the late date theory.<sup>86</sup> He contends that if the original date of Revelation were truly during the reign of Nero, there would exist clear historical evidence predating the sixth century to support this assertion. Hitchcock further assumes that the Domitianic date finds convincing support, tracing back to the writings of Irenaeus, noting the ambiguity surrounding the testimony of Hegesippus.<sup>87</sup>

According to Hitchcock, only those who are unbiased can affirm that the majority of the external evidence aligns with the late date theory.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, it appears as though the biased ones are those who intentionally overlook the obvious issues with the external evidence. The sources that are typically cited in support of the late date are not as reliable as proponents like Hitchcock contend. For instance, Irenaeus' statement, upon critical examination, is too ambiguous to definitively establish a late date, and even some scholars who advocate for the late date acknowledge this ambiguity.<sup>89</sup> Not to mention his reliability is called into question, see chapter two.

Additionally, Clement of Alexandria and Origen fail to specify which Roman ruler they refer to in their writings, even though the context better suggests Nero when mentioning a "tyrant."<sup>90</sup> Eusebius, too, should be criticized for inconsistency, selectivity, and biases in his use

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<sup>86</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 73-75.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>89</sup> Additionally, Hitchcock went to great lengths to highlight the unreliability of Clement as a credible witness; Ibid., 46-49; See also Peake, *The Revelation of John*, 73; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 956; Sweet, *Revelation*, 21; Glasgow, *The Apocalypse*, 43; Terry, *The Apocalypse of John*, 4-5; Farrar, *The Early Days*, 408.

<sup>90</sup> Stuart, *Apocalypse*, 1:283-284; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 83.

of sources, which cast doubt on his reliability as a historical reference.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, it has been noted that Jerome's text underwent editing and alteration to align with the late date perspective, orchestrated by a biased editor, whereas Jerome himself was in favor of the early date.<sup>92</sup>

Tertullian appears to associate John's exile to the island of Patmos as contemporary with the martyrdom of Peter and Paul during Nero's reign.<sup>93</sup> However, the account lacks an explicit reference to Nero, rendering it inconclusive. The Muratorian Canon does not definitively establish a date for Revelation, and it should be dismissed from the debate. Epiphanius, possessing access to an extensive library, considered that John was banished under Claudius, but this is to be interpreted as an indirect reference to Nero.<sup>94</sup> Yet, this also fails to conclusively establish the early date for Revelation.

The evidence from Andreas of Cappadocia suggests there were others during his time that held to a Neronian date. The evidence from *The Acts of John*, however, does not conclusively endorse any date for Revelation. Conversely, both the evidence from the Syriac Witnesses and Arethas explicitly support the Neronian date. Overall, while the external evidence fails to definitively support either date, this study demonstrates that the early date has further support than previously assumed. On the other hand, the evidence supporting the late date should now be regarded as less convincing than previously thought.

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<sup>91</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 103.

<sup>92</sup> Gumerlock, *Revelation and the First Century*, 123; Hillegonds, *The Early Date*, 70-74.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 1:284; Robinson, *Redating*, 223-224; Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, c.

<sup>94</sup> Hort, *Apocalypse*, xviii; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 104; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 956; Robinson, *Redating*, 224; Gilhus, "The Construction of Heresy," 154-155.

## Chapter Four: Internal Evidence

In this chapter, an analysis of internal evidence pertaining to the date of Revelation will be conducted within the framework of the preterist interpretation. The key areas of focus include an exploration of the thematic elements, an examination of its relevance for the intended audience, the temporal expectation of the author, the identification of the beast, and an investigation of passages associated with the Second Temple. The exposition will commence by presenting arguments in favor of the preterist interpretation, as advocated by Gentry. Subsequently, the objections raised by Hitchcock will be addressed to defend the Neronian date of the book. This structured approach aims to equip the reader with a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the debate surrounding the internal evidence of Revelation.

### *Theme of Revelation*

It is generally agreed that Revelation 1:7 is the thematic verse of the book: “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.”<sup>1</sup> According to Gentry, the thematic emphasis on the phrase “coming with the clouds” is relevant in determining the date of Revelation. His argument revolves around the premise that this phrase refers to Christ’s coming in judgment upon Israel, specifically in A.D. 70, where Christ employs the Roman army as the means through which this judgment is executed.<sup>2</sup> This position, however, is contested by Hitchcock who believes that the thematic verse does not pertain to the A.D. 70 judgment of

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<sup>1</sup> Gentry and Hitchcock concur that there exists a nearly unanimous consensus regarding Revelation 1:7 as the central thematic verse of the book. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 121; Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 80.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 121-123; Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 80.

Israel.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the main arguments supporting and opposing Gentry's position will now be presented to determine that Revelation 1:7 does indeed refer to this judgment.

### **Coming with the Clouds**

To begin, Gentry observes that in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, clouds are often used symbolically to represent divine wrath and judgment.<sup>4</sup> He notes that this symbolism is based on the idea that God's holiness and glory are so great that they are often depicted as being shrouded in clouds (Gen. 15:17; Exo. 13:21-22; 14:19-20; 19:9-19; Deut. 4:11; Job 22:14; Psa. 18; 97:2; 104:3; Isa. 19:1; Eze. 32:7-8). He further observes that the Old Testament commonly depicts God as "coming in clouds" to bring judgment upon humanity (Psa. 18:7-15; 104:3; Isa. 19:1; Joel 2:1, 2; Nah. 1; Zeph. 1:14, 15). Moreover, he notes that the New Testament also contains references to Christ's return in clouds of judgment (Matt. 24:3; 26:64), and in the context of His Second Coming (Acts 1:11; Thess. 4:15-17).<sup>5</sup>

When analyzing John's reference to Christ's "coming with clouds" in Revelation 1:7, it is useful to examine the contextual backdrop provided by the Old Testament. Revelation 1:7 contains material drawn from at least two distinct Old Testament passages, each contributing to how one is to understand John's message.<sup>6</sup> Specifically, the phrase "coming with the clouds" can be traced back to its origins in Daniel 7:13, while the mention of "those who pierced him" finds its source in Zechariah 12:10.

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<sup>3</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 80-86.

<sup>4</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 123; See also Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 116; David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition on the Book of Revelation* (1987, reprint, Fort Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1990), 64-65.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Douglas Wilson, *When the Man Comes Around: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2019), 7.

In the book of Daniel, the allusion to the arrival “with the clouds” does not pertain to the Second Advent but rather symbolizes the Messiah’s ascension into the heavenly throne room, demonstrating the establishment of His authority over the entire earth as the “divine King and Judge.”<sup>7</sup> Notice the content of this text: “...and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days.” The text explicitly mentions that the “son of man” ascended to the “Ancient of Days.” Contrary to the notion of the Second Coming of Christ, the text emphasizes His ascension.

Zechariah 12:10 focuses on the piercing of the Messiah and the mourning of the Jewish people, which, when John applies this in Revelation 1:7, clearly indicates that “those who pierced him” refers to the Jews. Therefore, “coming with clouds” is not referring to the Second Advent but refers to the coming judgment upon “those who pierced him,” the Jews. This will be further discussed immediately below.

### **Those Who Pierced Him**

As stated, the reference to “those who pierced him” in Revelation 1:7 is drawn from Zechariah 12:10 and clearly refers to the Jewish people. Gentry highlights that while the Romans executed the physical crucifixion of Jesus, it was the Jews who instigated and demanded this act (Matt. 20:18-19; 27:11-25; Mark 10:33; 15:1; Luke 18:32; 23:1-2; John 18:28-31; 19:12-15; Acts 3:13; 4:26-27). He observes that this sentiment is firmly substantiated by the New Testament, which portrays the apostles as attributing responsibility to the Jews for the crucifixion of Christ (Acts 2:22-23; 3:13-15; 5:28-30; 7:52; 10:39; 1 Thess. 2:14-15).<sup>8</sup> The “coming with the clouds” pertains to a coming judgment that will be upon “those who pierced him,” the Jews.

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<sup>7</sup> Jay Rogers, *The Prophecy of Daniel in Preterist Perspective: The Easy Parts and the Hard Parts* (Clermont, FL: Media House International, 2021), 24.

<sup>8</sup> Many scholars have agreed with this interpretation, affirming that “those who pierced him” pertains to the Jews. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Navigating the Book of Revelation: Special Studies on Important Issues*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.

## Tribes of the Earth

To further illustrate that Revelation 1:7 pertains to the Jewish people, Gentry interprets the phrase “tribes of the earth” around its association with the land of Israel and the twelve tribes. He contends that the Greek term for “tribe,” namely φυλή *phulḗ*, predominantly represents the Jewish tribes throughout Scripture (cf. Luke 2:36; Acts 13:21; Rom 11:1; Phil. 3:5; Heb. 7:14).<sup>9</sup> Gentry notes that “tribe” can refer to Gentiles in Revelation when the term is expanded to include the connection with “every tribe and language and people and nation” (cf. Rev. 5:9). He notes that the expansion serves to distinguish such references from Revelation 1:7 (Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6).<sup>10</sup> Since this contextual distinction does not apply to Revelation 1:7, it can be inferred that the phrase “the tribes” in this instance pertains to the Jews.

Hitchcock acknowledges that Revelation 1:7 references Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10.<sup>11</sup> He emphasizes that Zechariah 12:10 specifically mentions those who crucified the Messiah, identifying them as the Jewish people. However, Hitchcock argues that the main focus of Zechariah 12 and Daniel 7 is not on the judgment of the Jews but rather on their future redemption. He then highlights Beale’s argument, which asserts that the phrase “tribes of the

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(Fountain Inn, SC: GoodBirth Ministries, 2010), 94.; See also Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 64-67; Terry, *The Apocalypse of John*, 33; Stuart, *Apocalypse*, 1:272-273; Robert H. Gundry, *Commentary on the New Testament: Verse-by-Verse Explanations with a Literal Translation*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 988; James J. L. Ratton, *The Apocalypse of St. John: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London, UK: R. & T. Washbourne, LTD., 1915), 129.

<sup>9</sup> Gentry observes that in Revelation 5:5, the reference is made to the tribe of Judah, whereas in Revelation 7:4ff., the term is employed to expressly name all twelve tribes. Additionally, in Revelation 21:12, he notes that the apostle John makes mention of the twelve tribes of Israel. Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 119-120; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 127; See also its occurrence as referring to the twelve tribes of Israel in Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1069; See its occurrence in the New Testament as referring to racial Israel in Joseph Henry Thayer, *The New Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1981), 660.

<sup>10</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 127-128; Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 120; See also Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 84.

<sup>11</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 83.



earth,” as found in various passages in the Septuagint, does not explicitly refer to the tribes of Israel.<sup>12</sup> He suggests that Revelation 1:7 may not be exclusively about the judgment of the Jewish people but could have a broader application.

Nevertheless, even Beale acknowledges John’s flexible use of the Old Testament in Revelation.<sup>13</sup> He observes that John creatively adapts Old Testament passages while maintaining some key connections to their original context. Beale argues that when John references Old Testament passages, he does not do so without preserving connections to their original circumstances. Gentry’s response to this argument is that both Zechariah 12:10 and Revelation 1:7 share a significant commonality: they both pertain to the Jewish people.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, in Revelation 1:7, John seems to adapt the Old Testament references from Zechariah 12 and Daniel 7 to assert that the judgment being referenced pertains specifically to the Jewish people.

## **The Land**

In Revelation 1:7, the Greek term translated “earth” is γῆ *gé*, a word that carries various meanings within Scripture. Among these meanings, two primary interpretations emerge: it can signify the broader concept of “earth” representing the world as a whole, or it can denote a specific “land” referring to a particular region.<sup>15</sup> Gentry suggests that γῆ in Revelation 1:7 refers to the Promised Land because it is often used in this sense (cf. Matt. 2:6, 20-21; 4:14; John 3:22;

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 84; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 26.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.; Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 124; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 26, 81.

<sup>14</sup> Additionally, Gentry points out that the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24:30 combines elements from Zechariah 12:10 and Daniel 7:13. This discourse discusses the woes that would befall Israel and the destruction of the Second Temple, with a focus on events in the first century. He suggests that the book of Revelation may contain John’s version of the Olivet Discourse. Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 124-125. See also Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 92.

<sup>15</sup> Danker, Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 196; Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*, 114-115.

Acts 10:39).<sup>16</sup> Hitchcock, on the other hand, argues that because γῆ in Revelation 1:5 clearly means “earth,” it should be given the same meaning in verse 1:7.<sup>17</sup>

Hitchcock further observes that γῆ appears eighty-two times in the book of Revelation, pointing out that in instances where γῆ is employed in the New Testament to denote the geographical region of Israel, there is typically an accompanying descriptive statement that specifies the particular land or area under consideration (Matt. 2:6, 21; 4:15; 14:34; Mark 6:53; John 3:22).<sup>18</sup> As the context of the passage already involves a discussion about the Jewish people, however, the presence of the qualifier “those who pierced him,” suggests that John is referring to the Promised Land. The anticipation of impending judgment, symbolized by the metaphorical imagery of clouds, is aimed at the Jewish people, specifically identified by their association with the act of piercing Christ. This forthcoming judgment is destined for the various “tribes” (φυλῇ) that constitute the nation of Israel. Therefore, this correlation strengthens the likelihood of interpreting the term γῆ as indicative of the land of Israel.

### **Every Eye**

Hitchcock suggests that the phrase “every eye” extends beyond Israel and encompasses a universal perspective. He cites Ice’s argument, which contends that if the broader category of “every eye” pertains to the Jewish nation, it would be absurd for the specific group of “even those who pierced Him” to also refer to the same individuals.<sup>19</sup> It could be argued, however, that “every eye” does not exclusively pertain to Israel but rather encompasses all those who stand

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<sup>16</sup> Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 120-121; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 128.

<sup>17</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 82.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 85; Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice, *The End Times Controversy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2003), 98-99.

opposed to God; they will bear witness to His might, similar to the demonstration of His power when He brought judgment down upon Egypt (Exo. 9:16).

Gentry supports the idea of a “cloud coming” of Christ in A.D. 70 by referencing God’s judgment on Egypt in Isaiah 19:1.<sup>20</sup> Hitchcock argues against this metaphorical interpretation and insists that “every eye” indicates a literal and visible fulfillment.<sup>21</sup> However, as previously observed, the interpretation of this “coming” does not necessarily have to be literal, as similar judgment language is commonly employed throughout Scripture.

Isaiah 19:1 and Exodus 9:16 illustrate that God’s actions of judgment are not only punitive but they also serve the purpose of revealing His power and glory to the world. In Isaiah 19:1, God’s judgment upon Egypt is depicted with divine imagery (coming on a cloud), emphasizing His supreme authority. Exodus 9:16, during the plagues in Egypt, reveals God’s intention to display His power and make His name known to all the earth: “But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.”<sup>22</sup> When Revelation 1:7 states that “every eye will see him,” this is referring to Christ’s coming in judgment which serves as a testament to His sovereignty so that everyone will recognize His power and glory.

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<sup>20</sup> In this verse, God is described as “coming” against Egypt while “riding on a swift cloud.” Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 126.

<sup>21</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 85.

<sup>22</sup> John Piper suggests that the exodus was intended for the benefit of the nations, exemplified by Rahab, the harlot in Jericho, whose inclusion in the list of believers in Hebrews 11:31 and the teachings on justification in James 2:25 highlight the “saving effects of God’s reputation.” God’s purpose was to make His name “known and glorified.” This objective is explicitly expressed in His remarks regarding the victory at the Red Sea (Exo. 14:4, 17-18). Thus, God’s “cloud coming” judgment on Israel serves as the means by which He manifests His glory and achieves recognition and glorification. John Piper, *Providence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 92-94.

## Considering Revelation 3:10-11

Hitchcock contends that Gentry's interpretation of the "cloud coming" lacks a comprehensive response to Christ's commitment to "come" and provide deliverance to His followers during a period of persecution.<sup>23</sup> He highlights an instance in Revelation 3:10-11, where Jesus addressed the church in Philadelphia, stating, "Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown." It should be noted, however, that this assurance does not imply that Jesus promised to shield the Philadelphia church from harm in a physical sense. Instead, it signifies spiritual preservation, ensuring that their faith remains steadfast, preventing anyone from taking their salvation (crown).

The phrase "the whole world" is also used in other portions of Scripture to refer to the Roman Empire (cf. Luke 2:1). This implies that the impending trial, meant to "try those dwelling on the earth," will be felt by all within. When Jesus says He is "coming soon," it signifies impending judgment. The church will endure, but believers must "hold fast" to their faith, indicating spiritual preservation. Even some late date advocates interpret Revelation 3:10-11 spiritually.<sup>24</sup> Aune notes that this reference pertains to first-century Philadelphians. The idea of "taking away a crown" metaphorically implies disqualification. Since these individuals already possess their crowns, they must exercise caution to prevent anyone from taking them.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 82.

<sup>24</sup> Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 77-78; Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3 vols. (1685, reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1985), 3:958; Gundry, *Commentary*, 2:1008; See also Gentry, *Navigating*, 179; Gregg, *Revelation*, 111; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 92; Terry, *The Apocalypse of John*, 65-66; Wilson, *Commentary*, 46-47.

<sup>25</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 19-20; 240-241.

### *Audience Relevance*

In composing the book of Revelation, John emphasized the historical circumstances specific to the designated church communities. The Apocalypse clearly identifies its intended recipients, namely the congregations in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (Rev. 1:10-11). The sequence of these cities aligns with an established Roman courier route, highlighting a logistical aspect of communication during that period.<sup>26</sup> In short, John directed his letter towards seven tangible and extant churches in Asia during the first century, aware of the distinctive historical contexts pertinent to each church community.<sup>27</sup>

After identifying the author's intended audience, the consideration of the circumstances surrounding Revelation becomes necessary, particularly as they pertained to the members of these historical churches.<sup>28</sup> When considering the historical context of John's intended audience, it appears that he did not prophesy about events unfolding in the distant future but rather addressed the challenges confronted by these persecuted first century Christians. John implored his audience to attentively heed and comprehend his warnings so that they can act accordingly.

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<sup>26</sup> W. M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia: And Their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), 186.

<sup>27</sup> Gentry stresses the importance of considering the original audience when interpreting scripture. In evangelical hermeneutics, the grammatical-historical method is employed, which analyzes the grammar of a passage within its historical context. Gentry notes three key points that highlight the centrality of the original audience and their circumstances. First, John addresses specific historical churches (Rev. 1:4). Second, he aims for clear communication and expects these churches to understand and apply his message (Rev. 1:3; 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Third, John acknowledges the ongoing tribulation of his time, indicating that his writing pertains to contemporary issues rather than distant future events (Rev. 1:9). Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Perilous Times: A Study in Eschatological Evil* (Fountain Inn, SC: Victorious Hope Publishing, 2012), 122-123.

<sup>28</sup> Fee and Stuart emphasize the need to understand the original intent, historical context, literary context, and the meaning of the content. The goal is to know the author's intent in writing a particular text by examining the historical context in which they and their original audience lived. Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 27-35. See also Jeannine K. Brown, *Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics: Scripture as Communication* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 57-69; Luis Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hermeneutics* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 16-19.

This is captured in his exhortation, “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near” (Rev. 1:3). Thus, John directed his letter towards communities contending with adversity in the first century, providing them with guidance relevant to their specific situations rather than offering foresight into events occurring much later.<sup>29</sup>

### **Temporal Expectation of the Author**

The temporal expectation of the author serves as an additional piece of evidence supporting the early date theory for the composition date of the book of Revelation.<sup>30</sup> Throughout the text, there are numerous references to prophecies that are said to be “at hand” or “soon to take place” (Rev. 1:1, 22:6). This sense of urgency supports the idea that John expected the fulfillment of these prophecies to occur soon after the composition of the book. This concept of temporal proximity is substantiated by what are commonly referred to as “time texts,” as highlighted by Hitchcock.<sup>31</sup>

Matthew 24:34 is frequently cited as the most relevant reference supporting this argument: “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” It is argued that the phrase “all these things,” which encompasses all the events foretold in Matthew 24:4-31, found their fulfillment in A.D. 70, occurring within the lifetime of the contemporary generation that had heard the teachings of Jesus.<sup>32</sup> It would be reasonable to assume that John anticipated the imminent fulfillment of his prophecies in Revelation, expecting them to transpire within a relatively brief span of time, possibly within a few years. This

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<sup>29</sup> Chapter five of this study delves into the discussions surrounding the condition of the churches in Revelation 2-3.

<sup>30</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 133; Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 86.

<sup>31</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 86.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

interpretation, as argued by Gentry, gains further credence through the utilization of three distinct word groups: *τάχος tachos*, *ἐγγύς eggus*, and *μέλλω melló*.

As observed by Hitchcock, the words *τάχος* and *ταχύς* make eight appearances in the book of Revelation (1:1; 2:16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:6, 7, 12, 20). He notes that both of these terms are indicative of a “very brief” timeframe, emphasizing the speed of a given “activity or event.”<sup>33</sup> In particular, the phrase *ἐν τάχει*, in Revelation 1:1 and 22:6, is typically defined as “soon” or “in a short time.”<sup>34</sup> He further notes that the term *ἐγγύς* occurs twice (Rev. 1:3; 22:10) and is commonly rendered as “near” or “at hand,” signifying proximity in terms of space or time. Moreover, he observes that the word *μέλλω* appears thirteen times (Rev. 1:10; 2:10 [twice]; 3:2, 10, 16; 6:11; 8:13; 10:4, 7; 12:4-5; 17:8), noting that it can carry the meaning of “to be inevitable” or “to be destined.”<sup>35</sup>

Yet, there are three instances of temporal expectation in the introduction (Rev. 1:1, 3, 19) as well as four instances in the conclusion of the text (22:6, 7, 12, 20). As the book’s events are framed within both of these chapters, their placement is worth considering.<sup>36</sup> In fact, John uses two different terms to communicate his temporal expectations: *ἐν τάχει* (1:1; 22:6) and *ἐγγύς* (1:3; 22:10).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 87. Moreover, the utilization of the term *τάχος* to denote something as being “at hand” or “soon to take place” aligns with its historical usage. This is evident in Homer’s *Iliad* (c. 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.), where *τάχος* is employed twenty-five times in phrases such as “soon he will smite” (Hom. Il. 2.653), “lest soon the city blaze” (6.297), and “this Hector, that soon will burn our ships” (8.198).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Gentry notes that its usage with the aorist infinitive in Revelation 1:19 suggests a more appropriate rendering as “to be on the point of” or “to be about to.” However, Hitchcock posits that the temporal significance of *μέλλω* is comparatively weaker than the other word groups mentioned due to the “destined” sense of the word. Ibid., 86-88; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 133-145; See also Sproul, *The Last Days*, 141-151.

<sup>36</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 133.

<sup>37</sup> Joseph Henry Thayer’s *Greek-English Lexicon* defines *ἐν τάχει* as quickly, shortly, speedily, and soon. Likewise, the most popular modern Greek-English Lexicon (BDAG) describes the term as pertaining to “being close in point of time, near.” Moreover, *An Interpretive Lexicon of New Testament Greek*, defines the other term, *ἐγγύς*, as near, close to, or soon, as well. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*, 616; Danker, Bauer, Arndt, and

Gentry notes that nearly every modern English translation of the Bible uses language that describes something that would come in a short period of time. For example, in Revelation 1:1 the translation of ἐν τάχει in the King James Version is “must shortly come to pass.” In the New King James Version, it is translated as “must shortly take place.” In the English Standard Version, the New International Version, and the New American Standard Bible this phrase is translated as something that “must soon take place.”<sup>38</sup>

### **Latter Days**

In a lengthy note in *Before Jerusalem Fell*, Gentry discusses the interpretation of prophecies in Daniel’s writings, particularly the timing and nature of events foretold in the “latter days.”<sup>39</sup> Dispensationalists, like John Walvoord, argue that what Daniel prophesied for the “latter days” in the Old Testament is depicted in Revelation as happening “shortly,” suggesting a swift unfolding of events. However, Gentry points out that the “latter days” are considered to have already begun in the New Testament period (cf. Heb. 1:1-2; 9:26; 1 Cor. 10:11; Acts 2:16-17; 1 Pet. 1:20; 1 John 2:18).<sup>40</sup>

Additionally, Gentry notes the contrast between Daniel’s directive to “seal up” his prophecies (Dan. 8:26) for the distant future and John’s instruction to “not seal up” his prophecies (Rev. 22:10) in Revelation, indicating that “the time is near.” Gentry further notes a prophecy in Daniel linking the conclusion of the scriptural canon and prophetic revelations to the destruction of the Second Temple in A.D. 70. This is supported by Daniel 9:24-26, known as the

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Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 271; G. K. Beale, Daniel J. Brendsel, and William A. Ross, *An Interpretive Lexicon of New Testament Greek: Analysis of Prepositions, Adverbs, Particles, Relative Pronouns, and Conjunctions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 38.

<sup>38</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 137; Gentry, *Perilous Times*, 124.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.; John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (1966, reprint, Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1972), 35.



“seventy weeks of years,” traditionally associated with the First Advent of Christ, and Christ’s reference to it in His Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:15), which aligns with the A.D. 70 destruction of the Second Temple (24:1-2).<sup>41</sup>

## Response to Objections

Hitchcock argues that the timing terms, *τάχος* and *ἐγγύς*, are strategically located to frame the entire content of Revelation.<sup>42</sup> This is in agreement with Gentry who notes that “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.”<sup>43</sup> However, Hitchcock argues that Gentry’s viewpoint is inconsistent because if these timing terms are applied to all the events in the book, then one is forced to adopt either the full preterist perspective or the futurist perspective.<sup>44</sup> It is an exaggeration on Hitchcock’s part to claim that the adoption of either full-preterism or the futurist perspective is mandatory.

By looking at the context in which these timing words appear, it seems that the eschatological (future) events are separated from what John is intending as being at hand. For instance, focusing on Revelation 22:6-10, the angel is reiterating the fact that the coming judgment is going to come quickly and that all the prophecies regarding that which he stated pertaining to this coming judgment were at hand. This is why John is commanded *not to* seal up

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. For more information on the preterist interpretation of the Olivet Discourse, see Sproul, *The Last Days*, 33-101; Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 229-259; Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* (Atlanta, GA: American Vision, 1999); Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Olivet Discourse Made Easy: You Can Understand Jesus’ Great Prophetic Discourse* (2010, reprint, Chesnee, SC: Victorius Hope Publishing, 2021); Paul Ellis, *AD70 and the End of the World: Finding Good News in Christ’s Prophecies and Parables of Judgment*, (Birkenhead, New Zealand: KingsPress, 2017).

<sup>42</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 89.

<sup>43</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 133.

<sup>44</sup> Hitchcock brings forth a question regarding the specific nature of Satan’s final release (Rev. 20:7-9). He posits that the partial-preterist position is incorrect because the final release of Satan did not happen “soon” after Revelation was written. This objection is refuted in chapter five of this study in the section relevant to the discussion of the postmillennial view of Revelation 20. Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 89-90.

the scroll because this judgment is coming soon, whereas Daniel was commanded *to* seal up the scroll because the time was not near (Dan. 12:4; Rev. 22:10).

The judgments described in the letter are impending, and a final plea for repentance is expressed through the assertion that there is limited time available for repentance: “Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy” (Rev. 22:11).<sup>45</sup> This statement is closely associated with the imminence of the impending disasters, as indicated in the subsequent verse: “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done” (22:12). It may be argued that the admonition to those living in impurity and unrighteousness, that “time is running out,” serves as an incentive for them to repent before the judgment upon Jerusalem is delivered.<sup>46</sup>

A second objection put forth by Hitchcock asserts that if Revelation was indeed authored around A.D. 65, and if the prophecies contained in Revelation 1:1-20:6 were realized in the events of A.D. 64-70, then the majority of the book’s content would have transpired before most Christians had the opportunity to read or hear its contents.<sup>47</sup> Yet, John did not compose Revelation with the intention that it be widely disseminated and read by all; rather, his purpose was that it should be specifically directed towards the pastors (angels of the church; cf. Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14).<sup>48</sup> These pastoral recipients were expected to convey its

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<sup>45</sup> Wilson, *Commentary*, 264.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 90-91.

<sup>48</sup> Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown have observed that in larger congregations, there were numerous members, yet only one individual held the position of an angel. This person was seen as bearing responsibility in the oversight of the local church, as ordained by the Lord. The term “angel,” within the context of Revelation, denotes an ecclesiastical office. It is also worth noting that Revelation was the last New Testament book introduced into the Christian biblical canon. Lee Martin McDonald notes that Justin Martyr (c. A.D. 100-165) appears to have been the first to attribute authorship to John the apostle (*Dialogue with Trypho* 81.15). However, this authorship was rejected by Dionysius of Alexandria and Eusebius. Additionally, Cyril of Jerusalem (c. A.D. 313-386) forbade its use in both private and public settings (*Catechetical Lectures* 4.36). The Council of Laodicea (A.D. 363-365) did not include Revelation, although the Council of Hippo (A.D. 393) and the Council of Carthage

content to the distinct Christian congregations experiencing persecution (they that “hear” the words; cf. Rev. 1:3).

### *Identity of the Beast*

The book of Revelation portrays the beast as a formidable antagonist, opposed to both God’s followers and His righteousness.<sup>49</sup> Given the significance of Revelation to its initial audience in the first century, Gentry argues that it is necessary to identify the beast as a figure that would have held relevance for them.<sup>50</sup> This section of the dissertation argues that the depiction of the beast in Revelation should be understood as embodying both a generic entity (representative of the Roman Empire) and a specific individual (Nero Caesar). The beast of Revelation was relevant to John’s intended audience as it symbolized Rome and Nero, representing the persecuting powers threatening the church in the first century.

John’s description of the beast, characterized by its seven heads (Rev. 13:1), conveys a sense of collective identity, denoting a kingdom or empire.<sup>51</sup> Then, within the same chapter, the beast is assigned a specific identity intertwined with the number 666 (Rev. 13:18).<sup>52</sup> In fact, the angel reveals the mystery surrounding the seven heads of the beast, stating, “This calls for a

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(A.D. 397) did include it in the canon. Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*, vol. 3 (1871, reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 3:3:660; Lee Martin McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority* (2007, reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 399.

<sup>49</sup> Gentry, *Perilous Times*, 126.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Sproul, *The Last Days*, 200.

<sup>52</sup> Gentry notes that there is a consensus among most commentators regarding the dual nature of the beast in Revelation, which alternates between a generic identity, representing a kingdom, and a specific identity, symbolizing a king. These interpretations often revolve around the symbolism of the seven hills, which is commonly associated with the Roman Empire, and the number of the beast, which is thought to allude to an individual. Many scholars interpret the heads of the beast as a reference to Roman rulers (cf. Rev. 13:1, 18; 17:9-10). Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 10. For more information, see also Sproul, *The Last Days*, 200; Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 220; David E. Aune, *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation 17-22*, vol. 52C (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 944-945; Boring, *Revelation*, 17; Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 704-708; Ernest Renan, *Renan’s Antichrist*, Translated by William G. Hutchison (London, UK: Walter Scott, LTD, 1900), 215.

mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while” (Rev. 17:9-10).

Just as New York is commonly referred to as the “Big Apple,” Rome was renowned as the city of seven hills, and it is likely that the first-century readers would have recognized this allusion to Rome.<sup>53</sup> Smalley remarks, “The apparently obvious reference of [seven hills]... is to Rome itself, since classical writers from the mid-first century BC onwards used the phrase ‘seven hills’ as a symbol for the city.”<sup>54</sup> When situated within its historical context, the symbolism of the seven heads, signifying seven mountains or hills, strongly indicates a reference to the city of Rome and its rulers.

### **The Sixth King**

Once it has been established that the seven heads symbolize the emperors of Rome, the next step is to discern the identity of the five who have “fallen” and the one who “is” holding power at the time Revelation was written (Rev. 17:10). Gentry remarks, “If there is any chronologically precise statement in the book, Revelation 17:10 should certainly be it.”<sup>55</sup> Late date advocate, Adela Y. Collins, states, “The remarks that ‘five have fallen, one is etc.’ imply that the author was making some real calculation which was meaningful in his own historical context.”<sup>56</sup> While Revelation 17:10 seems to allude to the notion of seven historic Roman emperors ruling in succession, various approaches have been developed to interpret this verse.

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<sup>53</sup> Wilson, *Commentary*, 148-149.

<sup>54</sup> Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 435. See also Boring, *Revelation*, 184-185.

<sup>55</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 151.

<sup>56</sup> Adela Y. Collins, “Dating the Apocalypse of John.” *Biblical Research* 26 (1981): 36.

Hitchcock highlights four basic approaches to interpreting the seven kings: (1) the symbolic approach, (2) successive Roman emperors (also known as the historical approach), (3) successive forms of Roman government, and (4) successive kingdoms. In the first approach, the reference to the seven kings assumes a symbolic aspect, devoid of historical references, and instead, it tends to symbolize Roman rulers collectively or alludes to other world powers. The second approach identifies these seven kings as seven historical Roman emperors who governed in succession. In the third approach, the seven kings symbolize the sequential evolution of governmental structures within the Roman Empire. Finally, the fourth approach attributes these seven kings to the representation of successive Gentile world powers or kingdoms.<sup>57</sup>

This present author argues that the reference to “seven kings” pertains to a successive line of Roman rulers, commencing with Julius Caesar. If one initiates the count of Roman emperors with Julius, Nero emerges as the sixth king, reigning at the time when the book of Revelation was written. While this study adopts the historical approach, it is worth acknowledging the existence of various methods of enumerating the list of kings. Among these, the most prevalent alternative is to commence the list with Augustus, given that the Roman Empire was officially established during his rule.

Early date advocate Smalley, following a historical approach, begins his list of kings with Augustus. Notably, he skips over Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, and this omission leads to the conclusion that Vespasian is the sixth king during the composition of Revelation. Titus would be the seventh, as his reign would be brief, lasting only two years.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, late date advocate Aune, who takes a symbolic approach, views the number seven as a metaphor. He

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<sup>57</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 155-170.

<sup>58</sup> Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 436.

argues that it does not correspond to specific historical kings. Nevertheless, Aune acknowledges that proponents of the historical approach typically identify the phrase “one is living” in Revelation 17:9-11 as a reference to the emperor at the time of its composition, with Nero or Galba being the primary candidates. He also notes that the exclusion of the three “interregnum” emperors could imply Vespasian or Titus, although he finds the procedure of omitting these emperors to be “questionable.”<sup>59</sup>

Late date advocate Collins argues against the exclusion of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius from the list of emperors, as they were legitimate rulers, and their names appear in other historical records. Nevertheless, she commences her list of the seven kings with Caligula, who was the first emperor to come into conflict with the Jews.<sup>60</sup> This arrangement positions Domitian as the sixth king during the composition of Revelation. However, this interpretation appears improbable and seems to be a strained effort to align the context with a Domitianic dating of the text.

Several ancient sources consider Julius Caesar as the first king or emperor of Rome: The Sibylline Oracles (5.12-15; 8.135-138), Suetonius, in *The Twelve Caesars*, beginning with Julius and acknowledging his title as “Father of his Country” (*Julius* 76), and the Jewish work 4 Ezra, also known as 2 Esdras, reference the twelve Caesars, implying Julius as the first and Augustus as the second (12:13ff). Additionally, between the eighth and thirteenth centuries, four commentaries on Revelation listed Nero as the sixth king of Revelation 17:10, as noted by Gumerlock.<sup>61</sup> Stuart states:

That the line or succession of *emperors* is here meant, and not the primitive kings of Rome, is certain from the connection of the five with the one *who is*, and the one *who is*

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<sup>59</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 946-949.

<sup>60</sup> Collins, “Dating the Apocalypse of John,” 36.

<sup>61</sup> Gumerlock, *Revelation and the First Century*, 157-158.

*to come.* We have only to reckon then the succession of emperors, and we must arrive with certainty at the reign under which the Apocalypse was written... At most, only an occasional beginning of the count with Augustus can be shown, in the classic authors. The almost universal usage is against it.<sup>62</sup>

Gentry points out that even if one starts counting kings from Augustus, the composition date of Revelation could still fall before A.D. 70 because the sixth king would be Galba and the seventh king would be Otho, who had an even shorter reign.<sup>63</sup>

Although Julius Caesar never formally assumed the title of “emperor,” he did accept the designation of *Imperator*, as documented by Suetonius (*Julius* 76). Subsequent emperors adopted the name “Caesar” to signify their kingly status. Gentry argues that the most compelling witness for beginning the enumeration of kings with Julius Caesar is provided by the Jewish historian Josephus as his chronology aligns closely with the period encompassing the time of John and the New Testament (A.D. 37-101).<sup>64</sup> The most logical sequence for enumerating Roman emperors appears to be as follows: Julius Caesar (49-44 B.C.), Augustus (31 B.C. – A.D. 14), Tiberius (A.D. 14-37), Gaius, also known as Caligula (A.D. 37-41), Claudius (A.D. 41-54), Nero (A.D. 54-68), Galba (A.D. 68-69), Otho (A.D. 69), Vitellius (A.D. 69), and Vespasian (A.D. 69-79).<sup>65</sup> The following chart illustrates the order of the first eight emperors, based on different approaches.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Stuart, *Apocalypse*, 1:276, 2:447.

<sup>63</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 155-157; Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 142-143. See also Hillegonds, *The Early Date*, 41-44; Sproul, *The Last Days*, 158-160.

<sup>64</sup> Josephus, an author whose works were written for both Roman and Jewish audiences, proves valuable in comprehending John’s perspective on the enumeration of the kings of Rome due to their shared geographical origin in Palestine, common Jewish identity, and concurrent existence in the first century. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 155.

<sup>65</sup> Ehrman argues that certain sections of the book of Revelation were composed in the A.D. 60s during the period of Nero’s persecution. His argument partially revolves around initiating the count of kings with Julius Caesar, which places Nero in the sequence as the sixth king. Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 498.

<sup>66</sup> Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 704.

Julius	1	1		
Augustus	2	2	1	1
Tiberius	3	3	2	2
Caligula	4	4	3	3
Claudius	5	5	4	4
Nero	6	6	5	5
*Galba	7		6	
*Otho	8		7	
*Vitellius			8	
Vespasian		7		6
Titus		8		7
Domitian				8

### The Eighth King Objection: Nero Redivivus

The mention of the eighth king in Revelation 17:11 has been a point of contention among scholars: “As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction.”<sup>67</sup> Gentry argues that the eighth king refers to Vespasian, considering the Roman Empire’s near-collapse during the Roman Civil War.<sup>68</sup> Hitchcock, however, points out that this interpretation contradicts Gentry’s historical approach, as the eighth Roman emperor was Otho, not Vespasian.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> For various interpretations of the eighth king, see Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 946-950; Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (1993, reprint, New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2003), 405-407; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 875-878; Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 704-708; Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 96-98; Mathison, *From Age to Age*, 685; Hans-Josef Klauck, “Do They Never Come Back? Nero Redivivus and the Apocalypse of John,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (October 2001): 697; Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, 210-211; Mounce, *Revelation*, 317-318; Peake, *The Revelation of John*, 80-89; Poole, *Commentary*, 3:995; Robinson, *Redating*, 242-248; Smalley, *Thunder and Love*, 45-48; Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 510-512; Stuart, *Apocalypse*, 2:326-327; Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 221-222; Terry, *The Apocalypse of John*, 217-218; Wilson, *Commentary*, 198-201.

<sup>68</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 315-316.

<sup>69</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 161.



Gentry justifies his argument by focusing on the absence of the definite article “the” in the Greek text, suggesting that the beast is not *the* eighth, but rather *an* eighth.<sup>70</sup> He defends his argument as follows:

My exegetical argument is that *John himself* conspicuously drops the definite article in his presentation: he speaks of “the seven heads” (αι επτα, *hai hepta*), “the five” (οι πεντα, *hoi penta*)[,] “the one” (ο εις, *ho eis*), “the other” (ο αλλος, *ho allos*) (17:9-10). But when he gets to the “eighth” king, he drops the article. This king, instead, is “an eighth” (ογδοος, *ogdoos*)... Furthermore, the original vision does not provide us with *eight* kings anyway! The interpretive angel himself (as recorded by John, not imposed upon the text by me) suddenly imports an additional king from outside the original vision. Thus, the vision’s collection of kings (in the seven heads symbol) and the angel’s explanation of the seriatim meaning (the fallen five, the one that is, the other to come, 17:10) is unexpectedly enlarged by the addition of a new king from outside the chain. Thus, the sudden change is in the text itself; I simply seek to explain that sudden shift.<sup>71</sup>

Gentry proposes that John’s focus in Revelation 17:11 is not on the specific Roman emperor succeeding the seventh but the arrival of a new ruler, Vespasian, who would restore the Roman Empire’s stability.<sup>72</sup> Gentry posits that the beast’s death symbolizes the Roman Civil War, initiated by Nero’s suicide, during which Galba, Otho, and Vitellius briefly held power. Vespasian, in this view, became the eighth king responsible for the Roman Empire’s revival; the revival of the beast.

In contrast, Hitchcock argues that Gentry’s interpretation does not adequately explain the beast’s death and resurrection.<sup>73</sup> He suggests that the absence of the mention of a ninth or tenth king suggests that this refers to the final manifestation of the beast. He argues that the seemingly literal death and resurrection of the beast favors an interpretation relating to the end times and the Antichrist who is expected to suffer a fatal wound and recover, establishing his kingdom.

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<sup>70</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 315-316; Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 96-98.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, xxx-xxi.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>73</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 163.

The Nero Redivivus Myth is frequently employed by proponents of the late date of Revelation, suggesting it was written during Emperor Domitian's reign.<sup>74</sup> The rationale behind this argument is that Revelation addresses the churches during a period of persecution, and the persecutors are commonly identified as either Nero or Domitian.<sup>75</sup> It is argued that since the Nero Redivivus Myth indicates Nero's death before Revelation's composition, it implies that Revelation must have been written later, likely during Domitian's reign. This is because the time it would take to develop the myth and circulate widely enough to be incorporated in Revelation requires the later date.<sup>76</sup> Yet, Hitchcock does not utilize this late date argument, contending that it carries little weight because the myth diverges from what Revelation conveys about the wounds of the beast.<sup>77</sup>

Nevertheless, even if John incorporated elements of this myth, it does not necessarily establish a late date for Revelation or indicate John as a false prophet. This is because the groundwork for the rapid spread of the Nero Redivivus Myth was laid even before Nero's suicide, with pretenders claiming he would return to Rome and take vengeance on his enemies.<sup>78</sup> It is possible that John incorporated elements of the already-developing myth to symbolize the

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<sup>74</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 950; Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 407-423; Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 400-408; Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, 37; Peake, *The Revelation of John*, 123-133; Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, ci-cii.

<sup>75</sup> Hillegonds, *The Early Date*, 143.

<sup>76</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 177.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Elements of the myth had circulated widely prior to Nero's suicide in June of A.D. 68. Suetonius states that astrologers had foretold Nero's fate, with some predicting his eventual rule in the eastern regions, even specifying Jerusalem and the restoration of his former wealth. Suetonius goes on to mention that after Nero's death, there were proclamations made in his name, suggesting he was still alive and would return to Rome to exact vengeance on his enemies. Additionally, Tacitus records an incident before Galba's murder in A.D. 69 where an imitator, posing as Nero, recruited deserters and nearly incited war with the Parthians. Thus, if John utilized aspects of this myth in Revelation, the occurrence of these events so soon after Nero's death, proves that the myth was at least in development and widely circulated during Revelation's composition. Suetonius, *Nero* 57; Tacitus, *Histories* 1.2; 2.8. See also Bell, "Date of John's Apocalypse," 98; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 306-307; Hillegonds, *The Early Date*, 144-148; Mathison, *From Age to Age*, 646; Smalley, *Thunder and Love*, 44.

beast's return (the revitalization of the Roman Empire) and the imminent destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple under Vespasian's rule in A.D. 70.

### **Number of the Beast**

The directive to “calculate the number of the beast” suggests that the prophecies relate to the first century, as John assumed his readers would be able to identify the beast relevant to their historical context (Rev. 13:18).<sup>79</sup> Many preterists, including Gentry, commonly interpret the number 666 as a cryptogram that, when deciphered, points to Nero Caesar as the identity of the beast.<sup>80</sup> This is further supported by the presence of a textual variant in Revelation 13:18, which presents the numerical value of 616 instead of 666, aligning with alternative spellings of Nero's name. Gentry notes that in ancient times, letters had dual roles: they functioned as phonetic symbols for constructing written words and served as numerals.<sup>81</sup>

Storms outlines three primary approaches to interpreting the number of the beast: the chronological view, historical view, and symbolic view. The first approach associates the number with the duration of the beast's existence. For instance, in A.D. 1213, Pope Innocent III called for a crusade, believing that Islamic power would endure for six hundred and sixty-six

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<sup>79</sup> The number of the beast, 666, has always been a subject of debate among scholars. Sproul states, “Perhaps no biblical riddle has gripped and fascinated people more than this: who is the beast identified by the dreaded cryptogram 666?” Likewise, Storms remarks, “The meaning of 666 has puzzled students of the Scriptures ever since John first wrote Revelation.” Sproul, *The Last Days*, 198; Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 502.

<sup>80</sup> Ehrman also contends that the numerical symbol 666 in the book of Revelation is a reference to Nero, and he posits that the overarching theme of the book revolves around the idea of God overthrowing the Roman Empire at the end of time. Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., 501-502; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 198-201; Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 41-43. See also Greg L. Bahnsen, *Victory in Jesus: The Bright Hope of Postmillennialism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 2020), 21; Edmundson, *The Church in Rome*, 173; Hillegonds, *The Early Date*, 139-141; Mathison, *Postmillennialism*, 145; Robinson, *Redating*, 235; Sproul, *The Last Days*, 202-204; Terry, *The Apocalypse of John*, 179-180; Wilson, *Commentary*, 156-158.

<sup>81</sup> Gentry observes that Roman numerals provide a familiar example of letters having numerical values. For instance, “I” represents one, “V” stands for five, and “X” equals ten. In Greek and Hebrew, the values of letters align with the order of the alphabet. The first nine letters signify values from one to nine (1, 2, 3, etc.), the following nine represent tens (10, 20, 30, etc.), and the remaining letters denote hundreds (100, 200, 300, etc.). Therefore, an individual's name could be reduced to its numerical equivalent by adding the values of all the letters in the name. Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 38.

years.<sup>82</sup> The second view links the number to a historical individual, power, or kingdom. This interpretation is grounded in the practice of gematria and is the most widely accepted interpretation. In the third approach, the numbers in Revelation are seen as representing spiritual or theological realities rather than precise calculations. In this context, 666 is symbolic of imperfection.<sup>83</sup>

Craig R. Koester observes that Nero's name in Greek letters (transliterated as Neron) has a numerical value of 1005. He notes, however, that when Nero's name is written in Hebrew letters (נרון קסר), it equals 666.<sup>84</sup> This theory gains further support from the fact that in Latin, the name is written as "Nero," not "Neron" as in Greek. Accordingly, transliterating the Latin form of Nero into Hebrew (נרו קסר) yields the numerical value of 616, the value of the textual variant.<sup>85</sup>

Bruce M. Metzger suggests that this change may have been intentional, and agrees that the Greek form "Neron Caesar" in Hebrew characters equals 666, whereas the Latin form "Nero

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<sup>82</sup> Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 502-503.

<sup>83</sup> Numerology is a belief system that ascribes mystical significance to numbers, asserting their influence on various aspects of life. Functioning as a personality typing system, numerology assigns numerical values to letters, names, and ideas, attributing specific meanings to these values. The premise revolves around the idea that numbers carry inherent significance and can provide insights into personality traits and life events. Ibid. For information regarding Numerology, see Virginia Loh-Hagan, *Numerology* (Ann Arbor, MI: Cherry Lake Publishing Group, 2021); Shirley Blackwell Lawrence, *The Big Book of Numerology: The Hidden Meaning of Numbers and Letters* (Newburyport, MA: Red Wheel/Weiser, LLC, 2019); Greg Russell, *Numerology: The Secret of Numbers* (Mount Joy, PA: Inkspire, 2022).

<sup>84</sup> Craig R. Koester, "The Number of the Beast in Revelation 13 in Light of Papyri, Graffiti, and Inscriptions," *Journal of Early Christian History*, 6, no. 3 (2016): 9. See also Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 389-390; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 193-203; Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 41-43; Klauck, "Do They Never Come Back," 693.

<sup>85</sup> Cryptograms, also known as gematria, were not exclusive to the Jewish and Christian traditions, as there is evidence of cryptogrammatic riddles in various ancient cultures. An interesting example can be observed on the walls of certain Pompeii ruins, where a graffiti message reads, "I love her whose number is 545." Additional instances of ancient cryptograms can be found in the works of Suetonius (*Nero* 39) and in the Sibylline Oracles (5.28-31). Bahnsen, *Victory in Jesus*, 21; George Wesley Buchanan, *The Book of Revelation: Its Introduction and Prophecy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005), 370; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 193-196; Wilson, *Commentary*, 156-158.

Caesar” is equivalent to 616.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, Koester notes that if the Greek word for “beast” (θηρίον) is transliterated into Hebrew letters as תריון, its value is also 666.<sup>87</sup> Since Revelation associates this number with a “man” (Rev. 13:18), and both the Hebrew forms of “beast” and “Neron Caesar” equal 666, it is possible that there is a connection between the two.<sup>88</sup> Additionally, the genitive form of “beast” (θηρίου) in Hebrew letters (תריו) equals 616, which matches the shorter form of Nero’s name.<sup>89</sup>

Guthrie, conversely, rejects the notion of 666 referring to Nero, due to the absence of early evidence supporting this connection.<sup>90</sup> However, Gumerlock argues that even Irenaeus acknowledged that some individuals associated the name “Nero” with the number 616, which he considered a “spurious” interpretation (*Against Heresies* 5.30.1).<sup>91</sup> Gumerlock further cites evidence from the fifth century, specifically from the *Liber genealogus*, which indicates that early Christians used Nero’s name in their calculation of the number of the beast, which, in their version of Revelation 13:18, was 616. This fifth-century African text, in addition to the contemporaries of Irenaeus who deciphered the number as 616, suggests that the identification of Nero with the number of the beast occurred much earlier than previously believed. It is also

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<sup>86</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, corrected ed. (Stuttgart, DE: United Bible Societies, 1975), 750.

<sup>87</sup> Koester, “The Number of the Beast,” 9.

<sup>88</sup> Chilton’s interpretation goes beyond the singular reference to Nero and encompasses a broader association with Rome in general. In contrast, Smalley’s interpretation suggests that 666 symbolizes oppressive and unjust “human and secular forces” throughout the ages. Smalley argues that John’s reference is not directed at an individual but at various authorities misusing power. However, the most likely interpretation of the number is that it was intended to identify Nero, and likely Rome, as the oppressors of the first century church to which the prophecies were relevant. Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 351; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 352-353.

<sup>89</sup> Koester, “The Number of the Beast,” 9.

<sup>90</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 959.

<sup>91</sup> Francis X. Gumerlock, “Nero Antichrist: Patristic Evidence for the Use of Nero’s Naming in Calculating the Number of the Beast (Rev 13:18),” *Westminster Theological Journal* 68, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 358, 360. See also Hillegonds, *The Early Date*, 134-139.

noteworthy that a fragment from the oldest extant New Testament copy presents the number of the beast in Revelation 13 as 616, not the commonly accepted 666.<sup>92</sup>

Hitchcock acknowledges that the interpretation of 666 appears to necessitate some form of gematria.<sup>93</sup> Nevertheless, he contends that in order for the number 666 to align with the gematria value of Nero, the specific name and title “Nero Caesar” must be employed. This appears to present a challenge, as Hitchcock asserts that numerous names and titles were associated with Nero, raising uncertainty about the appropriateness of selecting this particular formulation of his name. He articulates his concern by stating, “Choosing this title seems too convenient for the Nero view,” a sentiment shared by Beale.<sup>94</sup>

This specific formulation of Nero’s name is found within the Talmud and various Rabbinical writings.<sup>95</sup> It has also been found in a Murabba’at document of the Qumran community.<sup>96</sup> Bauckham suggests that because the Greek word for “beast” also produces the sum of 666, as stated above, it may be part of the reason for this specific formulation of Nero’s name.<sup>97</sup> He posits that John might have had an alternative motive for the value of 666, hinting at the possibility that it also corresponds with the word “beast,” thus reinforcing Nero’s identification as the embodiment of the beast in Revelation.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 138.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 139; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 719.

<sup>95</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 199; Stuart, *Apocalypse*, 2:457; Gumerlock, “Nero Antichrist,” 348; Jay E. Adams, *The Time is at Hand* (1966, reprint, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970), 73.

<sup>96</sup> Hitchcock maintains a degree of skepticism regarding the authenticity of this document in producing the necessary spelling of Nero’s name due to its damaged condition. Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 141; See also David E. Aune, *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation 6-16*, vol. 52B (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 770; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 719.

<sup>97</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 388. See also Peake, *The Revelation of John*, 326; Hillegonds, *The Early Date*, 140; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 719.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 389-390.

Hitchcock's second objection pertains to Revelation 13:17, which explicitly states that the numerical value of 666 represents the *name* of the beast, without reference to a title.<sup>99</sup> To emphasize this, Hitchcock points out that when Irenaeus provided examples of names totaling 666, he consistently used single names, without including any titles.<sup>100</sup> Therefore, Hitchcock rejects the use of Nero Caesar because the gematria value of 666 requires this formulation of Nero's name, including the title.

His argument against the association of 666 with Nero Caesar based on the use of a title seems to read too much into the text, as it overlooks the straightforward interpretation. First, the historical context of Christian persecution during the time of Revelation's composition (Rev. 1:9) suggests that John was identifying a relevant figure contemporary with the audience he was addressing.<sup>101</sup> John's contemporary expectation that the prophecies of Revelation would shortly come to pass, support this position (Rev. 1:1, 3; 2:16; 3:11; 6:10-11; 10:6; 12:12; 22:6, 7, 12, 20). Second, it is likely that Irenaeus was aware that some individuals had deciphered the name Nero Caesar from the textual variant 616 (*Against Heresies* 5:30).<sup>102</sup> This suggests that Nero Caesar was identified shortly after Revelation's composition, giving enough time for the textual variant to be created for easier identification.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 139.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>101</sup> Gentry, *Perilous Times*, 126.

<sup>102</sup> Gumerlock notes that Evanthis, Lateinos, and Teitan were the candidates for the number 666 that were considered by Irenaeus. However, Irenaeus did not definitively endorse any of them, believing it was best to wait for the prophecy's fulfillment. Some during his time read the number as 616 instead of 666, based on a textual variant, and sought a person with a name that added up to this "spurious" number, claiming that person to be the awaited figure. Irenaeus seemed to know this name but did not reveal it. Gumerlock notes that the *Liber genealogus* is the only known patristic text providing a name that adds up to 616, which indicates that Irenaeus likely understood the name to have been Nero Caesar. Furthermore, caution is advised when relying on Irenaeus's writings as historical facts due to his known inaccuracies, as demonstrated in chapter two of this study. Gumerlock, "Nero Antichrist," 358-359.

<sup>103</sup> Some speculate that copyists may have intentionally changed the text from 666 to 616 so that the identification of Nero Caesar would be easier to decipher. See Beal, *The Book of Revelation*, 719; Gentry, *Before*

Third, it is noteworthy that the name “Caesar” was not merely a title. Nero’s original birth name was “Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus,” but upon his adoption by Emperor Claudius, his full name became “Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus.” Thus, “Caesar” was an integral part of Nero’s name, rather than simply a title, as Hitchcock asserts. Fourth, relying solely on Irenaeus’ opinion as a counterargument is not entirely reliable, as demonstrated in chapter two of this dissertation. For these reasons, Hitchcock’s argument must be rejected.

Hitchcock’s third concern relates to the necessity of translating Nero Caesar’s name from its Greek form into Hebrew to achieve the gematria value of 666.<sup>104</sup> This requirement arises because the numerical value of the Greek translation amounts to 1005, not 666. Hitchcock’s objection lies in his skepticism that John, the author of Revelation, would address a Greek-speaking audience and expect them to calculate a name in Hebrew.<sup>105</sup> He also argues that Irenaeus assumed the necessity of calculating 666 in Greek. Thus, Hitchcock rejects the transliteration of Nero’s name into Hebrew because he does not believe that John was addressing Hebrew readers.

Bauckham responds to this objection by asserting that John likely anticipated that there would be readers within the various churches who were knowledgeable in Hebrew.<sup>106</sup> Stuart supports this notion by pointing out that there were Jewish Christians dispersed across different

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*Jerusalem Fell*, 201-203; Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 376; Peake, *The Revelation of John*, 316; Sproul, *The Last Days*, 203.

<sup>104</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 140.

<sup>105</sup> Ramsay also shared this opinion when he wrote, “The idea that the sum of the numbers expressed by the letters of the name and title of Nero in Hebrew is hinted at, must be pronounced ridiculous. The book was written for Asian readers who knew no Hebrew.” W. M. Ramsay, “The Date of the Apocalypse,” *The Expository Times* 16, no. 4 (January 1905): 174.

<sup>106</sup> Beale suggests that Bauckham has presented the most compelling argument for John and his readers’ understanding of gematria, particularly due to its usage in other Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 719; Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 388.



regions, capable of deciphering the cryptic elements in the text.<sup>107</sup> Gentry emphasizes that one of the historical arguments favoring the early date of Revelation is the distinctly Hebraic nature of the book's language, especially when compared to the refined Greek found in the Gospel of John.<sup>108</sup> It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that John expected Jewish Christian readers for his work, given the use Old Testament symbols throughout the text, as well as his incorporation of Hebrew words such as "Armageddon," "amen," "hallelujah," "Satan," and "Abaddon" (cf. Rev. 9:11; 12:9; 16:16).<sup>109</sup>

Hitchcock's fourth objection pertains to the correctness of the title "Neron Caesar" in its Greek transliteration into Hebrew (נרון קסר).<sup>110</sup> He questions whether the Hebrew letters י (Yod) and ו (Vav) should be included in this calculation. The numerical value for "Neron Caesar" in Hebrew totals 666 only if the Yod is excluded from the word "Caesar" (קיסר) after the ק (Qof). Hitchcock claims that there is no conclusive evidence supporting the spelling of "Caesar" (קסר) without the Yod.<sup>111</sup> He also highlights the need to retain the Vav in "Neron" in order to arrive at the number 666. He argues, "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."<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Additionally, Hillegonds notes that a Jew living in the first century would likely be familiar with the Greek spelling of the Roman emperor's name. This is because it was prominently featured on the Neronian coins of that time, which bore the inscription "Neron Caesar." Stuart, *Apocalypse*, 2:457; Hillegonds, *The Early Date*, 131; See also, Farrar, *The Early Days*, 471; Renan, *Renan's Antichrist*, 207.

<sup>108</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 209; See also Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 355.

<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, it would be illogical for John to compose his code in a universally comprehensible language when its purpose was to convey a hidden message to the early church. During this period, the church maintained a strong Jewish identity. Therefore, it is plausible that John intended his code to be comprehensible to Jewish readers while also confounding the Roman authorities. It is worth remembering that John was writing from Patmos during his Roman exile. Gregg, *Revelation*, 360; Mathison, *From Age to Age*, 679.

<sup>110</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 141.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 142.

Hitchcock's assertion that there is no definitive spelling of "Caesar" without the inclusion of the Yod is inaccurate.<sup>113</sup> Even in the absence of direct evidence, and it is worth stating that such evidence does exist, Swete observes that Revelation's spelling could still function effectively as a cipher.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, the existence of the 616 variant supports this idea, suggesting that some individuals may have unraveled the puzzle and altered the text to allow decryption in the Latin form of Nero Caesar.<sup>115</sup> Therefore, none of Hitchcock's arguments sufficiently undermine the substantial evidence provided by 666 and the textual variation of 616 which suggests the identification of Nero as the beast of Revelation.

### **Persecution of the Beast**

Many scholars agree that the book of Revelation was authored during a period marked by intense Christian persecution, an assertion substantiated by John's reference to his own exile in the introduction (Rev. 1:9).<sup>116</sup> This wave of Christian persecution began in A.D. 64 when Emperor Nero held Christians responsible for the infamous fire in Rome. The fire's occurrence has been attributed to Nero himself, possibly to make space for his elaborate building projects.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> As previously mentioned, this spelling has been discovered in the Talmud, various Rabbinical writings, and on a scroll found at Qumran. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 388; Farrar, *The Early Days*, 471; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 199; Gumerlock, "Nero Antichrist," 348; Hort, *Apocalypse*, xxxi; Stuart, *Apocalypse*, 2:457.

<sup>114</sup> Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 176; Cited in Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 199; See also Renan, *Renan's Antichrist*, 207.

<sup>115</sup> Hitchcock argues that the deliberate or intended association of 616 with Nero is impossible to determine. As such, he does not believe it contributes to the support of the early date theory. Nevertheless, some suggest that the spelling may have been deliberate as the Greek word for "beast" also yields the sum of 666, as mentioned above. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 388; Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 142-143; Koester, "The Number of the Beast," 9; Peake, *The Revelation of John*, 326.

<sup>116</sup> Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 208-213; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 285-286; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 950-952; Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, 36; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 3-4; Wilson, "The Problem," 605.

<sup>117</sup> Nero is reported as having stood on a tall tower, overlooking the city while Rome was burning, playing a harp and reciting a poem about the Fall of Troy. Ferdinand Christian Baur, *The Church History of the First Three Centuries*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2 vols. (London, UK: Williams and Norgate, 1878-1879), 2:192; Charles Bigg, *The Origins of Christianity* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1909), 27-28; MacDonald, *The Life and Writings*, 170; Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44.

Even those who advocate for the late date of the book of Revelation, acknowledge that insufficient evidence exists to substantiate the notion of systematic persecution of Christians during the reign of Domitian.<sup>118</sup> In contrast, as Gentry observes, there is clear historical evidence of Christian persecution under Nero.<sup>119</sup> Neither Christian nor Pagan sources from the time of Domitian indicate a widespread systematic persecution of Christians.<sup>120</sup> This lack of evidence weakens the case for the Domitianic date of Revelation.

Beale attempts to diminish the significance of this point by arguing that there is no clear evidence indicating that Nero's persecution of Christians in Rome extended to Asia Minor.<sup>121</sup> However, Matthison counters Beale's point with two key observations. First, Matthison finds it peculiar to dismiss a date during Nero's reign due to localized persecution, while simultaneously accepting a date during Domitian's reign, where there is no evidence of systematic persecution *at all*. Second, Matthison emphasizes that even if Nero's persecution was predominantly confined to Rome, its repercussions would have reverberated across all the churches. Furthermore, Matthison emphasizes the significance of Nero's persecution by highlighting that it led to the deaths of two of the church's most prominent leaders, Peter and Paul.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Boring, *Revelation*, 17; Carson, Moo, and Morris, *An Introduction*, 474; Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 199.

<sup>119</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 298-299.

<sup>120</sup> Baur suggests that there were a few scattered incidents, but nothing substantial enough to indicate a widespread persecution of Christians across the Roman Empire during the reign of Domitian. Hitchcock, however, argues that there is evidence of a Domitianic persecution, drawing from Pliny's letter to Trajan, written around A.D. 112. He suggests that this letter marks the earliest known pagan reference to Christians being put on trial as Christians. Baur, *The Church History*, 2:196-197; Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 201-203; Pliny, *Letters* 10.96-97.

<sup>121</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 719.

<sup>122</sup> Mathison, *From Age to Age*, 646. See also Tertullian, *Apology* 5.4; *1 Clement* 6:1; Suetonius, *Nero* 16; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.25; Maier, *Eusebius*, 74.

Stuart's argument reinforces the idea that Revelation originated during a period of severe Christian persecution. He maintains that "Christians were suffering everywhere," and that the themes and content of the book unmistakably reflect the time of this oppression.<sup>123</sup> Due to the lack of evidence for a widespread Domitianic persecution of the church, Stuart's perspective corresponds better with the historical context that favors Nero's reign.

Additional evidence linking the beast of Revelation to Nero can be found in the text itself. Revelation 13 describes that the beast would be granted authority, enabling it to persecute the church and wage a war against the saints for a period lasting forty-two months (Rev. 13:5-8). Interestingly, the duration of Nero's persecution aligns with this period, lasting from November of A.D. 64 until his suicide in June of A.D. 68.<sup>124</sup> Nero's campaign of persecution, as stated above, also resulted in the deaths of Peter and Paul around A.D. 67.<sup>125</sup>

In his objection, Hitchcock contends that the absence of evidence for a systematic persecution of Christians during Domitian's reign should not be interpreted as an indication that Christians in Asia, and elsewhere, were exempt from persecution.<sup>126</sup> To support his case that believers were persecuted for their faith by Domitian, Hitchcock draws upon various historical sources, including Pliny the Younger (c. A.D. 61-113), Cassius Dio, Suetonius, Melito of Sardis (d. c. A.D. 180), Hegesippus, Clement of Rome, and Tertullian.<sup>127</sup> Hitchcock begins by contending that Christians who appeared before Pliny were presented with three opportunities to

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<sup>123</sup> Stuart, *Apocalypse*, 1:224.

<sup>124</sup> According to John Fletcher Hurst, the persecution began when Nero falsely accused Christians of starting the fire in Rome in A.D. 64 and persisted until his death in A.D. 68. John Fletcher Hurst, *Short History of the Christian Church* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1892), 18; See also Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 254-255.

<sup>125</sup> Wilson, "The Problem," 589.

<sup>126</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 199-200.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 201-212.

recant their faith, under threat of death.<sup>128</sup> Those who remained steadfast in their beliefs were subsequently executed.

Hitchcock, however, does not take into account the introduction of this letter in his argument. Mark Wilson observes that Pliny initiates his letter to Emperor Trajan by admitting that he has *never* personally participated in the interrogation of a Christian (*Letters* 10:96). It is unusual that this high-ranking Roman official, serving as a state prosecutor during the reign of Domitian, had somehow managed to remain absent at any Christian proscriptions, a fact that Wilson finds as “remarkable.”<sup>129</sup> The probable explanation lies in the absence of any organized persecution directed at Christians originating from Rome during this time. Consequently, Pliny lacked the necessary knowledge to determine the appropriate course of action when faced with those who were presented for prosecution.<sup>130</sup> For these reasons, the letters of Pliny should not be considered as conclusive evidence supporting the widespread Domitianic persecution of Christians.

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 201-203; Pliny, *Letters* 10.96-97.

<sup>129</sup> Hort dismisses the correspondence between Pliny and Trajan and states, “Whether Christians were by name forbidden to exist, or condemned under more general laws, condemnation was assuredly always a danger which they had to fear: and there is no reason why this state of things should not date from the time of Nero. Mark W. Wilson, “The Early Christians in Ephesus and the Date of Revelation, Again,” *Neotestamentica* 39, 1 (2005): 174; Hort, *Apocalypse*, xxvii.

<sup>130</sup> Pliny’s unfamiliarity with the protocol for prosecuting Christians, despite his role as a prosecutor during Domitian’s time, hints at the early inception of imperial measures against Christianity. His lack of knowledge implies that these policies were likely implemented before Domitian’s reign. Sulpicius Severus documents an edict issued by Nero explicitly forbidding Christianity, suggesting that these policies may have been initiated during Nero’s reign. The chaos following Nero’s suicide in A.D. 68 would have made it unlikely for such policies to be introduced afterward, and it is plausible that Pliny may not have been aware of such an old policy if it were indeed instituted under Nero. Gentry also suspects that this policy of persecution was present during Nero’s reign. Furthermore, Hitchcock argues that Pliny *specifically* states that the *persecution* only dates back 25 years. However, this is inaccurate because Pliny does not state that the *persecution* only dates back 25 years, he simply says that he spoke to some individuals who were *charged* as Christians, but they had claimed that they have *not been believers for 25 years*. Pliny then had them worship the Roman gods and curse Christ to prove their claims. Beale concedes that Pliny lacked knowledge of any formal imperial guidelines for persecuting Christians, and he acknowledges that the Neronian date of Revelation is possible. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 297; Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 201-202; Pliny, *Letters* 10.96. See also, Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 12.

Hitchcock then supports his argument by referencing evidence from Cassius Dio, specifically the execution of a Roman consul named Flavius Clemens and the banishment of his wife, Flavia Domitilla, Domitian's niece.<sup>131</sup> In the words of Cassius Dio,

Domitian slew, along with many others, Flavius Clemens the consul, although he was a 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.<sup>132</sup>

Gentry questions this evidence, deeming it too ambiguous due to the accusation of "atheism" brought against the individuals.<sup>133</sup> Hitchcock offers a counterargument by emphasizing Eusebius's interpretation, which attributes the persecution to their Christian faith.<sup>134</sup>

Bell, however, asserts that Clemens' death was unrelated to his religious beliefs, which he insists were not Christian.<sup>135</sup> On the contrary, as highlighted by L. W. Barnard, Domitian targeted individuals of importance whom he considered a challenge to his authority.<sup>136</sup> Hort observes that many prominent Romans were executed during the last few months of Domitian's life. In the case of Clemens and Domitilla, he notes that their Christianity was "brought against them, though it is more probable that this was a mere pretext."<sup>137</sup> P. J. J. Botha posits that Eusebius' attribution of Christian status to Flavia Domitilla might well be an erroneous endeavor

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<sup>131</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 203-205; Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 67.14.1-3.

<sup>132</sup> Cassius Dio, [\*Roman History\*, 67.14.1-3](#).

<sup>133</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 289.

<sup>134</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 204-205; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.18.4.

<sup>135</sup> Bell, "Date of John's Apocalypse," 98.

<sup>136</sup> Hegesippus, for example, notes that the grandsons of Jude were simple peasants without any significance, and as a result, Domitian sent them away and decreed that the persecution should come to an end. L. W. Barnard, "Clement of Rome and the Persecution of Domitian," *New Testament Studies*, 10, no. 2 (January 1965): 254. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.20.

<sup>137</sup> Hort, *Apocalypse*, xxiv.

to integrate an element of pagan history into the tradition of martyrdom.<sup>138</sup> Therefore, due to the ambiguity in Cassius Dio's account (and his potential unreliability as discussed in chapter two), the absence of substantial evidence supporting Christian persecution under Domitian, and the potential bias introduced by Eusebius, Hitchcock's objection is inconclusive.

Hitchcock then references statements that Suetonius had made about Domitian's claim of divinity and how he was generally perceived to have been a tyrannical ruler forcing people to worship him.<sup>139</sup> Leonard Thompson, as noted by Hitchcock, raises doubts regarding the unfavorable depiction of Domitian by ancient sources. Thompson suggests that these accounts were likely distorted by deliberate biases stemming from their efforts to gain favor with the current emperor.<sup>140</sup> Although Thompson references the positive accounts of other Roman sources who were active during Domitian's reign, Hitchcock contends that these sources might have also been inclined toward bias in their favor of Domitian, driven by the desire to gain his approval.<sup>141</sup> The majority of modern historians agree that the Roman historians of the imperial period distorted their depictions of Domitian for political reasons.<sup>142</sup> Therefore, the account of Suetonius should not be considered as conclusive evidence.

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<sup>138</sup> P. J. J. Botha, "The Historical Domitian: Illustration Some Problems of Historiography," *Neotestamentica*, 23, no. 1 (1989): 54.

<sup>139</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 206-207; Suetonius, *Domitian*, 13.1-3.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 207-208; Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990), 96-109.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>142</sup> Jones argues that the negative portrayal of Domitian was exaggerated, as he points out that Suetonius' depiction of him in *Domitian* 19 is not consistent with other historical records that indicate Domitian as a competent administrator, who even took measures to ensure the accuracy of coins. Aune concurs with this perspective, asserting that these writers "distorted nearly every aspect of Domitian's career and achievements," making it evident that a bias was at play. Charles Bigg, likewise, highlights the inconsistency in Domitian's image, noting that Suetonius acknowledges the provinces being exceptionally well-governed during Domitian's reign. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, lxvii-lxviii; Stephen Benko and John J. O'Rourke, *The Catacombs and the Colosseum: The Roman Empire as the Setting of Primitive Christianity* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1971), 65-68; Bigg, *Origins*, 47; Jones, *Domitian*, 198; Thompson, *Revelation*, 103-104.

Hitchcock, utilizing Christian sources, argues that there were localized instances of persecution in Asia under Domitian and suggests that an empire-wide persecution is not necessary for the setting of the book of Revelation.<sup>143</sup> Gentry, however, notes that Domitian's actions were mainly directed at specific individuals suspected of undermining his authority, as mentioned above.<sup>144</sup> He further highlights the problem that the evidence for this persecution comes from Christian sources that are later than the events themselves, making it less reliable, as historians may have been biased against Domitian, and that this bias influenced the subsequent Christian accounts.<sup>145</sup>

Charles Bigg argues that, under Domitian, being a "Christian" was not "exactly" a crime.<sup>146</sup> The capital offense was refusing to worship Domitian and the Roman gods. This means that Christians were persecuted under Domitian, not because of their designation as being a "Christian," but because they refused to worship the Roman gods and the emperor.<sup>147</sup> Collins argues that some of the individuals named as victims of this persecution may not have even been Christians. She notes that the Christian sources may have adopted the accounts for apologetic reasons.<sup>148</sup> Therefore, Hitchcock's argument that Christians were specifically persecuted under Domitian appears to be contested and inconclusive, particularly when compared to the undeniable Christian persecution and tyrannical character of Nero.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 209.

<sup>144</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 288. See also Barnard, "Clement of Rome," 254.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Bigg, *Origins*, 50.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Collins, "Dating the Apocalypse of John," 38.

<sup>149</sup> The beast of Revelation is described as an evil figure (Rev. 13:4-7). This malevolent entity, as observed by Gentry, persecutes the saints (13:7), demands worship (13:8), and is associated with a harlot who is depicted as being drunk on the blood of the saints (17:3-6; 18:24). Historically, Nero exhibited behavior akin to that of a savage beast. He engaged in depraved acts, including kicking one of his pregnant wives to death and murdering another. Nero also orchestrated the murders of his mother, brother, and aunt. He even went to the extent of castrating a young



## Worship of the Beast

Another relevant theme in Revelation is the worship of the beast (Rev. 13:4-15; 14:9-11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). According to Peake, the veneration of a living emperor was already practiced in Asia Minor during the reign of Augustus.<sup>150</sup> Morris concedes this point, acknowledging that, from Nero's time onward, the reverence of the Roman Emperor tended to grow, making it plausible that Revelation's references pertain to the period under or following Nero.<sup>151</sup> Robinson points out that Nero had a statue of himself in Rome, designed for worship, that was the same size as the statue of Mars, mirroring the description of the beast in Revelation 13 as both a political and religious figure.<sup>152</sup>

Hitchcock states, "No one would deny that Nero was worshipped during his reign. However, the real issue is whether the worship of Nero fits the facts of the worship of the beast in Revelation."<sup>153</sup> To illustrate his point, he raises concerns about Gentry's example of Nero's emperor worship, which involves an incident narrated by Cassius Dio in which Tiridates, the

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boy and subsequently "marrying" him. Nero's cruelty extended to setting Christians on fire to illuminate the night and ruthlessly murdering random individuals on the streets with a knife. He erected a large statue of himself and deified his adoptive father, aiming to establish a connection between himself and his deified ancestors. Interestingly, he earned the moniker "beast" during his reign. Upon his arrival in Rome, Apollonius is quoted as saying, "In my travels... I have seen many, many wild beasts of Arabia and India; but this beast, that is commonly called a Tyrant, I know not how many heads it has, nor if it be crooked of claw, and armed with horrible fangs... And of wild beasts you cannot say that they were known to eat their own mothers, but Nero has gorged himself on this diet." Likewise, in the Sibylline Oracles, Nero is called "the great beast" (8.157). Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*, 438, quoted in Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, 235-236; Suetonius, *Nero*, 16, 26, 28-29, 33-35. See also Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 70, 77; Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 14-17, 53; Douglas Wilson, *Heaven Misplaced: Christ's Kingdom on Earth* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2008), 108-109; Duncan Fishwick, "The Deification of Claudius," *Classical Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (2002): 346; George H. Van Kooten, "The Year of the Four Emperors and the Revelation of John: The 'pro-Neronian' Emperors Otho and Vitellius, and the Images and Colossus of Nero in Rome," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 30, no. 2 (2007): 221-222.

<sup>150</sup> Peake, *The Revelation of John*, 84.

<sup>151</sup> Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, 35.

<sup>152</sup> Robinson, *Redating*, 236.

<sup>153</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 144.

King of Armenia, paid homage to Nero.<sup>154</sup> Hitchcock disputes the compatibility of this event with Revelation 13 based on three reasons.<sup>155</sup>

First, Hitchcock contends that Tiridates paid homage to multiple images of Nero, whereas Revelation specifically mentions an “image” in the singular form (Rev. 13:14-15). Second, he argues that the image worshipped by Tiridates did not exhibit the characteristics described in Revelation 13:15, such as the ability to breathe and speak. Third, he challenges the notion that the worship mentioned in Revelation 13:8 is localized, asserting that it should be interpreted as a global event.

Addressing the first objection, it is worth noting that the worship of multiple images of Nero does not necessarily prohibit the worship of a singular image, as stated in Revelation.<sup>156</sup> Hitchcock appears to be reading too much into the text. Regarding the second objection, the imagery of the statue coming to life does not need to be interpreted literally. It can be seen as a metaphorical representation, given its placement alongside other metaphorical elements within the same passage.<sup>157</sup> As Terry notes, this likely symbolizes Roman authority, described symbolically as bringing life into the “image of imperial sovereignty.”<sup>158</sup> Thus, the description of

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 144-145; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 273; Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 82; Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 62.5.2.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 145.

<sup>156</sup> In the Gospel accounts, Mark documents the observation of a single angel, while Luke documents the presence of multiple angels (Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4). Similarly, the mention of worshipping a single image in Revelation does not preclude the worshipping of multiple images. It is noteworthy that Mark’s mention of a single angel or Revelation’s mention of a single image do not prohibit the possibility of other angels or images also being present or worshipped.

<sup>157</sup> For example, Revelation 13:2 states, “And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear’s, and its mouth was like a lion’s mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.”

<sup>158</sup> Terry suggests that there might be a connection between this illustration, and the well-known claims and feats associated with Simon Magus. In the *Recognitions of Clement* (3.47), Simon is portrayed as saying, “I have flown through the air; I have been mixed with fire and been made one body with it; I have made statues move; I have animated lifeless things.” Terry, *The Apocalypse of John*, 178.

a statue coming to life should be understood as being symbolic, not a literal event, and it likely symbolizes the authority of Rome.

As for the third objection, Revelation 13:8 appears to repeat the content presented in verses three and four.<sup>159</sup> The phrase “the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast” can be understood hyperbolically, and there is no need for a strictly literal interpretation encompassing the entire world (Rev. 13:3).<sup>160</sup> Verse 8 specifies that only those whose names have “not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain” would worship the beast. Only those who were predestined to do so, the non-elect, would worship the beast and be subjected to captivity (Rev. 13:10). Therefore, Hitchcock’s objections to the connection between Nero’s worship and the worship of the beast in Revelation are insufficient.

### *The Temple Was Still Standing*

Revelation 11:1-2 is frequently used as internal evidence supporting the Neronian date of the book.<sup>161</sup> These verses seem to describe the Second Temple before its destruction, suggesting that the book of Revelation predates the Temple’s fall in A.D. 70. The passage reads, “Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, ‘Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months.’”

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 173-174.

<sup>160</sup> Luke’s use of the term “whole world” to describe the Roman Empire taking a census is a clear example of hyperbole, as it clearly does not mean every individual on the entire planet (Luke 2:1-3). Likewise, when the Pharisees state that the “whole world” had gone after Jesus, it is evident that they are also employing hyperbole, since not every individual on earth was a follower of Jesus (John 12:19).

<sup>161</sup> Mathison argues that while some may interpret this as symbolic, the mention of this temple being “tread upon by the nations for forty-two months” suggests that it refers to the Second Temple, indicating that it had “not yet been destroyed at the time of the writing.” Wilson argues that the symbolic interpretation of Revelation 11:1-2 is unlikely. Part of his reasoning is based on the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation 21, where John explicitly states that there will be no Temple because God Himself will be the Temple (Rev. 21:22). According to Wilson, the straightforward and apparent explanation is that Revelation 11:1-2 was composed by John, along with the rest of the book, prior to the events of A.D. 70. Mathison, *Postmillennialism*, 145; Wilson, “The Problem,” 605.

Gentry acknowledges that it is important to identify this “temple” as it corresponds directly with the dating of the book of Revelation.<sup>162</sup>

Hitchcock presents four main interpretations regarding its identity: (1) it symbolizes the church, (2) it represents a heavenly temple, (3) it signifies a future eschatological temple, and (4) it denotes the Second (Herodian) Temple.<sup>163</sup> Gentry argues that the most likely identification is the literal Second Temple in Jerusalem. This choice of identification is grounded in its familiarity to the New Testament readers and its prominence in several of Christ’s prophecies (Matt. 24:2, Mark 13:2, and Luke 21:6).<sup>164</sup> This section of the dissertation will uphold this position.

### **The Temple’s Location**

In the vision described in Revelation 11, the apostle John is provided with a “measuring rod” and instructed to “measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there” (11:1). Interestingly, he is directed to exclude the court outside of the Temple from his measurements, as it is prophesied to be trampled by the Gentiles for a period of forty-two months (11:2). Gentry draws attention to the fact that the Temple altar and court are situated in “the holy city” that will be subjected to this trampling. He notes that the reference to “the holy city” appears to allude to Jerusalem, which is frequently referred to as “the holy city” in both the Old and New Testaments (Isa. 48:2; 52:1; Neh. 11:1-18; Matt. 4:5; 27:53).<sup>165</sup> The text further specifies this city as Jerusalem, where the “Lord was crucified” (Rev. 11:8; cf. Matt. 16:21; Mark 10:32-34).

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<sup>162</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 169; See also Bleek, *Introduction*, 226.

<sup>163</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 106-134.

<sup>164</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 169-170; Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 150.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

Hillegonds emphasizes the significance of recognizing that the city where the “Lord was crucified” serves as a “geographically symbolic location,” highlighting its transformation from a once-holy city to a spiritual “Sodom and Egypt” due to the rejection and crucifixion of Christ by the Jews.<sup>166</sup> The Second Temple’s location in Jerusalem aligns with the portrayal of the Temple described in Revelation, as the Temple in Jerusalem was likely still extant at the time this vision was given to John. At this point, Gentry revisits the book’s theme, emphasizing that Revelation serves as a warning to “those who pierced him,” as they are prophesied to witness Christ’s “coming with clouds” to bring judgment (Rev. 1:7).<sup>167</sup> Consequently, the importance of Jerusalem becomes evident, as it is identified as the very location where the “Lord was crucified” (11:8).

### **Parallel Evidence**

Gentry observes that Luke 21 depicts the destruction of the Second Temple and exhibits linguistic similarities to that of Revelation 11.<sup>168</sup> In Luke 21:24, Jesus predicts that “Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” Revelation 11:2 similarly states that “it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months.” The key linguistic similarities between the two texts are as follows: (1) in Luke 21:24 there is reference to “Jerusalem” whereas in Revelation 11:2 there is reference to “the holy city,” (2) Luke 21 refers to the “Gentiles” (*ethne*) whereas Revelation 11 refers to the “nations” (*ethnesin*), and (3) in Luke 21 Jerusalem is to be “trampled underfoot” (*patoumene*) whereas in Revelation the nations will “tread underfoot” (*patesousin*) the holy

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<sup>166</sup> Hillegonds, *The Early Date*, 159.

<sup>167</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 170.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 175-176.

city.<sup>169</sup> Therefore, the explicit mentions of the Temple's location in Jerusalem and the biblical parallels with its destruction suggests that the Temple reference in Revelation 11:1-2 pertains to the Second Temple and its eventual destruction by the Romans. This, in turn, implies that the composition date of the book of Revelation likely predates the Temple's destruction in A.D. 70.

### **Response to Objections**

Hitchcock posits four main objections to the identification of the Temple in Revelation 11:1-2 as the Second Temple.<sup>170</sup> First, he contends that the dating of *1 Clement* to A.D. 95 or 96 undermines the identification as it also depicts the Second Temple as still standing. Second, he asserts that disparities between Luke 21:24 and Revelation 11:1-2 suggest distinct points of reference, implying that they do not pertain to the same event. Third, Hitchcock argues that Gentry's hermeneutical approach lacks consistency. Fourth, he contends that Ezekiel 40-42 envisions a future temple, thereby implying that John's vision in Revelation must also pertain to a future temple.

Addressing the first issue, the challenge in dating *1 Clement* to A.D. 95 or 96 arises from the traditional scholarly association of this timeframe with the assumption that the text was composed during or immediately following the persecution under Domitian.<sup>171</sup> This assumption,

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<sup>169</sup> E. Earle Ellis, although not a preterist, notes additional parallels between the book of Revelation and the Gospel of Matthew. He highlights the common themes of Jerusalem, a city that "kills the prophets and stones those sent to it," resulting in the ultimate punishment of its inhabitants by the shedding of their blood (Matt. 23:34, 37), with the city that bears the guilt of shedding the "blood of the prophets and of saints," subsequently facing divine retribution for its actions (Rev. 18:24; 19:2). Ellis also distinguishes a parallel between Jesus' warning to His disciples to escape Jerusalem when its impending destruction approaches (Matt. 24:15-21) and the heavenly voices issuing warnings to depart from the city to avoid destruction (Rev. 18:4, 8). E. Earle Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament Documents* (Boston, MA: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), 227; See also Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 152-154.

<sup>170</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 110-118.

<sup>171</sup> Regarding this, Robinson states, "The consensus for a date of 95-6 is so strong, backed by the magisterial authority of Lightfoot's arguments, that it might seem temerarious merely to question it." However, Edmundson advocates for an earlier date and offers a solid defense of his position. Likewise, Sproul highlights that if Clement is asserting the continued existence of the Temple, three potential conclusions arise: (1) Clement was mistaken, (2) Jerusalem persisted unharmed for at least two decades after A.D. 70 (an improbable scenario), or (3)

however, is problematic in light of contemporary knowledge that discredits the existence of a Domitianic persecution of Christians, as demonstrated earlier in this study. Elmer Merrill observes that proponents of the Domitianic date for *1 Clement* establish their argument on the letter's introduction, which seemingly alludes to a persecution recently endured by the church.<sup>172</sup>

Merrill, proposing a later date around A.D. 140, outlines his argument through three main points. First, he asserts the absence of evidence within the letter indicating persecution of the Christian church in Rome by Domitian. Second, Merrill suggests the possibility that the letter was authored by a Clement, possibly the individual mentioned by Hermas, with the attribution stemming from a second century conjecture. In other words, the attribution of the letter to this specific "Clement" could be based on a speculative guess made in the second century rather than concrete evidence. Third, he questions the historical existence of Bishop Clement, asserting that he likely never existed.<sup>173</sup>

Merrill, however, contends that these "critics" struggle to provide a convincing explanation for the author's use of vague language when describing this persecution. He asserts that the lack of compelling evidence supporting the occurrence of such a persecution attributed to Domitian leads to the conclusion that the "natural" reference of the letter pertains to internal issues within the church.<sup>174</sup> Barnes also challenges the critics who date *1 Clement* to A.D. 96,

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Clement composed his letter before the destruction of Jerusalem. Sproul asserts the likelihood of the third option. Robinson, *Redating*, 327-328. See also, Edmundson, *The Church in Rome*, 189-205; Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 8; Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 23-24; Barnard, "Clement of Rome," 255-258; Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 110-118; Sproul, *The Last Days*, 161.

<sup>172</sup> Elmer Truesdell Merrill, "On 'Clement of Rome,'" *The American Journal of Theology* 22, no. 3 (July 1918): 440-442.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Laurence Welborn aligns with Merrill, asserting that the language in *1 Clement* is so ambiguous that it raises doubt about whether it truly alludes to persecution. He highlights that the introduction of *1 Clement* merely mentions the Roman church being delayed in addressing the Corinthian dispute due to sudden misfortunes and hindrances. Welborn argues that this seemingly innocent statement is mistakenly interpreted as a veiled reference to a recent severe persecution endured by the Roman church. He concludes that attributing persecution to the text is a

pointing out a flaw in their assumption that Clement authored the letter during his papacy.<sup>175</sup> He supports his argument by referencing *The Shepherd of Hermas*, asserting that Clement, prior to becoming Pope, held a role in foreign affairs.<sup>176</sup>

Hitchcock defends the later date of *1 Clement* by pointing out that the Corinthian church is called “ancient,” asserting that a document predating A.D. 70 would not fit this description. Yet, he suggests that adding just twenty-five additional years, placing it in the mid A.D. 90s, makes it suitable for the label “ancient.”<sup>177</sup> The inconsistency, however, in Hitchcock’s use of the term “ancient” becomes apparent when comparing his arguments for the dating of *1 Clement* and the dating of Revelation. In the case of *1 Clement*, he contends that a church being described as “ancient” is a crucial factor in dating the document, suggesting that it would be inappropriate to use such a term if the church was less than twenty years old.<sup>178</sup> However, when it comes to the “ancient” copies of Revelation, Hitchcock dismisses the significance of a thirty-year difference.<sup>179</sup>

This discrepancy reveals a potential bias in Hitchcock’s reasoning. He appears to apply a stricter interpretation of the term “ancient” when it supports his preferred dating for *1 Clement* but adopts a lenient stance when it comes to Revelation. This selective application of criteria

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result of mistranslation. Ibid.; See also Elmer Truesdell Merrill, *Essays in Early Christian History* (London, UK: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1924), 161; Laurence L. Welborn, “On the Date of First Clement,” *Biblical Research* 29 (1984): 38-39.

<sup>175</sup> Barnes suggests that rejecting the A.D. 95 or 96 date for *1 Clement* leads to a clear association with A.D. 70 and the subsequent challenges following Nero’s death. Barnes, *Christianity at Rome*, 210-211.

<sup>176</sup> According to Barnes, the reference to his letter is indisputable, and the passage strongly supports the earlier dating. Ibid., 213.

<sup>177</sup> Even under the assumption of the later date for *1 Clement*, it is noteworthy that the Corinthian Church, founded by Paul in the A.D. 50s, would have existed for only approximately forty-five years. Thus, characterizing the church as “ancient” may be somewhat ambitious. Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 112; *1 Clement* 47:6.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 24.



suggests a bias in favor of the conclusions he wishes to draw, potentially undermining the objectivity of his arguments. Since it is possible that *1 Clement* could be dated to a time before the Temple's destruction, clarifying why Clement refers to the Temple as if it were still intact, Hitchcock's objection is dismissed.

Regarding the second objection, Hitchcock makes a case against interpreting Luke 21:24 and Revelation 11:1-2 as referring to the same event. He acknowledges the linguistic parallels but emphasizes that similarity does not "necessarily denote identity."<sup>180</sup> Hitchcock then highlights three differences: (1) the extent of destruction in Jerusalem, (2) the indication in Revelation 11 that Jerusalem would not be totally destroyed during the period of forty-two months, and (3) the specific time limit provided in Revelation 11:2 compared to the "open-ended" nature of Luke 21:24.<sup>181</sup> Thus, Hitchcock argues that these disparities point to God passing judgment on Jerusalem in two separate instances, each linked to a different temple.

Revelation 11:2 states, "but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months."<sup>182</sup> Gentry suggests that the unmeasured (unprotected), outer courts of the Temple symbolize the literal nature of the Temple.<sup>183</sup> In contrast, the measured (protected), "inner temple portrays that which is essential and permanent, the true worship of God's holy name by his ongoing

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 113-114.

<sup>182</sup> The duration of forty-two months finds mention in the Old Testament in various contexts. It is notably cited in connection with the defilement of the Temple (Dan. 7:25) and the duration of Elijah's role in precipitating a drought in Israel (1 Kgs. 17-18). In Revelation 11, the significance of the forty-two-month period is highlighted as it denotes the duration of the persecution associated with Nero. Moreover, the war between Jerusalem and Rome endured for a similar period of time, nearly forty-two months. Certain scholars, such as Mathison and Smalley, who adhere to a preterist interpretation, find the forty-two-month timeframe as being symbolic of "an indefinite but limited period of suffering," drawing parallels with passages in Daniel (7:25; 8:9-14; 12:7). Mathison, *From Age to Age*, 675; Rogers, *The Prophecy of Daniel*, 77; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 274; Wilson, *Commentary*, 125-127.

<sup>183</sup> Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 160.

people.”<sup>184</sup> Gentry sees the distinction between the measured and unmeasured as symbolizing the protected true church and the unprotected literal Second Temple.

Mathison highlights the existence of varying perspectives on the significance of the measurement, the Temple’s identity, and the interpretation of the forty-two months. In the Old Testament, measurements can symbolize God’s protective providence in some instances (Ezek. 40:3; Zech. 2:1-5) and judgment and destruction in others (2 Kgs. 21:13; Lam 2:8; Amos 7:7-9).<sup>185</sup> The interpretation of the Temple’s identity influences the symbolic meaning attributed to the act of measurement.<sup>186</sup> Therefore, the correlation between Revelation 11 and Luke 21 becomes relevant in ascertaining John’s intended identity for the Temple in Revelation 11.

Concerning the parallel mentioned by Gentry, it is noteworthy that Luke 21:24 does not indicate any preservation of the physical Temple in any manner. Jesus, however, explicitly prophesies the divine protection of His genuine followers during the imminent destruction of the Second Temple.<sup>187</sup> Jesus affirms that “not a hair of [their] head will perish” (21:18) as they are instructed to “flee to the mountains” (21:21). Notably, Jesus advises that “those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, for these are days of vengeance” (21:21-22). It is interesting that those situated “inside” the city are directed to depart

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Mathison, *From Age to Age*, 674.

<sup>186</sup> Dispensationalists (such as Walvoord) tend to argue that this temple is a temple that will be rebuilt prior to the Second Coming of Christ. Others (such as Morris) argue that the temple symbolizes the true church. Others still (such as Beckwith) believe the temple represents the Jewish people, with the inner portion representing believing Jews and the outer court representing unbelieving Jews. Mathison suggest a combination of the last two interpretations appears to be the most likely interpretation. He notes that the temple and court that John sees represent the covenant people of God. The inner court represents the church in Jerusalem, which was composed predominantly of Jewish believers. The outer court represents unbelieving Jews and their city. He states that this interpretation is plausible considering that the Bible uses temple imagery elsewhere to symbolize God’s people (2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21; Rev. 3:12). Ibid., 674-675; Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 585-586; Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, 140; Walvoord, *The Revelation*, 176.

<sup>187</sup> Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 161.

prior to the impending calamity, ensuring their protection, while those “outside” are left exposed to peril, as divine retribution is promised upon those who have rejected Him.

As for the third objection, Hitchcock posits that Gentry’s interpretation of Revelation 11:1-2 involves a “confusing mixture of literal-historical and figurative-symbolic interpretation.”<sup>188</sup> Hitchcock contends that Gentry employs a figurative interpretation for Revelation 11:1 and a literal interpretation for 11:2 without a discernible indication to transition between these approaches.<sup>189</sup> According to Hitchcock, Gentry asserts that the forty-two months in Revelation 11:2 and the 1,260 days in 11:3 are literal, but the two prophets mentioned in 11:3 are not, likening this inconsistency to “changing the rules in the middle of the game.”<sup>190</sup> Adopting a futurist approach, unfortunately, allows for an interpretation where anything can be considered literal, as it has not yet transpired and, consequently, cannot be disproven.

Gentry defends his hermeneutical approach by emphasizing that the book of Revelation supports the concept that a single symbol may possess a dual reference. Specifically, he points to the example of the seven heads on the beast, contending that they symbolize both seven mountains and seven kings (17:9-10).<sup>191</sup> Hitchcock disputes this rationale, asserting that the text explicitly discloses the dual reference and does not permit readers to devise their own composite hermeneutic.<sup>192</sup>

Gentry counters by asserting that the mixture of the physical and spiritual is inherently grounded in the very essence of the Temple:

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<sup>188</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 114.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 116; See also Robert L. Thomas, “Theonomy and the Dating of Revelation,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 5, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 195.

<sup>191</sup> Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 161.

<sup>192</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 116.

For instance, in Hebrews 8:5a we read of an earthly ‘sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven.’ The earthly, external is a copy/shadow of the heavenly spiritual reality. The ‘man-made sanctuary’ is a ‘copy of the true one’ (Heb. 9:24). In Revelation 11 God removes the shadow-copy so that the essential-real remains, which John here portrays as the worshipers in the heart of the temple.<sup>193</sup>

This verse suggests that the earthly tabernacle, constructed as per God’s instructions to Moses, is a symbolic representation, or “copy and shadow,” of a higher heavenly reality.<sup>194</sup> In short, Hitchcock’s objection revolves around Gentry’s dual-reference interpretation of symbols in Revelation, particularly the Temple, of which Hitchcock perceives as being inconsistent. Nevertheless, Gentry offers reasonable rationale for his method by appealing to other Scriptures.

Regarding the fourth objection, Hitchcock asserts that the interpretation of Revelation 11:1-2 associated with the Second Temple is flawed. This assertion is grounded in his examination of the Old Testament background found in Ezekiel 40-42, where Ezekiel envisions a temple that did not exist during his time.<sup>195</sup> Within this context, Hitchcock posits that John’s allusion in Revelation 11:1-2 implies a temple in the future rather than one contemporaneous with the text. He then delivers a discussion supporting the idea that the eschatological temple anticipated in Revelation 11 aligns with the literal representation of the temple described in Ezekiel 40-48.<sup>196</sup>

Hitchcock presents counterarguments in his response to Gentry’s five objections to the literal interpretation of Ezekiel 40-48. First, Gentry argues that the temple’s location on a “very

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<sup>193</sup> Gentry rejects the idea of a future rebuilt temple for two key reasons: (1) the imminent events described in Revelation (Rev. 1:1, 3; 22:6, 10) contrast with the futurist perspective of a temple built at least 2000 years later, and (2) Revelation 11 is tied to Luke 21:24, both rooted in a first-century context related to the destruction of the Second Temple. Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 161-162.

<sup>194</sup> Elwell, *Commentary*, 1140; Gundry, *Commentary*, 2:892; Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *Commentary*, 3:3:551; Poole, *Commentary*, 3:842-843.

<sup>195</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 117-118.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 117-129.

high mountain” is geographically implausible, but Hitchcock counters by citing Zechariah 14:4-10, which he suggests predicts transformative topographical changes.<sup>197</sup> Gentry’s second point questions the feasibility of the river’s “source and flow,” but Hitchcock argues that such miraculous elements align with the messianic kingdom, as evidenced in Joel 3:18.<sup>198</sup>

Third, Gentry argues for symbolism in the river’s role in making the “Dead Sea fresh,” but Hitchcock contends that this aligns with the broader concept of the earth’s restoration in the messianic kingdom, citing Isaiah 11:1-11.<sup>199</sup> Fourth, Gentry challenges the practicality of allocating “parallel tracts of land” to the twelve tribes, but Hitchcock asserts that this aligns with the “expanded borders of the Promised Land in the kingdom.”<sup>200</sup> Fifth, Gentry argues that “the dispensational view is redemptively retrogressive” as it reimposes circumcision and redemptive sacrifices.<sup>201</sup> Hitchcock, however, argues that while there are similarities to the Mosaic law, the differences indicate a “new system of kingdom law.”<sup>202</sup>

Mathison discusses the interpretation of Ezekiel’s description of the temple, particularly focusing on the dispensationalist perspective. He suggests that dispensationalists argue for a literal interpretation of Ezekiel’s temple, but face challenges, especially regarding the temple sacrifices that are mentioned (Ezek. 43:18-46:24).<sup>203</sup> He notes that some dispensationalists suggest that these sacrifices are “memorials” of Christ’s sacrifice, similar to the Lord’s Supper,

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 129; Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (1992, reprint, Chesnee, SC: Victorious Hope Publishing, 2021), 361.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 129-130; Gentry, *Dominion*, 361.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 130; Gentry, *Dominion*, 361.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.; Gentry, *Dominion*, 361.

<sup>201</sup> Gentry, *Dominion*, 362-364.

<sup>202</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 130-131.

<sup>203</sup> Mathison, *From Age to Age*, 254.

but this contradicts the literal interpretation principle of dispensationalism.<sup>204</sup> Another dispensationalist interpretation suggests that Ezekiel may be using familiar terminology to describe “future (nonsacrificial) worship practices,” raising the question of whether a similar approach could apply to the “entire temple prophecy.”<sup>205</sup>

Mark Rooker contends that anticipating future sacrifices is unfounded, asserting that the book of Hebrews dismissed such offerings following the singular and conclusive sacrifice of Jesus. Yet, he suggests a distinction regarding the construction and continuity of the Temple, emphasizing that the New Testament does not explicitly confirm the fulfillment of this promise.<sup>206</sup> However, in John 2:18-22, Jesus metaphorically refers to His body as the Temple that will be raised in three days. This signifies a shift from the importance of a physical temple to a spiritual connection through faith in Jesus, implying no future need for a traditional temple.<sup>207</sup>

Likewise, in 1 Corinthians 3:16, it is stated that believers themselves are considered the Temple of God. This reinforces the concept that there is no future need for a physical temple, as the focus is on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers rather than a specific physical structure. Furthermore, in Ephesians 2:19-22, Paul metaphorically describes believers as a spiritual building, with Jesus as the cornerstone. The imagery of a temple is used to convey that

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<sup>204</sup> Hitchcock argues in favor of a literal interpretation. He emphasizes that the intricacies within the text necessitate a literal interpretative framework. Hitchcock asserts: “Without any established, governing principles one could make the intricate features of the text mean almost anything.” Ibid., 255; Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 123-125.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Mark F. Rooker, “Evidence from Ezekiel,” in *The Coming Millennial Kingdom: A Case for Premillennial Interpretation*, ed. Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townsend, 119-134 (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1997), 134.

<sup>207</sup> Mathison, *From Age to Age*, 254.

believers are becoming a holy dwelling place for God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.<sup>208</sup>

### *Summary of Internal Evidence*

The internal evidence supports the Neronian date of the book of Revelation. John's temporal expectations imply that the prophecies held particular relevance for the churches to which he was addressing (Rev. 1:10-11). In the context of the intense persecution faced by the churches during the composition of Revelation, Nero Caesar presents himself as the most fitting candidate for the designation of the beast (13:18). Historical records clearly confirm Nero's persecution of the church, while conversely, there is an absence of evidence supporting a systematic persecution under Domitian.

The reference to the Temple in Revelation 11 provides additional weight to the argument favoring the early date of the book. The inclusion of the Temple in the text implies its existence during the composition period, signaling a timeframe preceding the Temple's destruction in A.D. 70. This internal framework supports the assertion that Revelation was written during Nero's reign, aligning with the historical and contextual elements present in the text.

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter Five: Final Remarks

### *Additional Late Date Arguments Examined*

As the primary arguments against the Neronic date have already been explored, the initial emphasis of this chapter will be on addressing four remaining arguments that support the Domitianic date. These arguments include the condition of the churches, the banishment of John, the reference to New Jerusalem, and the mention of oil and wine (an unlikely reference to a decree issued by Domitian.). Therefore, this section will briefly respond to these arguments in defense of the Neronic date of the book of Revelation.

#### **The Condition of the Churches**

Regarding the Church of Ephesus, Hitchcock argues that accepting the Neronic date of Revelation poses challenges in harmonizing the chronology of events related to the ministries of both the Apostle John and the Apostle Paul.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, he highlights the absence of any mention of John's presence or recent banishment in Paul's letters, particularly in 1 and 2 Timothy. He suggests that if John had truly been in Ephesus or exiled to Patmos during those timeframes (c. A.D. 61-65), it seems odd that Paul would not mention him, especially considering that their respective periods of ministry may have "overlapped."<sup>2</sup>

Hitchcock's argument, however, faces several challenges that will be briefly considered. First, the fact that John is not explicitly mentioned in Paul's letters does not necessarily imply his absence or banishment during that period. Various factors, such as thematic focus and the intended audience, could explain this omission. Second, it is notable that Paul's letters,

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<sup>1</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 178.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 179-181.



particularly 1 and 2 Timothy, were directed at specific individuals and congregations, prioritizing immediate concerns over providing a comprehensive account of apostolic activities.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, the argument suggesting that Paul's silence on John's banishment serves as evidence for the late date of Revelation is not entirely conclusive. It is worth considering that if Revelation was indeed composed in the A.D. 90s, as proposed by Hitchcock, then why is there no mention of the deaths of Peter and Paul in John's writings? The argument cuts both ways. This highlights the challenges inherent in relying on an argument from silence to substantiate historical events.<sup>4</sup>

Clyde Weber Votaw notes that Paul addressed the emerging heresies and false teachings infiltrating the churches and emphasized the importance of faithful and worthy church leaders (1 Tim. 3:1-13; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; Titus 1:5-9).<sup>5</sup> After leaving Ephesus, Paul wrote 1 Timothy (A.D. 66), expressing his hope to return soon (1 Tim. 3:14). However, circumstances changed, and when he wrote Titus a few months later, he had decided to spend the winter at Nicopolis (Tit. 3:12). Paul was then re-arrested and imprisoned in Rome, where he wrote 2 Timothy after his first hearing, anticipating his imminent execution (2 Tim. 2:9, 4:6). Considering these pressing concerns, Paul did not comment on the activities of John. As there are no explicit mentions of John in any of Paul's writings (and no mention of Paul by John), it is likely he did not know him personally.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Clyde Weber Votaw, "The Epistles of Paul to Timothy and Titus," *The Biblical World* 7, no. 2 (February 1896): 132, 134.

<sup>4</sup> John Lange emphasizes the need to assess arguments from silence on a case-by-case basis rather than drawing broad conclusions. He contends that such arguments are typically not logically compelling, especially in important matters. The persuasiveness of these arguments varies and hinges on factors like the likelihood of finding pertinent documentation in specific cases. John Lange, "The Argument from Silence," *History and Theory* 5, no. 3 (1966): 301.

<sup>5</sup> Votaw, "The Epistles of Paul," 132, 134.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

However, the lack of direct references does not necessarily imply that they did not know each other, but it is a reasonable interpretation based on the available texts in the New Testament.

Hitchcock then argues that the Church in Smyrna appears to not have been in existence during Paul's ministry. He posits that Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, claimed in his letter to the Philippians that the Smyrnaeans did not know the Lord during that time.<sup>7</sup> This would indicate that Revelation had to have been written at a later date due to its mention of the church. The pertinent statement of Polycarp is as follows: "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>8</sup>

The claim that Polycarp's statement implies the non-existence of the Church in Smyrna during Paul's ministry is problematic because that is not the message being conveyed by Polycarp. Late date advocates, who misconstrue his words, are responsible for this misinterpretation.<sup>9</sup> Polycarp is only stating that the Philippians accepted the Gospel before the Smyrnaeans, a point that is recognized by several scholars, including Gentry, Robinson, Lightfoot, and Harmer.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Michael W. Holmes highlights a particular challenge within this section of the letter, emphasizing that there seems to be a loss or distortion in the text. It is worth noting that even Lightfoot, in his assessment, acknowledges that the letter has not been

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<sup>7</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 181.

<sup>8</sup> Polycarp, *Letter to the Philippians* 11.3; Cited in Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, xciv; Ice, "The Date," 3; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 954; Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 181; Moffatt, *Revelation*, 317; Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, 37; Zahn, *Introduction*, 3:412-3:413.

<sup>10</sup> Robinson dismisses this argument and states, "It is astonishing that so much has continued to be built on so little." Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 322-326; Lightfoot and Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 166; Robinson, *Redating*, 229-230.

transmitted without corruption.<sup>11</sup> In any case, the statement of Polycarp is not definitive evidence of the late date of Revelation.

Hitchcock then argues that the churches of Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis exhibit discernible signs of prolonged existence, attributed to evident spiritual decline.<sup>12</sup> In Hitchcock's analysis, the circumstances surrounding these churches conflict with the portrayals found in Acts, the letters to Timothy and Titus, and 1 Peter.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, he contends that the manifestation of spiritual decay aligns fittingly with a timeframe spanning from the A.D. 50s to the A.D. 90s rather than from the A.D. 50s to A.D. 65.

In response to the argument, Gentry, highlighted by Hitchcock, posits that "error" has the potential to manifest rapidly within a church setting. To substantiate this assertion, Gentry provides illustrative instances, referencing the churches of Galatia, which Paul asserts were prone to swiftly abandoning the Gospel (Gal. 1:6), and the issues with the Corinthian church.<sup>14</sup> Hitchcock states, "It is true that error can erupt and grow quickly in the proper soil," noting that Gentry highlights the immediacy of "error" by pointing to the Ephesian church's encounter with false teaching even during the lifetime of Paul (1 Tim. 1:6).<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the presence of "error" within the Seven Churches does not conclusively indicate the Domitianic date for Revelation, given that the rapid spread of "error" has been demonstrated in biblical accounts.

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<sup>11</sup> Michael W. Holmes, "A Note on the Text of Polycarp 'Philippians' 11.3," *Vigiliae Christianae* 51, no. 2 (May 1997): 207-210; Lightfoot and Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 165-181.

<sup>12</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 182-183; See also Milligan, *Discussions*, 130.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 326-329.

<sup>15</sup> Guthrie incorporates this argument into his discussion but admits that the validity of the argument is subject to dispute. *Ibid.*; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 328; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 954-955.

Regarding the Church in Laodicea, Revelation 3:17 reads, “For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.” Despite being described as “rich,” Laodicea suffered destruction by an earthquake in A.D. 60.<sup>16</sup> According to Hitchcock, this would have had enduring economic consequences for the community. He argues that while the city eventually reconstructed itself using its own resources, the rebuilding process was time-consuming, extending over many years.<sup>17</sup> Hitchcock, therefore, posits that it presents a challenge for proponents of the early date to assert that Laodicea was prosperous, self-sufficient, and in a state of boasting about its wealth in A.D. 65, just five years after the earthquake.<sup>18</sup>

There are essentially two main approaches to counter Hitchcock’s argument from the early date advocacy. The first approach interprets “rich” as pertaining to material wealth. In this scenario, proponents of the early date would need to contend that Laodicea was able to quickly recover from the earthquake, although this is unlikely.<sup>19</sup> The second approach, preferred by this author, posits that the mention of “riches” refers to spiritual wealth rather than material prosperity.<sup>20</sup> In this context, the economic aftermath of the earthquake on the community becomes inconsequential to the debate. The objection to the Neronian date based on the condition of the Church in Laodicea would not be an obstacle.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Tacitus, *Annals* 14.27; Sybilline Oracles 4:107-108.

<sup>17</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 185.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 187-190.

<sup>19</sup> Hitchcock notes that the archaeological evidence at Laodicea indicates a rebuilding process lasting approximately thirty years in the aftermath of the earthquake. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 321-322; Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 185; Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (1986, reprint, Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 193-195.

<sup>20</sup> Elwell, *Commentary*, 1206-1207; Gundry, *Commentary*, 2:1009; Jamieson, Fausset, Brown, *Commentary*, 3:3:670; Mounce, *Revelation*, 110; Poole, *Commentary*, 3:959; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 98-99; Terry, *The Apocalypse of John*, 69-70.

<sup>21</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 320.

## Banishment of John to Patmos

Hitchcock contends that John's exile to Patmos likely occurred during Domitian's reign rather than Nero's, presenting three key arguments.<sup>22</sup> First, he posits that the differing fates of Peter, Paul, and John suggest distinct imperial judgments. Second, Hitchcock asserts that Domitian preferred employing banishment as a punitive measure, in contrast to Nero's methods. Third, he argues that historical records highlight Domitian banishing a Christian for her testimony, whereas no evidence supports Nero engaging in such actions. Therefore, this study must briefly address the issues associated with these arguments.

First, Hitchcock presents the question, "Why would one apostle be treated differently than the other two if the same emperor were responsible for their sentences?"<sup>23</sup> Jerome asserts that John's banishment to Patmos followed a narrow escape from an attempted execution by burning oil, an event he attributes to Nero's reign.<sup>24</sup> This aligns with Hitchcock's second objection, highlighting Nero's inclination towards brutal forms of punishment, such as burning Christians alive.<sup>25</sup> According to Jerome, Nero attempted this method on John, but since he survived, Nero opted for banishment instead. Third, the idea that Domitila's banishment was directly linked to her being a Christian is unlikely. Her Christian identity is questionable, and it may have been deliberately created by Eusebius.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 191-192.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 165; Hillegonds, *The Early Date*, 74.

<sup>25</sup> Selwyn, *The Christian Prophets*, 213; Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44.

<sup>26</sup> Botha, "The Historical Domitian," 54; Collins, "Dating the Apocalypse of John," 38.

## **The New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:9-22:5**

According to Hitchcock, Revelation 21:9-22:5 highlights the arrival of the New Jerusalem from heaven which appears to support the late date theory.<sup>27</sup> He argues that the mention of the “New Jerusalem” by John suggests the preceding destruction of the Old Jerusalem. To support this claim, Hitchcock points to 4 Ezra, a second century pseudepigraphal text in Jewish apocalyptic literature, which also presents a vision of a New Jerusalem post the destruction of the Old Jerusalem. Consequently, Hitchcock contends that this parallel signifies John composing Revelation after A.D. 70.

In response to this argument, the present author asserts that the depiction of the New Heaven and New Earth in Revelation 21:1-22:5 should not be interpreted as referring to the eternal state following the Second Coming of Christ. Rather, the anticipation of the New Heaven and New Earth can be traced back to the prophetic words of Isaiah:

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind... No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. (Isa. 65:17, 20).

Isaiah predicts the persistence of death and sin during this period, a condition that will no longer exist after the Second Coming.<sup>28</sup> Gentry emphasizes that John’s portrayal of the new creation symbolizes a “present reality which the consummate order eventually fulfills, perfects, and replaces.”<sup>29</sup>

Gentry contends that when John portrays the new creation in Revelation 21:1-22:5, he is not describing a distant, future event exclusively. Instead, Gentry argues that these verses

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<sup>27</sup> Hitchcock, “Defense of the Domitianic Date,” 221-222.

<sup>28</sup> Wilson, *Commentary*, 245.

<sup>29</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Book of Revelation Made Easy: You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* (2019, reprint, GA: American Vision, 2019), 125.

symbolize a “present reality,” a concept deeply rooted in the unfolding narrative of God’s plan. According to Gentry, this present reality represents the inauguration of the “new covenant salvation,” an era that commenced during the first century.<sup>30</sup> He highlights that John’s depiction serves as an image of “new covenant salvation” entering the world during the first century.

Isaiah prophesies the arrival of Christ’s New Covenant Kingdom, encompassing the era of the church, a theme that John further elaborates upon.<sup>31</sup> Douglas Wilson contends that the Jewish Age concluded with the Second Temple’s destruction, marking the commencement of the Christian Age at Pentecost.<sup>32</sup> According to Mathison, the work of Christ through the church is progressively fulfilling all of God’s covenant promises.<sup>33</sup> He posits that this work will reach completion at some point in the future, with all of Christ’s adversaries being defeated (cf. 1 Cor. 15:25-26; Heb. 10:12-13). Christ will return to finalize his Kingdom, eradicating the last enemy, death, and “bodily” raising His people from the grave.<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, the concept of the “New Jerusalem” is to be comprehended symbolically rather than literally. It serves as a powerful symbol representing the establishment of a divine and perfected order. This perspective allows for flexibility in dating the book of Revelation, as the emphasis is on understanding the New Jerusalem as a symbol of the culmination of God’s redemptive plan and the fulfillment of His divine promises.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>32</sup> By connecting the destruction of the Second Temple with the initiation of the Christian Age, Wilson provides a historical and theological backdrop for interpreting the imagery in Revelation 21:1-22:5. The ongoing work of Christ through the church, as detailed in this perspective, aligns with the idea that Revelation symbolizes not only future events but also the transformative impact of Christ’s redemptive work within the context of this new age. Wilson, *Commentary*, 246.

<sup>33</sup> Mathison posits that the ongoing work of Christ in and through the church represents a gradual fulfillment of all God’s covenant promises. He suggests that this fulfillment is not confined to a single moment in history but is a process with a future completion. Mathison, *Postmillennialism*, 158.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

## The Oil and Wine in Revelation 6:6

Revelation 6:5-6 depicts a black horse with a rider holding scales, symbolizing a period of scarcity with mentioned prices of wheat and barley. A voice then demands that the oil and wine not be harmed. Hitchcock argues that there is a connection to a historical event during Domitian's reign in A.D. 92.<sup>35</sup> He notes that Domitian issued an edict at that time which restricted viticulture, ordering the destruction of half the vineyards in Asia Minor to make room for increased grain production. He asserts that this historical event is likely the inspiration for Revelation 6:5-6, stating that "Revelation had to be written after A.D. 92."<sup>36</sup>

Suetonius indeed records that Domitian, noting a surplus of wine and a shortage of corn, prohibited new vineyards in Italy and ordered the destruction of half the existing vineyards in the provinces. However, Suetonius also reported that Domitian took *no action* to enforce this edict. If Revelation 6:6 alludes to this decree, the rider of the Black Horse was wasting his time warning John as Domitian did not even enforce the command. Furthermore, the incorporation of oil in this context remains unclear, especially considering its absence in the decree. At any rate, it is difficult to derive a substantial conclusion from this simple coincidence.<sup>37</sup>

The likely interpretation suggests that Revelation 6:5-6 alludes to the famine experienced during the Roman Siege of Jerusalem.<sup>38</sup> This passage extensively incorporates imagery from the Old Testament, emphasizing the theme of famine. The darkness associated with the black horse, for instance, closely aligns with the portrayal of Jerusalem's desolation:

Now their face is blacker than soot; they are not recognized in the streets; their skin has shriveled on their bones; it has become as dry as wood (Lam. 4:8).

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<sup>35</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 232-233; Suetonius, *Domitian* 7.2.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>37</sup> Peake, *The Revelation of John*, 90-92.

<sup>38</sup> Wilson, *Commentary*, 75.



The scales, symbolizing measurement and scarcity, share a parallel with Ezekiel:

Moreover, he said to me, “Son of man, behold, I will break the supply of bread in Jerusalem. They shall eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and they shall drink water by measure and in dismay. I will do this that they may lack bread and water, and look at one another in dismay, and rot away because of their punishment” (4:16-17).

Historically, Josephus documents the state of Jerusalem during this famine:

Famine now raged in the city, and the rebels took all the food they could find in a house-to-house search, while the poor starved to death by the thousands. People gave all their wealth for a little measure of wheat, and hid to eat it hastily and in secret so it would not be taken from them. Wives would snatch the food from their husbands, children from fathers, and mothers from the very mouths of infants... The sufferings of the people were so fearful that they can hardly be told, and no other city ever endured such miseries (*Wars* 5:424).<sup>39</sup>

Revelation 6:5-6 is not a reference to an ineffective edict by Domitian that was both unnecessary and unenforced. The horseman in the vision of the Apocalypse is issuing a warning of the famine that is soon to take place, referring to the famine during the siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Rev. 1:1, 3, 19; 22:6, 7, 12, 20).<sup>40</sup>

### *The Millennium: A Brief Interpretation*

While this study’s primary focus is on dating the book of Revelation and does not extensively explore eschatology, it is essential to offer a brief interpretation of the millennium. This aspect influences how one understands the symbolic elements in Revelation, highlighting the interconnectedness of eschatological perspectives with the broader theme of the text. Thus, it

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<sup>39</sup> Cited in Paul L. Maier, *Josephus: The Essential Works* (1988, reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1994), 358.

<sup>40</sup> Rupert Furneaux, *The Roman Siege of Jerusalem* (London, UK: Granada Publishing Limited, 1973), 112, 114-145, 151, 161, 170, 173-174, 181; E. Kölbing and Mabel Day, *The Siege of Jerusalem* (1932, reprint, New York, NY: Kraus Reprint Co., 1971), xvi, 62, 67; J. E. Lendon, “Roman Siege of Jerusalem,” *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History* 17, no. 4 (Summer 2005): 6-15.

is necessary to briefly explain a millennium concept that supports the preterist interpretation of Revelation.

### **Revelation 20:1-3**

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while (Rev. 20:1-3).

The phrase “Then I saw” denotes the order in which John was given the vision rather than a strict chronology of events. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart note that apocalyptic literature often employs symbolic numbers, presenting visions in carefully organized sets that convey a thematic message without insisting on strict chronological order.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, interpreting these events sequentially may be misleading.

For instance, if one interprets Revelation 20:1-3 chronologically, it raises a contradiction with the preceding events in 19:19-21. In 20:1-3, a procedure is described to prevent Satanic deception of nations previously deceived in 19:19-21. This seems inconsistent since defending nations from Satan’s deception after they have already been deceived by Satan and eliminated by Christ (19:12-21) appears illogical.<sup>42</sup> The narrative of Satan’s conquest in 20:1-3 has parallels in 12:7-9, where the same names (dragon, serpent, devil, Satan) are mentioned, reinforcing the non-linear nature of the narrative.<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, this verse does not suggest a literal binding of the devil with physical chains, as Satan is a spiritual being (Cf. John 8:44; Eph. 6:12; 2 Cor. 10:3-4; 1 Pet. 5:8). Specific

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<sup>41</sup> Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 261.

<sup>42</sup> Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 431.

<sup>43</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1078.

language is being used to highlight that the devil is bound in terms of deceiving the nations (πλάνησι).<sup>44</sup> John draws on early Jewish texts, such as 1 Enoch 10:4-6; 88:1, which speak of wicked angels being chained until the day of Judgment.<sup>45</sup> Here, John employs this imagery to convey that the devil cannot hinder the spread of the Gospel among the nations. The phrase “he must be released for a little while” indicates that after an unspecified duration (symbolized by the thousand years), Satan is briefly set free to lead a rebellion before facing ultimate destruction (cf. 20:10).

### **Revelation 20:4-6**

Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4-6).

In this verse, the “thrones” in heaven correspond to those occupied by the twenty-four elders mentioned in Revelation 4:4, symbolizing the church or the elect.<sup>46</sup> This parallels the description of souls beheaded and those slain at the fifth seal’s breaking in 6:9.<sup>47</sup> Christ, as king, establishes an order where he shares authority with the martyrs. The thousand-year period refers to the same thousand-year period above, i.e., the church age.<sup>48</sup> The “church age” refers to the

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<sup>44</sup> Wilson, *Commentary*, 230.

<sup>45</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 770.

<sup>46</sup> Mathison, *Postmillennialism*, 156.

<sup>47</sup> Ian Paul, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 328.

<sup>48</sup> Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck highlight the differing historical Jewish perspectives that existed on the nature and duration of the messianic era: the pre-Christian synagogue anticipated an eternal Messiah’s rule, while the post-Christian synagogue distinguished between the temporal days of the Messiah and the everlasting

period of time from the establishment of the Christian Church at Pentecost until the Second Coming of Christ.

The “first resurrection” pertains to Jesus Christ’s resurrection, and only those in Christ share in it. The second resurrection, occurring at the end of the church age, involves a general resurrection and judgment. Christ, identified as the “firstfruits” and “firstborn from the dead,” signifies the foundational resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20; Col. 1:18).<sup>49</sup> Through faith, believers partake in Jesus’ death and resurrection (Rom. 6:4-5), ensuring immunity from the second death for those in the first resurrection. In contrast, the second resurrection leads to an “agonizing realization of eternity” for those facing the second death.<sup>50</sup>

### **Revelation 20:7-10**

And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Rev. 20:7-8).

At the end of the church age, Satan will be unleashed for a final rebellion against the kingdom of God. This allusion is rooted in the symbolic adversaries “Gog and Magog” from Ezekiel 38 and 39, often regarded in Jewish texts as the “final major enemies of Israel.”<sup>51</sup> God will allow Satan to raise a wicked army who will eventually be cast into the lake of fire. In

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fulfillment in “Olam ha-ba,” the world to come. Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, Dritter Band Die Briefe Des Neuen Testaments Und Die Offenbarung Johannis (München, DEU: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1954), 823-827.

<sup>49</sup> Wilson, *Commentary*, 233.

<sup>50</sup> Paige Patterson, *Revelation: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 294-295.

<sup>51</sup> Keener, *Bible Background Commentary*, 771.

response to Satan's deception of nations and the instigation of rebellion, God intervenes by sending fire from heaven to annihilate His enemies (Rev. 20:9). This likely refers to the Second Coming of Christ, "In flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thess. 1:8). Ultimately, the narrative concludes with Satan and his followers being cast into hell for eternity (Rev. 20:10).

Hitchcock brings forth a question regarding the specific nature of Satan's final release (Rev. 20:7-9). He posits that the partial-preterist position is incorrect because the final release of Satan did not happen "soon" after Revelation was written. The answer to this question lies in the preceding verses, where it is stated that Satan is initially bound, preventing him from deceiving the nations (Rev. 20:3; cf. Matt. 12:29). However, as time unfolds, there comes a moment when Satan is once again allowed to lead nations astray. This has not yet taken place, as it occurs after the successful evangelization of the world (the millennium). From the perspective of post-millennialism (Gentry's view), the millennium signifies an extensive timeframe during which the Great Commission is fulfilled with the successful evangelization of the entire world. Following this period, God permits Satan to resume his deception, but ultimately, the Lord returns and sentences the wicked to eternal damnation (2 Thess. 1:8).<sup>52</sup>

### *Comparison of the External Evidence*

Understanding the similarities and differences between the perspectives of the present author and Gentry is relevant to this study, not only for academic scrutiny but also due to the theological implications of reevaluating the date of Revelation. The temporal positioning of this text, whether preceding or succeeding the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple,

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<sup>52</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 89-90; Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Postmillennialism Made Easy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chesnee, SC: Victorious Hope Publishing, 2020), 5-8. See also Terry, *The Apocalypse of John*, 242-243; Wilson, *Commentary*, 236; Mathison, *Postmillennialism*, 156-157; Bahnsen, *Victory in Jesus*, 40-42.

influences the comprehension of its symbolic language, theological themes, and its relevance to the historical context. While this study aligns with Gentry's conclusion that Revelation predates A.D. 70, it is essential to scrutinize the nuanced variations in their interpretations of the evidence. Given that both perspectives largely agree with the internal evidence, this study will emphasize the similarities and differences in external evidence. External evidence is deemed particularly relevant as it serves as the primary support for the late date theory.<sup>53</sup>

To begin, both the present author and Gentry acknowledge the relevance of Papias, but a notable difference arises in the weight they assign to his writings. This author asserts that the pertinent manuscript of Georgius Hamartolus genuinely represents Papias, supporting an early date. In contrast, Gentry places less emphasis on Papias, citing disputes over authenticity.

Moving on, both authors find it likely that *The Shepherd of Hermas* was composed around A.D. 85, supporting a Neronian date for Revelation. Concerning Irenaeus' statement, both authors agree on its ambiguity. This author maintains slight reservations to Gentry's proposed translational change due to the Latin translators interpreting Irenaeus' statement as referring to the timing of the vision as well as the lack of a translational issue among other church fathers.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, Irenaeus has been demonstrated to be an unreliable witness, diminishing his credibility in this debate.

Regarding Clement of Alexandria, Gentry views him as a positive witness for the early date, whereas the present author dismisses Clement as an unreliable source. Turning to Tertullian's account, Gentry sees it as suggestive evidence for John suffering under Nero, while the present author deems it inconclusive due to the absence of an explicit reference to Nero.

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<sup>53</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 41.

<sup>54</sup> Hitchcock, "Defense of the Domitianic Date," 27-28.

Gentry posits that the Muratorian Canon supports an early date by implying John preceded Paul in writing to the seven churches. However, the present author challenges this, arguing that the Muratorian Canon does not definitively establish either date or may focus on the essence of John's apostleship.

Both authors agree on the ambiguity of Origen's statement, recognizing its impact in diminishing the weight of the late date theory. Regarding Victorinus' account, they both deem the practicality of John undertaking a strenuous journey in his advanced age as highly unlikely. In the assessment of Eusebius, both the present author and Gentry agree that his inconsistency renders him an unreliable source for late date advocacy. Additionally, they share the perspective that Epiphanius likely referred to Nero when mentioning Claudius but acknowledge the inconclusiveness of his witness.

Regarding Jerome, Gentry downplays his significance, while the present author contends that alterations made to Jerome's texts lend support to the early date of Revelation. Lastly, both the present author and Gentry agree in recognizing indications that traditions and witnesses do not uniformly support the late date. Both cite varying degrees of conclusiveness for each source, including Andreas of Cappadocia, Acts of John, Syriac Witnesses, and Arethas. In sum, although Gentry and the present author agree on dating the book of Revelation before A.D. 70, variations arise in their assessments of the significance and reliability of certain external source materials.

### *Conclusion*

This study has examined the external and internal source material relevant to the dating of the book of Revelation, advocating for the Neronian date in opposition to the traditional Domitianic date. The analysis centered on the works of Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. and Mark L. Hitchcock, who respectively championed the early and late dates for the book. Throughout the

five chapters, the arguments from both camps were presented and examined. The conclusion drawn is that the internal coherence of the text aligns more convincingly with the pre-destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple, placing the composition of the book of Revelation before the significant events of A.D. 70.

### **External Evidence**

The statement made by Irenaeus is characterized by ambiguity, Clement of Alexandria and Origen lack specificity in their references to the Roman ruler, Eusebius demonstrates inconsistency, selectivity, and biases in his utilization of sources, and Jerome's text appears to have been edited and forced to align with the late date perspective, despite Jerome himself favoring an earlier date. On the other hand, Papias, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, Tertullian, and Epiphanius are cited as early date sources that, if deemed authentic, provide support for the Neronian date of the book of Revelation in varying degrees of usefulness. Therefore, the conclusion is drawn that, while external evidence does not decisively favor either date, the early date theory gains further support than previously acknowledged. Nevertheless, it is sensible to approach the date with caution, as external evidence alone will not suffice to definitively assign a date to the book.

### **Internal Evidence**

The internal evidence within the book of Revelation provides substantial support for the theory that its composition occurred during the reign of Nero. This assertion is grounded in several key factors, namely John's temporal expectations, the pronounced persecution experienced by the Seven Churches, and the absence of documented indications of systematic persecution under Domitian. The utilization of both 666 and 616 as gematria, referencing Nero Caesar, provides additional support for the early date of the book. Moreover, the mention of the



Second Temple in Revelation 11 implies a timeframe predating its destruction in A.D. 70, thereby reinforcing the alignment of historical and contextual elements with the proposed Neronian date. While additional arguments, such as the condition of the churches, John's exile to Patmos, the reference to the "New Jerusalem," and the mention of oil and wine in Revelation 6:5-6, are presented, they do not decisively substantiate a late date. Rather, the internal evidence of Revelation coherently corresponds with the historical context of Nero's reign.

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