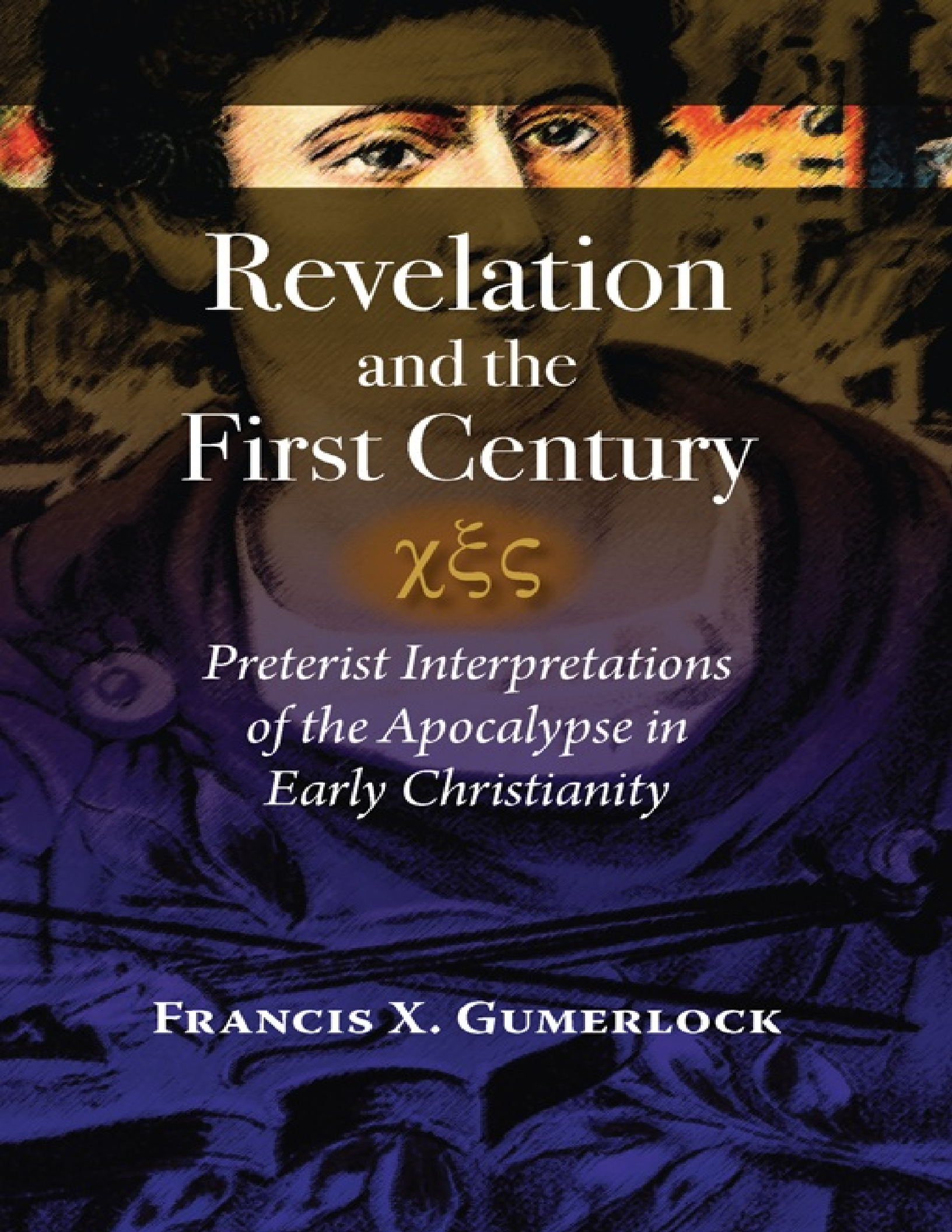

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Preterist Interpretations
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Revelation and the First Century
Preterist Interpretations of the Apocalypse in Early Christianity
by Francis X. Gumerlock

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INTRODUCTION:

Are Preterist Interpretations of Revelation Something New?

The book of Revelation! The very title fills us with awe, wonder, mystery, and triumph. *Revelation and the First Century* is about a way of interpreting the Apocalypse that is as ancient as Christianity itself. It will show that many commentators on the book of Revelation from early Christianity interpreted its visions as prophecies of first-century events. Hence, the title *Revelation and the First Century*.

This introduction will discuss the need for this book, which essentially is to combat the misinformation about the history of preterist interpretations of the book of Revelation. Next, this introduction will present the purpose of this book, which is to provide selections from ancient and medieval commentaries on the book of Revelation that interpret the visions in a preterist fashion. This introduction will lay out, in summary form, its strategy for achieving that purpose. It will do so by providing a brief explanation of the contents of each chapter. It will then discuss the value of the history of biblical interpretation, explain some approaches to the Apocalypse that were dominant in Christian history, make some general clarifications, and give a few acknowledgments. First, however, it is necessary to define what is meant by 'preterist interpretations.'

'Preterist Interpretations' Defined

The term "preterist" comes from the Latin word *praetereo, praeterire* meaning "to pass by."[1] Perhaps some readers familiar with the Spanish language know that verbs can be in the "preterit" tense, which means their action is in the past.[2] When we speak of preterist interpretations of the book of Revelation, we speak of a method of interpreting its prophecies as having already been fulfilled in our

past. Of course when John wrote the prophecies, they were future. But from the perspective of the twenty-first-century, they have already been fulfilled. A preterist interpretation of the Apocalypse says that most of its prophecies were fulfilled in the first-century. As Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. wrote, "Preterism holds that the bulk of John's prophecies occurred in the first-century, soon after his writing of them."[3] Most often preterists see their fulfillment in the "events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple in A.D. 70."[4] This approach to the book of Revelation many conservative scholars believe is the most satisfactory. These include contemporary Christian authors like Jay Adams, R.C. Sproul, Hank Hanegraaff, Kenneth Gentry, Gary DeMar, and many others.

Varieties of Preterism

Partial preterists hold that *many* or *most* of the prophecies in the book of Revelation have already been fulfilled. They are called "partial" preterists because they hold that the bodily return of Jesus to earth for the Last Judgment has not yet taken place, nor has the general resurrection of all humanity that will accompany it. When this book speaks of preterism or preterist interpretations of the book of Revelation, it refers to partial preterism.

Another mild type of preterism holds that most of the prophecies in the book of Revelation pointed to the downfall of the Jewish nation *and* the fall of pagan Rome. This view sees the prophecies fulfilled not only in the first-century but over the first *several centuries* of Christian history.[5] Apparently, this type of preterism was held by authors like John Henten, Luis Alcasar, Henry Hammond, John Lightfoot, Moses Stuart, Henry Barclay Swete, and Isbon T. Beckwith.[6]

Two aberrations of preterism are hyper-preterism and liberal preterism. Hyper-preterists, arising out of the Church of Christ sect,[7] believe that all of the prophecies of the New Testament have already been fulfilled including the Second Coming of Christ and the Last Judgment.[8] Hyper-preterists are not waiting for Christ from heaven or for the general resurrection. Some hyper-preterists believe that a physical rapture of the saints occurred in 70 A.D., and others say that the resurrection in Scripture simply refers to the reception of a spiritual body after death, not a general bodily resurrection at the end of the world.[9] Many books and articles have been written against this aberration, showing its deviation from Christian orthodoxy and affinity with various

heresies.[10] It should be noted that "those who hold to Partial Preterism do not advocate these beliefs [i.e., that there is no future resurrection and that the resurrection was only spiritual resurrection] and should not be treated as if they were enemies of the Gospel." Thus spoke futurist Thomas A. Howe. He continued in his very fair assessment of partial preterists, affirming that they "are no less committed Evangelical Christians than Futurists."[11]

Some liberal biblical scholars see the book of Revelation as a composition of apocalyptic literature pieced together over several decades by different people and deny its divine inspiration. They do not believe in prophecy in the sense of divinely inspired predictions of future events. From their perspective, the writer or writers of the book of Revelation lived through the events and then wrote about those events afterward, composing their narratives in the form of prophetic language.[12] The reason I mention them is because sometimes their views resemble preterist interpretations. For example, some liberal scholars hold to an early date of Revelation, and very often refer the visions of the book of Revelation to historical events of the first-century, but for very different reasons than biblically conservative partial preterists. This author does not endorse hyper-preterist or liberal preterist opinions and believes that such views endanger both their adherents and the true Christian faith.

Misinformation about the History of Preterist Interpretations of the Apocalypse

One common criticism against preterist interpretations of the book of Revelation is their alleged lack of representation in Christian history. Opponents of preterist interpretations of Revelation say that such views did not exist in ancient Christianity but were introduced into Christianity in the 1600s by a Jesuit named Luis Alcasar, sometimes spelled Alcazar. This, of course, implies that such interpretations are novel. For Christians, "novel" tends to mean that such interpretations are unorthodox and not in agreement with the ancient faith handed down to us by the apostles. This book shows that those who say such things are misinformed about Christian history.

Below are statements by Christian writers asserting that preterist interpretations of the book of Revelation have *not* been found in early Christianity. I have placed certain words or phrases of theirs in italics for emphasis.

H. Wayne House and Thomas Ice:

> If the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem fulfilled so much of biblical prophecy, then why is this not reflected in the views of the early church? Why is it that *all of the early fathers*, when referring to Revelation and Matthew 24, see these as future events?[13]

Thomas Ice, president of Pre-Trib Research Center:

> My preterist friends have not been able to find any early preterists in the early church . . . it is interesting that they *have not found anybody in the early church* who believed in preterism.[14]

J. Randall Price:

> According to . . . one of the foremost experts on preterism, there is no evidence of *any preterist interpretation in the history of the early church* through the Reformation.[15]

Joe Van Koevering:

> The historical record left by the church fathers refutes any validity to the preterist teachings.[16]

Mal Couch, president of Tyndale Theological Seminary:

> Preterism goes against the witness of the very early church. And "Could the early church have agreed with today's Preterists?" The answer is a loud NO.[17]

Ron J. Bigalke, Jr., professor at Tyndale Theological Seminary:

> Bahnsen and Gentry desire their readers to believe many ancient fathers were preterists regarding Daniel's Seventy Weeks, the first portion of Christ's Olivet Discourse, and/or Revelation. This statement has proven to be false.[18]

To summarize, the accusation is that no early Christian writers interpreted the visions of the book of Revelation in a preterist manner, as prophecies that were fulfilled in the events surrounding the first-century destruction of Jerusalem. Such interpretations, they say, do "not have good historical credentials."[19]

Below are listed statements alleging that Luis Alcasar was the *first* to interpret visions in the book of Revelation in a preterist manner. Again, I have italicized words for emphasis.

Duncan McDougall:

> Alcazar, a Spanish Jesuit, *started* the idea that the Apostle John . . . was writing about what was happening in his own day, and that his Antichrist was probably the Emperor Nero or some other early persecutor.[20]

Irwin Baxter, founder of Endtime Ministries in Indiana:

> Preterism was *first* advanced in 1604 by Roman Catholic Jesuit Luis de Alcasar . . .[21]

Paul Owen:

> Now with regard to the Praeterist [sic] Scheme, on the review of which we are first to enter, it may be remembered that I stated it to have had its *origin* with the Jesuit Alcasar . . .[22]

Lawrence A. Justice:

> Most Bible historians today recognize the Jesuit priest Alcasar who died in 1613 A.D. as being *the originator* of modern preterism.[23]

Ronald Cooke:

> Alcasar, another Spanish Jesuit . . . seems to have been the *first* man in history to advocate the Preterist Approach to the Apocalypse.[24]

According to these writers, preterist interpretations of the Apocalypse were never seen in early or medieval Christianity, but were first introduced by a Jesuit named Luis Alcasar (d. 1613), whose commentary on Revelation was published posthumously in 1614.[25]

Purpose of This Book

Such criticisms against preterist interpretations of the book of Revelation elicit questions: Did any early and medieval Christian writers interpret the visions of Revelation in a preterist manner? Are preterist interpretations of the book of Revelation a modern, seventeenth century invention, as is claimed by the above writers? This book answers these questions by providing selections from ancient and medieval commentaries on the book of Revelation, writings composed long before the seventeenth century. Many of these selections are translated into English here for the first time. All of the selections reflect the fact that some Christians in ancient and medieval times interpreted visions in the book of Revelation in a preterist fashion.

Contents of This Book

The first two chapters show ten different traditions where early Christians believed that the apostle John was exiled to Patmos and wrote the book of Revelation before A.D. 70. Chapter Three translates many comments from medieval commentaries that attributed the “tribulation coming upon the whole earth”(Rev. 3:10) to the persecution of Christians in the early church, rather than a great tribulation at the end of the world.

Those who take a futurist approach to the book of Revelation are prone to

speak about the release of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse (cf. Rev. 6) as part of judgments that will be unleashed upon the earth at the end of the world. But many writers in the middle ages, as shown in Chapters Five and Six, saw the emperor Nero and the military general Titus as the embodiment of the horsemen, who in the *first-century* unleashed their fury on early Christians and the city of Jerusalem. Chapter Six reveals that many commentators in early Eastern Christianity interpreted the opening of the sixth seal in Rev. 6 as fulfilled, or partially fulfilled, in the first-century Roman siege of Jerusalem.

Futurists also tend to view the 144,000 who are sealed in Rev. 7 as Jewish evangelists that will appear in the last days. Chapter Seven of this book demonstrates that interpreters from the earliest days of Christianity saw these 144,000 as Jewish people who came to Christ in the days of the apostles, or as a remnant of Jewish believers, preserved from the affliction of the Romans as they besieged Jerusalem.

Furthermore, we are often told by our futurist friends that the forty-two months mentioned several times in the book of Revelation is a reference to the time of a great tribulation that will come at the end of the world. Chapter Eight of this book provides selections from medieval commentators who saw that forty-two month time period in reference to the siege of Jerusalem that occurred just decades after our Lord's death, resurrection, and ascension. Regarding the two witnesses of Rev. 11, Chapter Nine translates selections from early commentators who saw the witnesses as apostles who were martyred in the first-century.

We often hear in the depictions of the Antichrist from pop culture, that he will be a religious or political figure in the future who will be shot and killed, but then return to life. Chapter Ten of this book gives many examples of Christians in the early church who believed that the passage in Rev. 13 about a beast whose "fatal wound was healed" (Rev. 13:3, 12) referred to the emperor Nero, who reigned from 54–68 A.D.

We also very often hear how the Antichrist in the last days will force people to receive a mark of 666 on their foreheads and hands. Chapter Eleven translates and explains an ancient North African text that encouraged its readers to use the name of Nero when calculating the number of the beast. Chapter Twelve illustrates that at least four commentators on Rev. 17:10 from the fourth through

eighth centuries saw Nero as the sixth king, the one who was reigning at the time John wrote the book of Revelation.

The last seven chapters of this book examine the way early Christian writers interpreted other prophetic Biblical passages in light of the emperor Nero and the first-century destruction of Jerusalem that occurred shortly after that tyrant's death. Chapter Thirteen looks at interpretations of James 5, illustrating that many early commentators referred the prophecy of a "slaughter in the last days" to the destruction of Jerusalem in the first-century. Chapter Fourteen provides selections from early commentaries on 2 Thessalonians which saw Nero as the "mystery of iniquity." Chapter Fifteen translates selections from early Christians and the Reformer Henry Bullinger (c. 1542) who interpreted prophecies in Matt. 24:5–21 as fulfilled in the events surrounding the first-century Roman-Judean conflict.

Chapter Sixteen analyzes early Christian interpretations of Jesus' parable of the fig tree in Matt. 24:32–33 and concludes that the interpretations of modern prophecy writers about this passage greatly differ from those of many early Christian authors. The latter did not believe that it was a prophecy about God bringing back the Jewish people to the land of Palestine in the last days, but rather a prophecy about the deception of Antichrist.

Quotations from early and medieval commentators on Daniel abound in Chapter Seventeen. These display that many early Christians believed that the seventy weeks prophecy was entirely fulfilled in the first-century, not awaiting fulfillment at the end of the world. The last chapter looks at various prophecies in the Old Testament which early Christian writers interpreted as having been fulfilled in the first-century Roman-Judean war.

Regardless of what interpretive approach you hold, I trust that you will find this book informative about how some of our Christian forefathers interpreted the visions contained in this last book of the Bible.

The Value of Christian History

An objector might say, "The Bible is our final authority. Church history doesn't matter as it merely contains the traditions of men. What is important is only what the Bible says or what can be proved from the Bible." I agree that the Bible, God's holy word, is our final authority. But the history of biblical interpretation apparently does matter to the ten or more modern authors quoted

above, who say that preterist interpretations of the Bible were non-existent in early Christian history but were first set forth by Luis Alcasar in the seventeenth century.

Knowing church history is important for Christians because we believe in the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit. We believe that, through His Spirit, God helps us in understanding His holy word, the Bible. And He does this not only today, but *has been* illuminating His saints for over nineteen centuries. Therefore, there can be great value gained from reading, studying, and translating the biblical commentaries of early Christians. We can benefit from *their* gift of illumination. How?

The history of how a passage of Scripture has been interpreted can aid us in discernment, particularly on the difficult or controversial ones like those in the book of Revelation. How common was that interpretation? Does it have a time-honored history, or is it a historical novelty? Did a church council ever formally condemn the interpretation, and if so, why? If the viewpoint was clearly not the mainstream opinion, was it considered an orthodox alternative, or was it an opinion held exclusively by heretical sects? These, I believe, are all valid questions.

Furthermore, studying ancient Christian commentaries can often bridge the temporal, cultural, and linguistic gaps that exist between the biblical writers and us today in the 21st century English-speaking world.[26] Finally, studying church history can often provide a sense of historical connectedness with Christ's body in the past.

Of course, this is not to say that we should swallow everything the church fathers wrote, hook, line, and sinker. Just because an interpretation of a biblical passage shows up in Christian history doesn't make it right. Like we ourselves, even the greatest minds of Christianity were fallible and often wrong. But sometimes they provide amazing insights. I hope that you will find the selections contained in this book as insightful as I have.

Other Interpretive Approaches to the Apocalypse

As stated earlier, this book is about preterist interpretations of the visions of the Apocalypse that see the prophecies as having been fulfilled in events related to the reign of the Roman emperor Nero (54–68 A.D.), the years of turmoil following his death, the siege and destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies

led by Vespasian and Titus, the signs associated with that siege as confirmed by the Jewish historian Josephus, and the flight from Jerusalem to Pella by believers during that war, as related by the early church historian, Eusebius. However, over the nearly two thousand years of interpretation of this blessed Apocalypse of Jesus Christ other interpretive approaches have dominated at different time periods.

One of the viewpoints common in contemporary Christianity is a **futurist** approach which says that the visions of the book of Revelation signify historical events that will occur at the end of the world. Some early Christian writers like Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Lactantius seem to have held similar views. Some who hold this view today believe that the visions in the majority of Revelation (Chs. 6–19) will be fulfilled only in the last seven years of life on earth as we know it. That seven year period they call the Tribulation or Daniel's Seventieth Week. Many of this viewpoint say that the Tribulation will be preceded by a catching away or Rapture of true Christians to heaven. They also teach that the Tribulation will end with the Second Coming of Christ who, upon His return, will reign as an earthly king in Jerusalem for a thousand years. This view is called Premillennialism.

It seems that in the thirty-two years since I was called to Christ by our gracious Lord, more and more Christians who were taught that interpretation of the book of Revelation are questioning its veracity. Not the truth of the book of Revelation, God forbid, but the veracity of that *interpretation* of John's visions. The false predictions of dates for the Rapture and the endless pin-the-tail on the Antichrist assertions by people of that persuasion have no doubt contributed to their disillusionment with that approach.

Another interpretive approach to Revelation, very common between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, is the **historicist** view. This view sees the visions of the Apocalypse as markers in a grand blueprint of Christian history from the first-century to the Second Coming of Christ. Its advantage is that it makes the book of Revelation not simply about the last few years of history, but relevant for the whole church age. But it too is beset with major shortcomings. One of its main problems is that it paves the way for as many interpretations of the Apocalypse as there are interpreters. Each interpreter is free to interpret its visions in reference to any historical person or event that he sees fit. For

example, one historicist interpreted the “angel having the everlasting gospel” (Rev. 14:6) as the emperor Constantine; another saw the angel as Francis of Assisi, and still another saw it as Martin Luther. The same can be said when they come to the two witnesses of Rev. 11 and the beasts of Rev. 13.[27] The multitude of historical candidates who supposedly fulfilled these prophecies is an embarrassment. Stanley Griswold, in a sermon preached in 1800, summed it up well, saying that if people were to give credence to all the interpretations of Revelation ever advanced, they would be forced to conclude that “a more wild, incoherent book never was written.”[28] And G.K. Chesterton similarly observed that “though St. John the Evangelist saw many strange monsters in his vision, he saw no creature as wild as one of his commentators.”[29]

A more sober approach is the **idealist** one, an interpretive method common in the fifth through tenth centuries. Its major premise is that the visions of Revelation are not prophecies of historical events as much as they contain eternal truths that apply to God’s people throughout their sojourn on earth before the Second Coming. These truths center upon: the enthronement of Christ the King, God’s salvation of and faithfulness to His people, His call for all humans to repent of their sins and to persevere in loyalty to Him in the midst of persecution, God’s judgment of the ungodly, and His crowning of the righteous with everlasting life. Idealist commentaries avoid the wild speculations common in futurist and historicist commentaries, but also are not without problems, the major one being a divorce of John’s visions from the experiences of the churches of Asia Minor.



AUGUSTINE

Kenneth Gentry once wrote that the book of Revelation is the most "variously understood of the New Testament books."[30] It has perplexed some of the greatest minds of ancient and modern Christianity. Jerome, who translated the whole Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Latin and wrote massive commentaries on difficult books like Isaiah, Daniel, and Jeremiah, said that the book of Revelation "contains as many mysteries as it does words."[31] Augustine wrote that many of its obscure passages "exercise the mind of the reader."[32] John Calvin wrote commentaries on every book of the Bible *except* Revelation. One of the greatest preachers in the history of Christianity, Charles Spurgeon, said candidly that "there is a whole book of Revelation which I do not understand, but which I fully believe;" and B.B. Warfield called it "the most difficult book of the Bible."[33] Because some of the most gifted among God's people have struggled with its interpretation, and because in a certain sense "we are only divided by degrees of ignorance,"[34] it behooves us to exercise much charity and patience toward our brothers and sisters in Christ who seek to understand in a sober

manner the book of Revelation, which can often seem like a "veiling" (Greek, *epikalupsis*) rather than an "unveiling" (*apokalupsis*).[35]

Clarifications Regarding This Book

In this introduction I also think it is necessary to clarify a few things about the book you are about to read, and about what it does *not* contain or imply. Although it treats the book of Revelation in order, it is not intended as a verse-by-verse commentary. Rather, it includes commentary on selected passages by writers who lived before the seventeenth century. Their opinions are just that—*their* opinions—and not necessarily mine. My views on eschatology can be found in my booklet "Christ Will Come Again," which will be available soon through my website, francisgumerlock.com. On the book of Revelation more specifically, my views can be found in the packet of notes and lectures that I provide for students enrolled in the course "The Epistles of John and Revelation," which I had the privilege of teaching in 2009 and 2011 at Providence Theological Seminary. Also, the views in this book do not reflect those of any ecclesiastical organization or educational institution with which I am affiliated.

This book also does not imply that the selected commentators on Revelation were preterist in all of their interpretation of the Apocalypse from the first chapter to the last. Admittedly, some of these commentators were eclectic and held views or interpreted other passages in line with the other schools of interpretation. For example, Victorinus was all over the map, sometimes preterist, sometimes idealist, and sometimes futurist in his interpretations. Berengaudus was sometimes preterist, sometimes idealist, and sometimes historicist in his interpretations. The commentaries by Alexander Minorita and Peter Auriol, from which preterist selections are translated, are historicist in many places. Some of the authors, in addition to their preterist comments cited herein, held certain non-preterist views, such as belief in the coming of a future end-time Antichrist. Many of the authors cited held that the book of Revelation was written during the reign of emperor Domitian (A.D. 81–96), which differs from the common modern preterist view that Revelation was written prior to A.D. 70.

Revelation and the First Century contains no comments on the coming of Christ in Revelation (cf. Rev. 1:7; 2:5, t16; 3:3, 11; 22:7, 20), as I did not find

any of the Apocalypse commentaries of the early church that interpreted the coming of Christ in those passages as a "judgment coming" of Christ in 70 A.D.[36] However, in my published research on patristic and medieval interpretations of Matthew 24, I found in an Irish *Book of Questions on the Gospels* from about the year 725 a comment on Matt. 24:30 about Christ coming in the clouds "in the armies of the Romans," and another medieval author writing about a "hidden" coming of Christ when "He solemnly brings some judgment upon the impious, just as happened in Sodom and Gomorrah, and in the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, and when He removed the ark from Shiloh," although in that example he does not refer specifically to the first-century destruction of Jerusalem.[37] I also did not include in this book the many examples of early Christian writers who took a non-literal interpretation of the thousand years (Rev. 20), as they are the main subject of a different book that I am writing.

Many texts from early and medieval Christianity that are translated in this book speak about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Some of the texts interpret that historical event, with biblical support by the Jewish authors of the New Testament, as an act of divine wrath for Israel's rejection and crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God and the Messiah to which the Jewish Scriptures pointed. Unfortunately, many throughout history, in the name of Christ, have treated Jewish people with unkindness, isolation, forced baptism, brutality, persecution, slavery, and even death. On the other hand, there are examples of many lay Christians, clergy, and Christian political leaders throughout history who have treated Jewish people with kindness and respect. We would do well to imitate them and be kind to all people as we obey our Lord's command to spread His Good News to all nations.

With those things said, I invite you to take a journey through some of what the early Christian writers have said and decide for yourself : Did preterist interpretations of the book of Revelation exist in Christian history before the modern period? Does the charge of historical novelty against preterist interpretations of the Apocalypse hold water?

Acknowledgements and Dedication

I would like to thank Dr. Lloyd Pierson of Kalispell, Montana, Thomas Schmidt of Utica, New York, and Stephanie Brown of Denver, Colorado for their

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This book is dedicated to Wayne Anesh of South Plainfield, New Jersey: filmmaker, movie critic, photographer, friend, brother-in-law, and Bob Dylan fan. As "the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ" (Rev. 11:15), may he and all the readers of this book find the Lord Jesus Christ to be a King entirely worthy of our love and allegiance. For, Christ first loved us and gave His life as a sacrifice for our sins. Having taken the penalty for our sins in our place, He freely declares us who believe to be in right standing with God, and clothes us with His own righteousness. May God grant us all faith in Him, repentance from our sins, and everlasting life.

And as one ninth-century Syrian pastor, who wrote the earliest Syriac commentary on Revelation, encouraged his readers:

> "Let it [the Apocalypse] be revealed and explained in all the churches to the edification, advantage, and strength of all Christians who believe in Christ, the Son of God. . . . The Apocalypse of the Son of God is precious, gracious, very dear, and wonderful. O beloved and dear children which the Father enriched through the (sacrificial) slaughter of his Son, raise your heads toward heaven. . . . Let us spiritually refresh ourselves in the Apocalypse of the evangelist John, because from it a crown of great glory both radiates and gleams. From it light and life . . . glitter and flash to all the beloved children."[38]

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1. D.P. Simpson, *Cassell's Latin Dictionary* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 469.

2. *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1985), 932.

3. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., "A Preterist View of Revelation" in C. Marvin Pate, ed., *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 37.

4. Thomas Ice and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Great Tribulation: Past or Future?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1999), 7.

5. According to Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (*Fast Facts on Bible Prophecy from A to Z* [Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1997], 155), "*Mild* preterists believe that the past fulfillment occurred during the first three centuries as God waged war on the two early enemies of the church: Israel and Rome. Israel was defeated in A.D. 70 and Rome in the fourth century." For other descriptions of "mild" preterism, see the articles by Ice entitled "The Destructive View of Preterism" *Conservative Theological Journal* 3:10 (Dec 1999) and "Has Prophecy Already Been Fulfillled?" *Conservative Theological Journal* 4:12 (Aug 2000) both at

www.conservativeonline.org/journals. Accessed December 16, 2003.

6. David Brady, "The Number of the Beast in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth- Century England," *Evangelical Quarterly* 45:4 (Oct–Dec 1973):219–240 at 233; Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 228; Thomas Ice, "What is Preterism?" in Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice, eds., *The End Times Controversy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2003), 17–35 at 22; J. Randall Price, "The Development of Preterism" antipreterist.wordpress.com. Accessed March 9, 2009.

7. Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, Rev. ed. (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2002), 34: "The origins of this modern movement arise out of and are fueled by many either presently or previously within the Church of Christ sect."

8. On the Lord Jesus returning in bodily form at the end of time for the Last Judgment, see Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 21:3: "So therefore he will come in human form. The ungodly too will see this; those placed to the right will see it too; those separate to the left will see it too, as it is written, 'They shall see him whom they have pierced.' If they will see him whom they have pierced, they will see the same body that they thrust through with a spear . . ." Cited in Alberto Ferreiro, ed., *The Twelve Prophets.* Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Old Testament XIV (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 272; Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentaries on the Twelve Prophets*, On Joel 2:30: "in coming on the clouds he will be visible." In Robert Charles Hill, trans., *Theodoret of Cyrus. Commentaries on the Twelve Prophets*, Vol. 3 (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006), 97; Julian of Toledo, *Foreknowledge of the World to Come*, 3.4: "When the world will have come to its end, Christ, the Son of God, will come for judgment with all the saints in the same bodily aspect with which he ascended into heaven." ACW 63:431. Canons 7 & 18 of an iconoclastic council in Constantinople in 754 pronounced anathema on anyone who "does not confess that Christ is seated with God the Father in body and soul, and so will come to judge. . ." and anyone who "denies the resurrection of the dead, and the judgment. . ." NPNF, 2nd series, 14:545–6.

9. The church father, Tertullian, in *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, 22 (ANF 3:560) spoke of certain "Animalists" in his day that believed, like hyper-preterists today, that the resurrection "is accomplished immediately after their departure from this life." Some of the followers of David Joris, who in the sixteenth century thought he was the "third David," were accused of teaching that "the resurrection of the dead has already occurred." See "Appendix 2. Articles of the Jorists, 1544" in Gary K. Waite, trans. and ed., *The Anabaptist Writings of David Joris, 1535–1543* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994), 293. And one of the Forty-Two Articles of Religion of 1553, drafted by the Church of England, taught against a similar belief saying [I have retained the original spelling]: "The resurreccio of the dead is not as yet brought to passe: as though it only belonged to the soule . . . but it is to be loked for at the laste day." Cited in Bryan W. Ball, *A Great Expectation: Eschatological Thought in English Protestantism to 1660* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 244.

10. Against hyper-preterist views, see C. Jonathan Seraiah, *The End of All Things: A Defense of the Future* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 1999); Jay E. Adams, *Preterism: Orthodox or Unorthodox?* (Stanley, NC: Timeless Texts, 2003); Keith A. Mathison, ed., *When Shall These Things Be? A Reformed Response to Hyper-Preterism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004). For more exhaustive lists of articles refuting hyper-preterism, see Gary DeMar and Francis X. Gumerlock, *The Early Church and the End of the World* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2006), 119-20. To those can be added Gentry, "A Brief Theological Analysis of Hyper-Preterism," *Chalcedon Report* 384 (July 1997):22-4; and John E. Young, *Jesus Did Not Return in A.D. 70: A Study in Preterite Theology* (New York: Vantage Press, 1999), 5.

11. Thomas A. Howe, *Daniel in the Preterists' Den* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008), 681.

12. This is referred to as a *vaticana ex eventu* or a prophecy from [after] the event.

13. H. Wayne House and Thomas Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1988), 258.

14. Thomas Ice, "Update on Pre-Darby Rapture Statements & Other Issues," audiotape (Arlington, TX:

Pre-Trib Research Center, Dec. 1995), side two.

15. Price, "The Development of Preterism."

16. Joe Van Koevering, *Exposing the Scoffers: Sign of the End-Times* (St. Petersburg, FL: God's News Behind the News, no date), 29.

17. Mal Couch, "The Fatal Mistake of Preterism," 4. www.preteristarchive. com. Accessed Dec. 19, 2004.

18. Ron J. Bigalke, Jr., "Preterism and Antiquity: Was Preterism a View of the Early Church?" *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 12:35 (March 2008), 49–60 at 60.

19. Ronald Cooke, *Premillennialism and Optimism* (Hollidaysburg, PA: Truth International Ministries, 1992), 64.

20. Duncan McDougall, *The Rapture of the Saints*, Rev. ed. (Muskogee, OK: Hoffman Printing Co., 1998), 3.

21. Irwin Baxter, "Climbing the unstable doctrine of Preterism: Examining a False Teaching," www.endtime.com. Accessed December 19, 2004.

22. Paul Owen, *The Origin of Futurism and Preterism* (Owasso, OK: Truth in History Ministries, 2006), 16.

23. Lawrence A. Justice, "Preposterous Preterism," 2. www.preteristarchive. com. Accessed December 19, 2004.

24. Cooke, *Antichrist and Optimism* (Hollidaysburg, PA: Truth International Ministries, 1994), 14.

25. Luis de Alcasar, *Vestigio Arcani Sensus in Apocalypsi [An Investigation of the Secret Meaning of the Apocalypse]* (Antwerp: Martinus Nutius, 1614, 1619).

26. In an essay entitled "Learning from Patristic Christology," I gave many examples of how the study of patristics has helped my Christian faith, particularly in discernment and solving biblical difficulties. In Paul A. Hartog, ed., *The Contemporary Church and the Early Church: Case Studies in Resourcement* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 155–79 at 157–65.

27. Francis X. Gumerlock, *The Day and the Hour: Christianity's Perennial Fascination with Predicting the End of the World* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2000), 49, 89, 151.

28. Stanley Griswold cited in James West Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought: Eighteenth Century New England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 269.

29. G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, II, 17, cited in Dennis Eugene Engleman, *A Rumor of War: Christ's Millennial Reign and the Rapture of His Church* (Salisbury, MA: Regina Orthodox Press, 2001), 176.

30. Gentry, *Beast of Revelation*, 2.

31. Jerome, *Letter 53*, 9. NPNF, 2nd series, 6:102.

32. Augustine, *On the City of God*, 20.17. Cited in Engleman, *Rumor of War*, 256.

33. Charles Spurgeon (Vol. 45, 402) cited in Ian H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope: A Study in Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), 262. Benjamin B. Warfield ("book of Revelation" in Selected Shorter Writings, 2:80) cited in Gary D. Long, *Context!: Evangelical Views on the Millennium Examined* (Colorado Springs: Sovereign Grace Ministries of Colorado, 2001), 292.

34. Geoffrey A. Adams ("The Fullnesss of Israel," 1980) cited in Long, *Context!*, 20.

35. My paraphrase of a statement by Gerasimos, the patriarch of Alexandria, in a letter he wrote in 1629. See Ernest Cadman Colwell, *The Elizabeth Day McCormick Apocalypse*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940), 31.

36. Many ancient and medieval interpreters saw the "coming" of Christ in these verses as something other than the bodily Second Coming at the end of the world, but not in relation to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. These interpretations include a "coming" of Christ at death (*Handbook on the Apocalypse of Saint John* on 1:1,3; Nerses of Lambron on 3:3; John Bale on 3:3; Francis Lambert on 3:11; Andrew of Caesarea and Arnold of Villanova on 22:7; Paul of Bush on 3:11 and 22:20), a coming in

judgment to inflict punishment on the unrepentant in one of the seven churches (Nerses of Lambron on 2:16; Richard Rolle on 2:5; 2:16; 3:11), a present "coming" of Christ into believers or into the church (Geoffrey of Auxerre on 1:7; Berengaudus on 22:8–21), or a "hidden coming of Christ and judgment" at the end of the fifth or beginning of the sixth *status* (Peter Olivi on 3:3).

37. Cited in DeMar and Gumerlock, *Early Church and the End of the World*, 97–103.

38. Cited in Stan Larson, "The Earliest Syriac Commentary on the Apocalypse: Transcription, Translation, and Importance of Brit. Lib. MS. ADD. 17,127," diss. (University of Birmingham, UK, 1984), 383.

ONE

THE DATE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

(REV. 1:1, 9–10)

INTRODUCTION

Biblical scholarship manifests significant disagreement over the date of the book of Revelation. When ascertaining when John wrote his Apocalypse, it is standard to weigh both internal and external evidence. Concerning external evidence, the dominant tradition, beginning with Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 180), dates Revelation to the end of the reign of Domitian, about 95 or 96 A.D. This view was passed down through the writings of Victorinus, Eusebius, Ambrosiaster, Chromatius, Jerome, Ecumenius, Primasius, Cassiodorus, Isidore of Seville, and Bede. Based on the opinion of these ancient authors, it was common about a hundred years ago for biblical scholars to make claims that the Domitianic view was the exclusive view of the early church. A sample of these, with italics inserted by me for emphasis, include the following:

Philip Schaff (1910):

> The prevailing view, we may say *the only distinct tradition*, beginning with so respectable a witness as Irenaeus, about 170, assigns the exile [of John] to the end of the reign of Domitian, who ruled from 81 to 96.[1]

Doremus A. Hayes (1917):

> The external evidence for the late date of the Apocalypse is stronger than for any other book in the New Testament. . . . Here are the ancient authorities. . . . They *all agree* that the Apocalypse was written during the reign of Domitian, some time in the last decade of the first-century. Can there be any good reason for contradicting a tradition guaranteed by such names and such *unanimity*?[2]

James Moffatt (1918):

> So far as the early church had *any* tradition on the subject, it referred the banishment [of John] to Domitian's reign.[3]

Arthur Peake (1919):

> And on the other side we have the external evidence which is *almost all* in favour of the later date.[4]

Robert H. Charles (1920):

> The earliest authorities are *practically unanimous* in assigning the Apocalypse to the last years of Domitian . . .[5]

Several recent writers unfortunately have repeated such claims. For example, Richard L. Mayhue wrote in an article for *The Master's Seminary Journal*:

> From the second through the eighteenth centuries, the late date was essentially *the exclusive view*."[6]

And Robert L. Thomas, in an entry for the *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, expressed:

> The *unanimous* witness of the early church fathers . . . fix the date in the 90s, during the reign of Roman emperor Domitian.[7]

The truth of the matter is that quite a bit of diversity existed in early Christianity regarding the date that John wrote the book of Revelation, and the dominance of one opinion is not synonymous with unanimity of opinion. Several writers in recent years have noted that markedly different opinions about the date of Revelation abounded among early Christian writers. For example, Adela Yarbro Collins took notice of "traditions about the date of Revelation" that "were apparently independent of Irenaeus."[8] More recently George Wesley Buchanan wrote that in the church fathers "there is no consistent agreement on the precise time when John lived and wrote."[9] In an earlier book, *The Early Church and the End of the World* co-authored with Gary DeMar, I categorized these various opinions regarding the date of Revelation under different headings, from "very early," e.g., the time of Claudius, (41–54 A.D.) to "very late" during the reign of Trajan (98–117 A.D.).[10] This chapter and the next expand significantly upon that research. The two chapters provide passages from ancient and medieval texts, showing that there were at least ten different traditions favoring a date of the

book of Revelation before 70 A.D.[11] These interpretations all predate the seventeenth-century commentary of Luis Alcasar, which is regarded by many as the first preterist commentary of Revelation. In this chapter I have arranged the texts starting with those that portray the earliest dating of the Apocalypse around 30 A.D. to those which dated it about 53 A.D.

REVELATION 1:1, 9–10

The Early Date of the book of Revelation

> The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must shortly take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John. . . . I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day.

A text which says that John received the visions recorded in Revelation shortly after the Last Supper (27–30 A.D.)

The Venetian version of *The Voyage of St. Brendan*, dated 1270–1350, has Elijah in paradise saying this: "He [Antichrist] will win the world for himself by many means; many prophets have spoken of him, and so did Saint John the Evangelist in the Apocalypse, which was a vision which appeared to him when he was in anguish at the Last Supper, grief-stricken on hearing that Judas would betray the Lord."[12]

The author of the text does not give a source for his opinion that John received the vision of the Apocalypse at the Last Supper. Many scholars say that Jesus was born between 6 and 4 B.C., and that he lived on earth for 33 and a half years, and therefore, died, rose, and ascended between 27 and 30 A.D. Since the Last Supper was on the night before He died, that would put the reception of the visions of Revelation about 27–30 A.D.

At first sight, such a theory seems outlandish. Upon closer examination, however, one may be able to see, at least partially, why people might have believed this. First, this tradition for such an early reception of the visions may be related to the actual wording of Rev. 1:10: *I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day*. The word "Lord's" is a rare adjectival form of the word "Lord" and is used only twice in the New Testament: here in Rev. 1:10 (*kyriake*) and in 1 Cor. 11:20

(*kyriakon*) where it speaks of the Lord's Supper. Perhaps because of the similarity of vocabulary in the two passages, John's reception of the visions on the "Lord's" day recorded in Revelation was correlated with the events of the first "Lord's" Supper.[13]

Secondly, a tradition ascribed to Eusebius of Caesarea (d. c. 339) said that John was banished by the emperor Tiberius, who reigned 14–37 A.D. If the author of the *Voyage* were a recipient of that early date tradition, perhaps he was trying to make sense of when John would have received the visions of Revelation before 37 A.D., and placed it within the events of the night that Jesus was betrayed.

Thirdly, this view does not say that John immediately wrote down the visions, only that he received them at the Last Supper. So, the author could have believed that John received the visions at the Last Supper, but wrote them down sometime later, although that does not seem to square with certain passages in Revelation, which indicate that John wrote down the visions as he was receiving them (Rev. 10:4; 21:5; 22:9–10).

With all that said, I am unaware of anyone today who holds that John received the visions of the Apocalypse at the Last Supper. Such a view, in my opinion, divorces John and the book of Revelation from the context of Patmos and the cities of Asia Minor. Nevertheless, the *Voyage of St. Brendan* contains an example of a tradition which held that John received the visions of Revelation at a very early date, corresponding to sometime between 27 and 30 A.D. in our reckoning of time.

A text which says that John was exiled by Tiberius Caesar (36–37 A.D.)

Mingana Syriac 540. In 1930 Alphonse Mingana, keeper of Oriental manuscripts in the John Rylands library in Manchester, England, published excerpts from a manuscript now called Mingana Syriac 540. Although the manuscript dates from 1749, Mingana concluded that "it was a faithful copy of an original from about A.D. 750."[14] The manuscript contains the Syriac New Testament called the Peshitta along with another treatise ascribed to Eusebius of Caesarea. That latter treatise gives a short account of the deeds of the twelve apostles. About the apostle John it reads: "John the Evangelist was also from

Bethsaida. He was of the tribe of Zebulun. He preached in Asia first, and afterwards was banished by *Tiberius* Caesar to the isle of Patmos. Then he went to Ephesus and built up the church in it."[15]

Mingana Syriac 540 says that John was banished to Patmos by Tiberius, who reigned from 14 to 37 A.D. When would John have been on Patmos during the years of that reign? We know from Acts Chapter 8 that after the persecution in which Stephen had been stoned to death, Philip went to Samaria. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria "had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them. . . ." (Acts 8:14–15) So John was in Jerusalem and Samaria around the time the persecution of Acts 8 broke out, which is thought to have been in 36 A.D. Tiberius Caesar died in 37 A.D. Therefore, in this theory regarding the exile of John, John would have travelled to Asia in 36 or 37 and would have been banished to Patmos shortly thereafter by Tiberius, before the death of that emperor in 37. From that island he would have written the book of Revelation.

Michael of Antioch. A similar story, said to have come from the writings of Dionysius Bar Salabi (d. 1171), is related in the *Chronique* written by Michael the Syrian, patriarch of Antioch from 1166–1199. It reads:

> John preached at Antioch; he went away to Ephesus and the mother of our Lord accompanied him. Immediately, they were exiled to the island of Patmos. On returning from exile, he preached at Ephesus and built a church. Ignatius and Polycarp served him. He buried the blessed Mary. He lived 73 years and died after all the other apostles; he was buried at Ephesus.[16]

In this account, John goes to Ephesus with Mary the mother of Christ. (Other early accounts of the life of John say that he remained in Judea until Mary died, and then went to Asia Minor.[17]) In other words, the relocation from Judea to Asia was early enough in the life of John that he was still taking care of Mary. Immediately upon arriving, both John and Mary are exiled to Patmos. If the account is arranged chronologically, and it seems to have been written that way, Mary also returned from exile with John, and he later buried her in Ephesus. Then John dies at age 73.



JOHN AS A YOUNG VISIONARY

This is not the picture that is often portrayed of John as an aged man, eighty or ninety years old, living on the island of Patmos, writing the book of Revelation about 95 or 96 A.D. If that were the case, and Mary were with him on Patmos, Mary would have been on the island with John when she was well over 110 years old (assuming that Mary was 13 or 14 years old when she gave birth to the Lord).

Not many people today hold that John's exile and writing of the book of Revelation took place as early as the reign of Tiberius.[18] Nevertheless, Mingana Syriac 540 preserved an early Syrian tradition that John was exiled to Patmos very early by emperor Tiberius who died in 37 A.D..

The tradition that John was exiled by and prophesied in the time of the emperor Claudius (41–54 A.D.)

Epiphanius of Salamis. About the year 370 Epiphanius of Salamis, a Greek-speaking bishop on the island of Cyprus, wrote that John "prophesied in the time of Claudius . . . the prophetic word according to the Apocalypse being disclosed."[19] The emperor Claudius reigned from 41–54 A.D. The Roman historian Suetonius tells of Claudius expelling from Rome Jews who were

arguing over “Chrestus,” which most scholars take as a misspelled reference to Christ. Suetonius wrote: “The Jews he [Claudius] expelled from Rome, since they were constantly in rebellion, at the instigation of Chrestus.”[20] Perhaps Epiphanius and others believed that John was a victim of that expulsion, which occurred about 51 A.D. In any event, Epiphanius believed that John wrote Revelation very early. Other early Christian writers, Apringius of Beja and Beatus of Liebana, recorded this as well.

Apringius of Beja. Apringius, a Latin-speaking bishop in Beja in modern Portugal, wrote a commentary on Revelation in the early sixth century (c. 531-548). On Rev. 1:9 he made this comment:

> Just as ecclesiastical reporters have taught, in the time of Claudius Caesar, when that famine, which was announced to be coming within ten years by Agabus the prophet in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. Acts 11:28), became severe, in that same storm Caesar, compelled by customary vanity, proclaimed a persecution against the churches. In that time also he commanded that John, the apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ, be transferred into exile, whom also the present scripture establishes was deported to the island of Patmos.[21]

So, just as the fourth-century Greek bishop believed that John was banished to Patmos by the emperor Claudius, so too did this sixth-century Latin speaking bishop, Apringius of Beja, who was ministering on the other side of the Mediterranean.

Beatus of Liebana. Beatus of Liebana, a monk in northern Spain, copied verbatim Apringius’ comments about John being exiled by Claudius, and included them in his *Commentary on the Apocalypse* written in 786.[22] Beatus’ commentary, along with its contents about the early date of Revelation, was widely disseminated in medieval Europe, as shown by the large number of illustrated manuscripts of it that have survived.[23]

A text which says that John wrote the book of Revelation in the 23rd year after Christ’s death (50–53 A.D.)

Sometime between the sixth and eighth century, an unknown person authored a small Handbook on the Apocalypse of the Apostle John that circulated under the names of Jerome and Isidore of Seville. The prologue to the handbook contained in a ninth century manuscript—Bamberg, Staatliche Bibliothek Patr. 102—discusses the time when John wrote the book of Revelation: “It was

written in the twenty-third year after the passion of the Lord, and in the time of the emperor Domitian, who was very much a persecutor of the churches of Christ."[24] The two dates given—the 23rd year after Christ's passion and the time of Domitian, who did not reign until over fifty years after Christ's death—seem contradictory. However, if one takes the 23rd year after the Lord's passion at face value, and the Lord's passion took place between 27 and 30 A.D., that would put his dating of Revelation between the year 50 and 53.

The most recent editor of the *Handbook*, Roger Gryson, believes the number XXIII, or 23, was an error written by either the author or a later librarian, and the intention of the author was for it to read LXIII, or 63. Gryson explained his reasons for this conjecture, and it is a little complicated. The author of the prologue, Gryson says, was probably using as a source Jerome's translation of Eusebius' *Chronicle*.[25] In it, time is reckoned by Olympiads, or periods of four years. According to one tradition, John wrote the Apocalypse in the fourteenth year of Domitian, corresponding with the second year of the 218th Olympiad, or the 870th year from the first Olympiad. The passion of Christ, according to the *Chronicle*, took place in the 18th year of Tiberius, the third year of the 202nd Olympiad, or the 807th year from the first Olympiad. The difference between 870 and 807 is 63. Thus, the fourteenth year of Domitian would have been the LXIII, or 63rd year, after the passion of the Lord.

Gryson's theory makes sense, but the theory would be stronger if there were a manuscript that contained LXIII to confirm it, and there is none. It may be that Gryson is correct. However, there are other possible explanations for the discrepancy between the 23rd year after the passion of the Lord and the reign of Domitian.

One possibility is that the author of the prologue did not know his Roman history of emperors and did not perceive any contradiction between the 23rd year after the passion of Christ and the reign of Domitian.

Another possibility is that the author of the prologue, in mentioning that Revelation was written in the 23rd year after the Lord's passion *and* under Domitian, was giving voice to two different patristic traditions about the date of Revelation (the Domitianic tradition and the Claudianic tradition which links John's exile with the expulsion of the Jews from Rome in 51). Not concerned

about consistency, he simply blended the two traditions into one short statement. For an early medieval Apocalypse commentator to reiterate earlier traditions, even though those traditions are contradictory, is certainly not out of the ordinary. Beatus' commentary contains three conflicting patristic traditions about the date of Revelation (Claudianic, Neronic, Domitianic), without any attempt at reconciling them.[26]

It is also allowable to interpret the conjunction "and" (*et*) in the sentence of the prologue as "in addition." In other words, the author of the prologue could have believed that Revelation was published both in the 23rd year after Christ's death *and* in the reign of Domitian. This is not to be confused with redaction theories of certain higher critics, which say that the Apocalypse was edited several times by different people before taking its final form.[27] Rather, some biblically conservative scholars, who uphold the inspiration of Scripture and single authorship of Revelation, think that Revelation was originally written early and distributed on a relatively small scale, and then a few decades later was copied and distributed on a much wider scale. For example, Kym Smith, an Anglican priest from South Australia, conjectured that John wrote Revelation about 62 A.D., but not many copies of it were circulated at that time. Then, near the end of the reign of Domitian, there was a reissuing of the book on a wider scale. This theory, for Smith, reconciles the internal evidence he sees, that Revelation was written in the 60s, with Irenaeus' statement about the Apocalypse having been seen toward the end of Domitian's reign.[28] Did the author of the prologue to this *Handbook* believe that John wrote the Apocalypse in the 23rd year after the passion of Christ *and* that it was copied on a wider scale in the time of Domitian? It is possible, but not probable.

Whatever we are to make of the prologue to this early medieval *Handbook on the Apocalypse of the Apostle John*, we know that many medieval readers and hearers (since texts were often read aloud) of the Bamberg manuscript read or heard that the Apocalypse was written in the twenty-third year after the death of the Lord, which corresponds to the early 50s of the first-century.

Summary

This essay showed that the Domitian hypothesis for the date of Revelation was by no means universally received in early and medieval Christianity. On the

contrary, many ancient Christian writers expressed opinions that John wrote Revelation much earlier.

One tradition has John receiving the visions of the Apocalypse at the Last Supper, another during the reign of Tiberius as early as 36 or 37 A.D. Several commentators on Revelation believed that John was exiled by the emperor Claudius around 51 A.D. Still another biblical commentator said that John wrote Revelation 23 years after Christ died. All of these views have John writing the Apocalypse long before the reign of Domitian in the 80s and 90s.

Regarding our brothers, like Philip Schaff, who in the early twentieth century made the claim that the Domitianic dating of Revelation was the *only* tradition of early Christianity, latitude can be shown for their inaccurate statements. Perhaps the patristic texts illustrating the variety of opinions prevalent in the early church and middle ages were not readily available to them. But now that so many of these texts have been brought to light, it seems to me that in the twenty first-century there is no excuse for making the assertion that the church fathers were all agreed on the Domitianic date of Revelation, or that such dating was the exclusive view of the early church. For, many different traditions from ancient and medieval Christianity, dating the book of Revelation much earlier, have been preserved.

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1. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Tradition*, 3rd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 1:427.

2. Doremus A. Hayes, *John and His Writings* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1917), 245-6.

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

4. Arthur Peake, *The Revelation of John* (London: Holborn, 1919), 96.

5. Robert H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1920), xcii. The five references above were cited in Mark L. Hitchcock, "A Defense of the Domitianic Date of the book of Revelation," (diss. Dallas Theological Seminary, 2005), 75-7.

6. Richard L. Mayhue, "Jesus: Preterist or Futurist?," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 14:1 (Spring 2003):9-22 at 13.

7. Robert L. Thomas, "Dating the book of Revelation," in Mal Couch, ed., *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1996), 366–7.

8. Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 55.

9. George Wesley Buchanan, *The Book of Revelation: Its Introduction and Prophecy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 40.

10. Francis X. Gumerlock, “The Date of Revelation in the Early Church,” Ch. 7 of Gary DeMar and Francis X. Gumerlock, *The Early Church and the End of the World* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2006), 125–139. One Arabic commentary, that of Ibn Katib Qaysar written in 1267 A.D., has the sixth king of Rev. 17:10 (“the one who is”) as Ilia Andrianus (Publius Aelius Hadrianus) or the emperor Hadrian, who reigned from 117 to 138 A.D. That is on page 337 of the 1994 reprint of the Arabic edition, which I learned through personal correspondence with Stephen J. Davis of Yale University who has studied the commentary. See his article “Introducing an Arabic Commentary on the Apocalypse: Ibn Katib Qaysar on Revelation,” *Harvard Theological Review* 101:1 (2008):77–96.

11. An earlier version of this essay and the next chapter is an unpublished paper by me entitled “External Evidence for an Early Date of Revelation: Ten Early Date Traditions in Ancient Christianity” delivered at the National Prophecy Conference hosted by American Vision in Ridgecrest, North Carolina in June 2011.

12. W.R.J. Barron and Glyn S. Burgess, *The Voyage of St. Brendan* (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2002), 221. Concerning the date of 27–30 A.D. for the Last Supper, a Scythian monk named Dionysius Exiguus (d. 544) was responsible for our modern reckoning of time from the birth of Christ. However, because of miscalculations on his part, recent scholarship dates the birth of Jesus between 6 and 4 B.C. Colin J. Humphreys, “The Star of Bethlehem, a Comet in 5 B.C. and the Date of Christ’s Birth,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 43:1 (1992):31–56; Tom Wright, *The Millennium Myth* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 2; Ben Witherington III, “Primary Sources,” *Christian History* 59 (1998):12–19 at 14; Damian Thompson, *The End of Time* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1996), 32–3; Allan Hauch, *Calendar of Christianity* (New York: Association Press, 1961), 25. If it is agreed that the Lord lived on earth about 33 and a half years, this would put Christ’s death (and the Last Supper the night before he died), resurrection, and ascension between 27 and 30 A.D.

13. Furthermore, the phrase “in the spirit” in Rev. 1:10, according to some (e.g., Buchanan, *Book of Revelation*, 61), is a Hebraic poetic expression describing a mental state similar to day dreaming. Whether or not such an interpretation of that phrase is correct, the author of the *Voyage of St. Brendan* may have viewed the expression in a similar manner. The mental agitation that John must have felt upon hearing the news that his Lord would be betrayed might account for the author’s mention of John’s mind being “in anguish” and “grief-stricken” when he received the visions. For another non-traditional interpretation of the phrase “in the spirit” in Rev. 1:10 written about the same time as the *Voyage of St. Brendan*, see the English commentator Richard Rolle (d. 1349) who wrote: “It can be said that John here sees while he is sleeping.” Robert Boenig, trans., *Richard Rolle. Biblical Commentaries* (Salzburg, Austria: Institut für Anglistic und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg, 1984), 142.

14. R. Alan Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 230.

15. Translated in Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 230. This text of Mingana is also cited by F. F. Bruce in his “Some Notes on the Fourth Evangelist” (www.earlychurch.org.uk), which gives the bibliographical information of Mingana’s original article “The Authorship of the Fourth Gospel” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 14 (1930):333ff.

16. Translated in Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 235.

17. For example, the account in Arethas of Caesarea of Cappadocia on Rev. 7:4–8. PG 106:606.

18. Buchanan (*Book of Revelation*, 431, 712) holds that some of the parts of the book of Revelation, namely, Chapters 12–15, could have been written as early as 37 A.D. or during the reign of Gaius Caligula (37–44 A.D.). However, Buchanan does not seem to hold to the authorship of Revelation by the apostle John or even by one author. Nevertheless his commentary is useful for its placing in parallel columns the text of Revelation and passages of the Old Testament to which they allude.

19. Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion* [often referred to as *Adv. Haer.* or *Against Heresies*] 51.12, 33. PG 41:909. Translation in Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Beast of Revelation*, Rev. ed. (Powder Springs, GA:

American Vision, 2002), 196; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation*, Rev. ed. (Atlanta: American Vision, 1998), 104. In *Panarion* 51.12.2 Epiphanius wrote that John wrote his Gospel "after his return from Patmos in the time of Claudius Caesar and after he had spent many years in Asia." Translation in Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 158.

20. Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*. Catharine Edwards, trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 184.

21. Apringius, *Tractate on the Apocalypse*. On Rev. 1:9. CCSL 107:39. My translation of: *Sicut relatores ecclesiastici docuerunt, Claudii Caesaris tempore, quando famis illa invaluit quae ab Agabo propheta in Actibus apostolorum annis decem venire nuntiata est, ea tempestate idem Caesar solita vanitate compulsus persecutionem indicit ecclesiis. Quo in tempore etiam domini nostril Iesu Christi apostolum Iohannem mandate exilio mancipari, quem deportatum in Pathmos insula etiam praesens comprobat scriptura.* An English translation of Apringius' *Tractate on the Apocalypse* was recently published in William Weinrich, trans., *Latin Apocalypse Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011).

22. Beatus of Liebana, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 1. On Rev. 1:9. E. Romero-Pose, ed., *Sancti Beati a Liebana Commentarius in Apocalypsin*, Vol. 1 (Rome: Typis Officinae Polygraphicae, 1985), 91–2. Latin and English translation are in DeMar and Gumerlock, *The Early Church and the End of the World*, 147, 154.

23. John Williams, *The Illustrated Beatus: A Corpus of the Illustrations of the Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 5 vols (Langhorne, PA: Harvey Miller Publishers, International Publishers Distributor, 1994–2002).

24. Pseudo-Jerome, *Handbook on the Apocalypse of Saint John*, Prologue. CCSL 107:193. My translation of: *XXIII anno post passionem domini scriptum est, et sub tempore Domitiani imperatoris, et qui etiam persecutor ecclesiarum Christique nimium fuit.* This entire *Handbook on the Apocalypse of Saint John* has been translated into English by me, but at present is still unpublished.

25. Roger Gryson, ed., *Commentaria minora in Apocalypsin Johannis*. CCSL 107 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003), 182-3. Jerome's Latin translation of Eusebius' Greek *Chronicle* is in PL 27.

26. Beatus of Liebana, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. The Claudianic date is in Book 1 (Romero-Pose, 1: 91–2); the Neronic in Book 9 (Romero-Pose, 2:281-3); and the Domitianic in Book 6 (Romero-Pose, 2:159).

27. An excellent summary of the redaction theories of twentieth century scholarship, with helpful charts, is John W. Marshall, "Appendix 2: Composition Theories of the Apocalypse of John," in his dissertation "Parables of the War: Reading the Apocalypse within Judaism and during the Judaean War," Vol. 1 (Princeton University, 1997), 473–83.

28. Kym Smith, *Redating the Revelation* (Blackwood, South Australia: Sherwood Publications, 2001), 57, 76, 144.

TWO

JOHN'S EXILE BY NERO

(REV. 1:9–10)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter shows six different early opinions regarding the date of the book of Revelation, which all say that John was exiled and wrote the Apocalypse either during the reign of Nero (54–68 A.D.) or before the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. These are important because they establish that the Domitianic view, which says that John wrote the Apocalypse in the 90s A.D., was by no means the exclusive view of the early church.

REVELATION 1:9–10

John's Exile by Nero

> I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day.

John was exiled to Patmos by Nero and from there wrote the book of Revelation (54–68 A.D.)

History of John. An ancient Syriac document, the *History of John, the Son of Zebedee*, shows that some Syrian Christians believed John was exiled by Nero, who reigned from 54-68 A.D. While one of the manuscripts containing this treatise dates from the sixth century, recent scholarship has shown that the *History*, because it used the *Diatessaron* harmony of the Gospels, was most likely composed by the end of the fourth century.[1] It reads:

> After these things, when the Gospel was increasing by the hands of the Apostles, Nero, the unclean and impure and wicked king, heard all that had happened at Ephesus. And he sent [and]

> took all that the procurator had, and imprisoned him; and laid hold of S. John and drove him into exile; and passed sentence on the city that it should be laid waste.[2]

Clearly the author believed, its readers read, and its hearers heard, that John was exiled by the emperor Nero.

Thomas of Harkel. In 508, Polycarpus translated the New Testament into the Syriac language. It was later revised by Thomas of Harkel in 616.[3] This version of the New Testament is called the Peshitta. At the beginning of the book of Revelation in the Peshitta version, a preface reads: "The Revelation, which was made by God to John the Evangelist, in the Island of Patmos, To which he was banished by Nero the Emperor."[4] This preface to Revelation in the Peshitta version shows that many in the Syrian church read or heard that John was exiled by Nero to Patmos where he wrote the book of Revelation.

John was banished to Patmos 32 years after Christ's ascension (59–62 A.D.)

Theophylact of Ochrida (d. 1109) a Byzantine bishop who ministered in the region we know today as Bulgaria, recorded an exegetical tradition that John had been banished to Patmos thirty-two years after Christ's ascension. In the preface to his commentary on the Gospel of John, he wrote that John "began to explain those things, and to bring clarity, and to bring forth in his own Gospel, which he also wrote, having been banished on the island of Patmos thirty-two years after the ascension of Christ into heaven."[5] Since Christ died, rose, and ascended to heaven sometime between the year 27 and 30 A.D., thirty-two years afterward brings one to the years 59–62, during the reign of Nero.

Some recent scholarship on the date of the book of Revelation agrees with the view recorded by Theophylact regarding the time of John's exile. Gonzalo Rojas-Flores, in a 2004 article entitled "The book of Revelation and the First Years of Nero's Reign," argued for a date of the writing of Revelation in the early years of Nero's reign, between 54 and 60.[6] Kym Smith also, in a 2001 book entitled *Redating the Revelation,* argued that John's banishment took place in 61 and that he wrote the Apocalypse in 62.[7]

John wrote the book of Revelation before Paul's seven letters were completed (before 67 A.D.)

The Muratorian fragment, dated variously from the second through fourth centuries, is an important document for the study of the formation of the canon of Scripture. A section of it reads:

> . . . since the blessed apostle Paul himself—following the pattern (*ordo*) of his predecessor John—writes, giving their names, to not more than seven churches, in this order: To the Corinthians a first; to the Ephesians a second; to the Philippians a third; to the Colossians a fourth; to the Galatians a fifth; to the Thessalonians a sixth; to the Romans a seventh. But although there is one more each to the Corinthians and to the Thessalonians, for the sake of reproof, nevertheless it is obvious that one church is dispersed over the whole globe of the earth. For also John, in his Apocalypse, while writing to seven churches, yet speaks to all (lines 47–59).[8]

If this fragment is read plainly, it says that John was a predecessor of Paul in the writing of epistles, that John wrote to seven churches (in the book of Revelation), and that Paul, following John's pattern, wrote to seven churches. While Samuel Tregelles, who edited the Muratorian fragment in 1867, said, "It cannot be that the author thought that St. John saw and wrote the Apocalypse before St. Paul had written his Epistles," others are not as dismissive of that idea.[9] Krister Stendahl commented on this portion of the fragment referring to the seven churches to which Paul wrote, saying: "This number seven is seen as a conscious conforming to the pattern of God's own revelation through John."[10] Kenneth Gentry, Jr. interpreted the fragment as external evidence that some in the early church believed that John wrote the book of Revelation much earlier than 95 or 96 A.D. He explained, "This ancient writer clearly teaches that John *preceded* Paul in writing letters to seven churches. And it is universally agreed among historians and theologians that Paul died before A.D. 70, either in A.D. 67 or 68."[11] Kym Smith sees the fragment as evidence that John wrote the book of Revelation about the same time that Paul was writing his epistles. He concludes, "The fragment's reference to John as Paul's predecessor, then, is interesting. At the very least it places the writing of the Revelation in the midst of Paul's epistolary activity. . . ."[12]

It is very likely that the author of the Muratorian fragment was placing the authorship of the book of Revelation before the completion of Paul's letters and definitely before Paul's death around 67.

John was exiled by Nero at the same time that Peter and Paul died, and he wrote the book of Revelation before the destruction of

Jerusalem (67 A.D.)

Tertullian. Around the year 203, Tertullian of Carthage wrote *On Prescription against Heretics.* In that book he linked the deaths of Peter and Paul with the suffering and exile of John at Rome under the emperor Nero.[13] About the church at Rome, the passage reads:

> How fortunate is that church, upon which the apostles poured out all their teaching with their own blood, where Peter suffers a passion similar to the Lord's, where Paul is crowned with the death like that of John [the Baptist], where the apostle John afterward, submerged in boiling oil, suffered nothing, and is exiled on an island.[14]

On this passage J. Hadot wrote that the city of Rome was "the theater of the triple martyrdom of Peter, of Paul, and of John."[15] Gentry observed that the statement by Tertullian "unites the three Apostles under the Neronic persecution."[16]

Jerome. 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 boiling oil."[17] 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. [18]

Origen (d. 251). In fragment 9 of his commentary *On Luke,* Origen wrote that "John was still living at the time of Nero,"[19] suggesting that after Nero John was not still living. So Origen seems to have believed that the apostle John lived up to (and died) during the reign of Nero. This is far different from the tradition recorded in Eusebius that John was still living at the time of Trajan.[20]

John Henten (1545). Besides Tertullian, Origen, and Jerome suggesting that John suffered, was exiled, or died under Nero, John Henten in the mid-sixteenth century wrote that the apostle John was exiled and wrote the book of Revelation at the same time as the deaths of Peter and Paul. Henten was a professor at

Louvain who edited the Apocalypse commentary of Arethas of Caesarea in Cappadocia (860–940 A.D.). In 1545 Henten commented on the date of Revelation as follows:

> And first it seems to us that John, this apostle and evangelist who is called the Theologian, was exiled onto Patmos by Nero at the very same time in which he killed the blessed apostles of Christ Peter and Paul. . . . [and] that the Apocalypse was written on Patmos before the destruction of Jerusalem.[21]

Henten also held that Chapters 6–11 of Revelation referred to the abrogation of Judaism, and Chapters 12–19 referred to the destruction of Roman paganism.[22] For these views Henten does not seem to have been influenced by the statements of Tertullian, Origen, and Jerome cited above. In all likelihood he found justification for these preterist views about Revelation in the ninth- or tenth-century Apocalypse commentary of Arethas, who wrote on Rev. 7:4–8 that "the devastation that had been brought against the Jews had not yet been inflicted by the Romans when the evangelist received these oracles."[23]

One conclusion can be drawn from Henten's dating of the Apocalypse before the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem. Luis Alcasar's commentary on Revelation, published in 1614, was not the first to take a preterist approach to the main body of the Apocalypse (Chs. 6–19).[24] Henten wrote his comments almost a century before the publication of Alcasar's commentary.

John was martyred in Jerusalem before the destruction of that city by the Romans (before 70 A.D.)

As mentioned in the first chapter, the tradition about John's exile that eventually dominated the others was that the apostle was exiled by Domitian, wrote Revelation in the closing years of that emperor's reign about 95 or 96, was later released from exile, and lived in Ephesus up to the time of Trajan (98–117). However, another tradition that may be even *more ancient* is that the apostle John was martyred in Jerusalem before its destruction by the Romans in 70. The tradition in all probability dates back to Papias in the early second century; and it was well preserved in early churches of Syria.

Papias (c. 60–130). Papias was bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor in the late first and early second centuries. Only fragments of his writings exist. Philip of Side in Pamphylia wrote a 36-volume *Christian History* between the year 434

and 439. In it he claimed that Papias wrote that John the Evangelist was slain by the Jews. The full citation from Philip of Side reads as follows, and I have put the relevant portion in italics:

> Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, a disciple of John the Theologian and friend of Polycarp, wrote *The Lord's Gospel* in five books. There he gave a list of Apostles and, after enumerating Peter and John, Philip and Thomas and Matthew, recorded as 'disciples of the Lord' Ariston and another John, whom he also called 'presbyter'. As a result, some believe that (this) John is the author of the two short Catholic Epistles, which circulate under the name of John, their reason being that the men of the primitive age accepted the First Epistle only. Some have also erroneously believed the Apocalypse to be this man's work. Papias, too, is in error about the Millennium, and so is, in consequence Irenaeus. *Papias says in the second book that John the Evangelist and his brother James were slain by the Jews.* The aforesaid Papias related, alleging as his source of information the daughters of Philip, that Barsabas, the same Justus that passed the scrutiny, was forced by the unbelievers to drink snake poison, but was in the name of Christ preserved unharmed. He relates still other marvelous events, in particular the rising of Manaemus's mother from the dead. Regarding those who were raised from the dead by Christ, he says that they survived till Hadrian's time.[25]

According to Philip of Side, Papias wrote that the apostle John and his brother James were martyred by the Jews. A similar report of Papias writing that John was killed by the Jews is contained in the *Chronicle* of George the Sinner [Hamartolus] (c. 840). It says: "John has been deemed worthy of martyrdom. For Papias, the Bishop of Hierapolis, having been an eyewitness of him, saying in the second book of his 'Dominical Oracles,' that he was killed by Jews, having evidently fulfilled, with his brother the prediction of Christ concerning them."[26]

Clement of Alexandria (d. c. 215). In his *Stromata*, Clement, bishop of Alexandria, quoted Heracleon as saying that "Matthew, Philip, Thomas, Levi, and many others" did not die as martyrs.[27] Since John is not mentioned in the list of apostles as those who did not die a martyr's death, it is probable that Heracleon was a recipient of the early tradition that the apostle John was martyred.

Aphraates of Nineveh (c. 344). This Syrian church father discussed life after death and eschatology in one of his *Demonstrations*. In it he speaks of the martyrdom of James and John. He writes: "Great and excellent is the martyrdom of Jesus . . . to him followed the faithful martyr Stephen whom the Jews stoned. Simon also and Paul were perfect martyrs. James and John trod in the footsteps of their Master Christ. Also other of the Apostles thereafter in divers places confessed, and proved themselves true martyrs."[28]

Manichaean Psalm Book (4th c.) This book from fourth century Syria says that the "two sons of Zebedee were made to drink the cup" of martyrdom, and that while James was stoned and killed, John the Virgin was "fourteen days imprisoned that he might die of hunger."[29]

John Chrysostom (400). John Chrysostom, in a homily on the Acts of the Apostles preached during his residence in Constantinople about the year 400, mentioned that the Roman-Judean war broke out "only after the Apostles were dead."[30] Jerusalem was besieged by the Romans in 68 A.D. This implies that Chrysostom believed that the apostle John had died before 68 A.D.

Syrian martyrology (411). In a Syrian martyrology dated 411, the martyrdom of "the apostles James and John at Jerusalem" was celebrated on December 27th.[31] This document gives clearer indication that the early Syriac church not only believed that the apostle John was martyred but that he was martyred in Jerusalem.

In summary, evidence exists from Philip of Side and George the Sinner that Papias, a very early Christian writer, communicated that the apostle John was killed by the Jews. Aphraates in the fourth century and a Syrian martyrology in the fifth century also stated that the apostle John was martyred, the latter specifying the place of his martyrdom as Jerusalem. The writings of several others imply that John's martyrdom in Jerusalem occurred before the Roman-Judean war. From this evidence, E. Lipinski concluded that the opinion of the fathers which says that John died at Ephesus at an advanced age goes "against the more ancient testimony of Papias and against the weight of the tradition preserved by the Syrian church." Lipinski continued, writing that the tradition of Irenaeus which became dominant—that John lived until the time of Trajan—may have overshadowed but did not "completely eliminate the more ancient tradition."[32]

Some might use the tradition of an early martyrdom of John in Jerusalem to deny the authorship of the book of Revelation by that apostle. It should be noted, however, that these patristic writers, who held to the early martyrdom of John, may have believed that John was exiled to Patmos by Claudius around 51, a view expressed in texts of Epiphanius, Apringius, pseudo-Jerome, and Beatus (see Chapter 1), and therefore would have had no problem holding that the one who saw the visions on Patmos in the 50s was martyred in Jerusalem before

A.D. 70.



THE ISLE OF PATMOS

John was exiled on Patmos for 15 years, and lived another 26 years after returning from Patmos to Ephesus (about 57–72 A.D.)

Another early account of the life of John, written in the fifth century, is called the *Acts of John by Prochorus*. (Prochorus, to whom it is attributed, was one of seven men named in Acts 6:5.) The treatise survived in several languages including Greek, Latin, and Arabic, which means it was well circulated. It says that John was 50 years old and Prochorus 30 years old when they came from Jerusalem to Ephesus. It goes on to say that they ministered in Ephesus for nine years. Then they were exiled on Patmos for 15 years. Finally, it says, John lived another 26 years back in Ephesus after his exile, dying at the age of 100.[33]

It was believed by the author of this life of John, that the apostle John lived a very long life. As mentioned above, some early Christian accounts of John's life say that he lived all the way up to the time of Trajan, whose reign began in 98.[34] If that tradition of John living to a very old age (up to Trajan's reign) is brought to bear on this account of John living to 100 years old, the math is simple. John would have died about 98 A.D. 98 minus the 26 years John spent in Ephesus after his exile, means the apostle was released from Patmos about the year 72. Having spent 15 years in exile on Patmos, John was there from around A.D. 57–72. Hence, he would have been exiled to Patmos by the emperor Nero (54–68),

and would have received the visions of Revelation on that island sometime during his fifteen year exile. Therefore, this *Acts of John by Prochorus* is yet another witness for a much earlier date of John's exile than under Domitian.

Summary

Many texts from early Christianity state or imply that the apostle John was exiled by Nero, who reigned from 54–68 A.D., and that John wrote the book of Revelation before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. These include writings by Tertullian and Origen, the Muratorian fragment, the *History of John, the Son of Zebedee*, the preface to Revelation in the Harklean version of the Peshitta, the *Acts of John by Prochorus*, Theophylact of Ochrida, and John of Henten. One very early tradition stated that the apostle Paul patterned his letters to seven churches after those of John to the seven churches of Revelation, implying that Paul knew of the Apocalypse before the end of his literary activity in 67. A writing of Papias, a very early apostolic father, and a host of texts from early Syrian Christianity held that John was martyred by the Jews in Jerusalem before that city's destruction by the Romans.

These texts show the fallacy of statements of opponents of preterist interpretations of Revelation, like: "[P]reterists still fail to provide any reliable evidence from the first few centuries of the Christian Church in support of their A.D. 68 date."[35] They also overwhelmingly demonstrate that the Domitianic dating of the book of Revelation was not the unanimous opinion of early Christians. Rather, many early Christians held early date views which set forth that Nero exiled the apostle John to Patmos, from which he authored the Apocalypse before 70 A.D.

These early date traditions are similar to what many biblical scholars are saying today about the date of the book of Revelation. Mark Wilson in his essay "The Early Christians in Ephesus and the Date of Revelation, Again" argued for a date in the late 60s.[36] Albert A. Bell, Jr.'s article "The Date of John's Apocalypse. The Evidence of Some Roman Historians Reconsidered," and J. Christian Wilson's article "The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation," concluded that Revelation was written in 68 or 69.[37] Robert B. Moberly in "When Was Revelation Conceived?" and Thomas B. Slater in "Dating the Apocalypse to John" fix the date of the Apocalypse in 69.[38] The reasons for their

conclusions are diverse, but their findings are similar to those of the early Christian writers cited above, namely, that the book of Revelation was written much earlier than the reign of Domitian.

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1. R. Alan Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend* (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 2000), 223. The *Diatessaron*, a harmony of the Gospels that was used in the Syrian churches, was prohibited from use in the fifth century.

2. William Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols. Reprint, Amsterdam: Philo, [1871] 1968), 2:55.

3. On the dates of the Syriac translation of the New Testament by Polycarpus and the revision of it by Thomas of Harkel, Arthur Vööbus, *The Apocalypse in the Harklean Version*. Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 400 (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1978), 59; John Gwynn, *The Apocalypse of St. John in a Syriac Version Hitherto Unknown* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897), iv and xcvi.

4. James Murdock, trans. *The New Testament; or, The Book of the Holy Gospel of our Lord and our God, Jesus the Messiah. A Literal Translation from the Syriac Peshitto Version* (Boston, MA: Hastings, 1852), 442. This has been reprinted under the title *The New Testament: A Literal Translation from the Syriac Peshitto Version* (Piscataway, NJ: Gregorias, 2001). A translation by Vööbus (*Apocalypse*, 42) of the same transcript reads: "Again the revelation which was upon the holy John the Evangelist from God when he was on the island of Patmos where he was thrown by the emperor Nero."

5. Theophylact of Ochrida, *On the Gospel of John*, Preface. PG 123:1133–4.

6. Gonzalo Rojas-Flores, "The book of Revelation and the First Years of Nero's Reign," *Biblica* 85 (2004):375–392.

7. Kym Smith, *Redating the Revelation* (Blackwood, South Australia: Sherwood Publications, 2001), 58.

8. Translation of Krister Stendahl, "The Apocalypse of John and the Epistles of Paul in the Muratorian Fragment," in William Klassen and Graydon F. Snyder, eds., *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), 239–245 at 239. A translation of the entire canon is contained in D.H. Williams, ed., *Tradition, Scripture, and Interpretation: A Sourcebook of the Ancient Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 163–165.

9. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, ed., *Canon Muratorianus: The Earliest Catalogue of the Books of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1867), 44.

10. Stendahl, "The Apocalypse of John and the Epistles of Paul in the Muratorian Fragment," 241.

11. Kenneth L Gentry, Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1998), 94.

12. Smith, *Redating the Revelation*, 55.

13. That the apostles Peter and Paul were martyred by Nero is attested also in Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.25. Christian Frederick Cruse, trans., *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilius* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), 79–80. One preface to 1 Peter in an early Latin Bible says that Peter was killed "in the fourteenth year" of Nero. Another preface says "in the thirty-sixth year after the passion of the Lord." See Donatien de Bruyne, *Préfaces de la Bible Latine* (Paris: Auguste Godenne, 1920), 258.

14. Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum*, 36. CCSL 1: 216–217. My translation of: *Ista quam felix Ecclesia cui totam doctrinam Apostoli cum sanguine suo profuderunt, ubi Petrus Passioni Dominicae adaequatur, ubi Paulus Iohannis exitu coronatur, ubi Apostolus Iohannes posteaquam in oleum igneum*

demersus nihil passus est, in insulam relegatur. . . Cf. ANF 3: 260.

15. J. Hadot, "L'Apocalypse de Jean et les christianismes primitifs," *Revue de l'université de Bruxelles* 18 (1966): 190–217 at 193–194. My translation of *théâtre du triple martyre de Pierre, de Paul, et de Jean.*

16. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 95.

17. Jerome, *Against Jovinian*, 1.26. My translation of *Refert autem Tertullianus quod a Nerone missus in ferventis olei. . .* I realize that elsewhere in Jerome's corpus he states the Domitian theory for the date of Revelation.

18. The scholia in the edition of Vittori, Vol. 3, 344, cited in Henry Dominique Saffrey, "Le témoignage de pères sur le martyre de S. Jean l'Évangeliste," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 69 (1985): 265–272 at 267–8. My translation of *A Nerone, sic legebatur antea, nos ex ipso Tertulliano pro a Nerone reposuimus Romae. Domitiani enim non Neronis tempore hoc fuit, ipseque Tertullianus minime id a Nerone sed Romae, nulla Neronis habita mentione, factum esse prodit.*

19. Origen, *In Lucam*, Fragment 9. The Greek text with French translation is in E. Lipinski, "L'apocalypse et le martyre de Jean à Jerusalem," *Novum Testamentum* 11:3 (July 1969): 225–232 at 227.

20. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.20. Cruse, 103.

21. Johannes Henten, *Enarrationes vetustissimorum theologorvm: in Acta qvidem Apostolorvm et in omnes D. Pavli ac Catholicas epistolas ab Oecumenio, in Apocalypsim verò, ab Aretha Caesareae Cappadociae episcopo manga cura collectae* (Antwerp: Johannes Steelsius, 1545). Available at http://books. google.com. My translation of *Primumque hoc nobis videtur, Johannem hunc Apostolum ac Evangelistam, qui et Theologus cognominatur, a Nerone in Patmos relegatum, eodem omnino tempore ille beatos Christi apostolos Petrum et Paulum interemit . . . quod scripta sit in Patmo Apocalypsis ante Ierosolymorum excidium.*

22. Seán P. Kealy, *The Apocalypse of John* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987), 242.

23. Arethas of Caesarea in Cappadocia, *Commentary on Revelation*. On Rev. 7:4–8. PG 106:606: *nondum enim Judaeos comprehenderat vastatio a Romanis adducta, cum evangelista haec susciperet oracula.*

24. Very few writers take notice of Henten's preterist approach. One that does, however, is V. Vernon Eckleberry, *Countdown to Victory: A Dynamic Multidimensional Interpretation of Revelation Twenty* (Bloomington, IN: Trafford, 2005), 39: "Another approach which refuted the church-historical method of the Protestants was advanced by John Hentenius in 1547, and developed more fully by Louis de Alcazar (1554–1613). This interpretation, known as Preterism, argued that most of the events prophesied in Revelation had already been fulfilled."

25. Cited in Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol. 3 (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1986), 530.

26. George the Sinner, *Chronicle*, 3.134. Translated in Culpepper, *John the Son of Zebedee*, 171. The Greek text is reproduced in Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 92.

27. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 4.9. ANF 2: 422.

28. Aphraates of Nineveh, *Demonstrations*, 21.23. Quoted in Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 173.

29. Quoted in Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 172.

30. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*, Homily 25. NPNF, 1st series, 11: 164.

31. Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 172. See also Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* , 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1970), 261.

32. Lipinski, "L'apocalypse et le martyre de Jean à Jerusalem." My translation of *contre le témoignage puls ancient de Papias et contre le poids de la tradition préservée par l'Église syraique* (p. 229) and *éliminer complètement la tradition plus ancienne* (p. 231).

33. Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 221.

34. For example, Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, 2:22, 5; 3:3. ANF 1:392, 416.

35. Grant R. Jeffrey, *Triumphant Return: The Coming Kingdom of God* (Toronto: Frontier Research Publications, 2001), 95.

36. Mark Wilson, “The Early Christians in Ephesus and the Date of Revelation, Again,” *Neotestamenica* 39:1 (2005): 163–93.

37. Albert A. Bell, Jr., “The Date of John’s Apocalypse. The Evidence of Some Roman Historians Reconsidered,” *New Testament Studies* 25 (1978): 93–102; J. Christian Wilson, “The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation,” *New Testament Studies* 39 (1993): 587–605.

38. Robert B. Moberly, “When Was Revelation Conceived?” *Biblica* 73:1 (1992): 376-93; Thomas B. Slater, “Dating the Apocalypse to John,” *Biblica* 84

THREE

THE TRIBULATION OF THE FIRST CENTURY

(REV. 3:10)

INTRODUCTION

Those who hold a dispensational futurist interpretation of Revelation almost unanimously hold that "the hour of testing" in Rev. 3:10 is a tribulation that will take place at the end of the world. This chapter shows that many medieval expositors of the book of Revelation saw "the hour of testing" as a first-century persecution.

REVELATION 3:10

On the Time of the Hour of Testing and the First Century

> Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole earth.

Pretribulationists contend that this passage teaches a rapture of the saints.[1] Their assumption is that "the hour of testing" is a great tribulation that will occur at the end of the world. Concerning the time of this testing, there were many expositors of Revelation in early and medieval Christianity who believed that it referred to a tribulation under Antichrist at the end of the world. These include Primasius (d. 565), Bede (d. 735), Ambrose Autpert (d. 785), pseudo-Alcuin (9th c.), Haymo of Auxerre (d. 875), Anselm of Laon (d. 1117), and Martin of Laon (d. 1203).

However, some ancient interpreters believed that it did refer, or could refer, to a persecution that occurred in the first-century. For example, Ecumenius wrote a

Greek commentary on Revelation in the sixth century, in which he commented on 3:10 in this manner:

> Therefore, *since* in patience *you have kept* my faith, *I also will keep you from the hour of* painful *trial*; and he speaks of the persecution against Christians which occurred under King Domitian, who became the second persecutor after Nero, as Eusebius tells in *Ecclesiastical History* (3.17–18) and in the *Chronicles*, by whom also the holy evangelist was condemned to dwell on the small and desolate island of Patmos.[2]

Ecumenius believed that John was exiled to Patmos by the Roman emperor Domitian, who reigned 81–96. Interestingly, however, he interprets the hour of testing in Rev. 3:10 not as an eschatological tribulation under Antichrist, but as a first-century persecution that occurred under Domitian. From Ecumenius' interpretation of this "hour of testing" as the persecution under Domitian, he implies that John was exiled early in the reign of Domitian, not late (c. 95) as others think.[3]

Ecumenius appears not to have stood alone in his thoughts about the date of the book of Revelation. Jerome (d. 420) also seems to have held that John authored the Apocalypse early in the reign of Domitian. He wrote in his *On Illustrious Men*: "In the fourteenth year then after Nero, Domitian having raised a second persecution, he [John] was banished to the island of Patmos, and wrote the *Apocalypse*."[4] If John were exiled and wrote Revelation in the fourteenth year after Nero, and Nero died in 68 A.D., this brings one up to 81 or 82 A.D. While Jerome does not say that John immediately wrote the Apocalypse upon his banishment to Patmos, the text seems to favor a date for the writing of Revelation closer to 81 or 82 than 95 A.D. Ibn Katib Qaysar, author of an Arabic commentary on Revelation in 1267 A.D., also held to a Domitianic date, but not in 95 or 96 A.D., but several years earlier than that, around 90 A.D.[5] These texts are significant because they show, as the texts in Chapters 1 & 2 did, that the church fathers were not in agreement about the time of the writing of the Apocalypse. Rather, there is evidence of much variety in the early church on that issue.

Andrew of Caesarea, another sixth-century Greek commentator on the Apocalypse, allows for two interpretations of the "hour of testing" in Rev. 3:10, one preterist, the other futurist. He wrote, "By the 'hour of trial' he speaks either of the persecution against the Christians which occurred almost immediately by

those who ruled Rome at that time, from which he promised that the church would be freed, or he speaks of the universal coming of antichrist against the faithful at the end of time."[6]

Nerses of Lambron wrote a commentary in the Armenian language around 1180 A.D. On Rev. 3:10 it reads: "By 'the hour of trial' he means that which shortly and rapidly was about to occur from the impious kings of the Romans against the Christians, from which he promises to save them."[7] Although Nerses was familiar with the commentary of Andrew of Caesarea and used it as a basis for his own commentary, on this passage he did not follow Andrew in giving two possible interpretations—a preterist and a futurist. Rather, he gave only one interpretation, namely, that the hour of trial was that which was about to come shortly and rapidly by the Romans against the Christians.

Many Latin Apocalypse commentaries are extant from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. A good many of these similarly give two possible interpretations for the hour of testing in Rev. 3:10, a preterist one and a futurist one. The writers of these commentaries state that the hour of testing could refer to either persecution of Christians in the first-century or to a period of trial under a last days Antichrist. Ralph of Laon (d. 1136), for example, wrote on this passage in his widely circulated *Ordinary Gloss* on the Bible: "*From the hour of testing*, either of the general persecution which would happen immediately after Nero, or in the last time of Antichrist."[8] This interpretation that the hour of testing refers to a persecution that happened immediately after Nero is similar to modern preterist thoughts on the passage. For example, David Chilton on this passage wrote, "It is also likely, however, that this judgment partially corresponds to the wars, revolutions, riots, and 'world-wide convulsions' that racked the Empire after Nero committed suicide in June 68."[9]

Geoffrey of Auxerre (fl. 1150) wrote on Rev. 3:10 that the preservation promised in this verse perhaps refers to the faithful of John's time. He explained:

> Commentators say that, as in the following visions the sixth place contains material distributed throughout the other seven, so here in the letter written to the sixth angel [of the church of Philadelphia] the last and greatest of antichrist's persecutions is spoken of. Yet the preservation promised to this angel can less easily be understood in the hour of this trial, unless perhaps we refer what is said concerning him to the faithful of that time.[10]

Hugh of Saint Cher (d. 1263), a Dominican who served on the theology faculty

at the University of Paris and who became vicar general of his order and later a cardinal, wrote a commentary on the entire Bible, including the Apocalypse, about the year 1235. On Revelation 3:10, he proposes: "*From the hour*, which was either in the time of Nero, or will be in the time of Antichrist."[11] Hugh wrote a second commentary on Revelation. The comment on 3:10 is similar but a comparison will show that he changed "in the time of Nero" to "immediately after the death of Nero."[12]

Alexander Minorita of Bremen (d. 1271) wrote a commentary on the Apocalypse between 1230 and 1240, which was widely disseminated and read. On Rev. 3:10 he also gave the two main interpretations of the hour of testing, writing:

> *And I shall save you from the hour of testing which is coming upon the whole world*, that is, of the general persecution which was going to come in his own times throughout the whole world of the kingdom of the Romans. *To test those who dwell on the earth.* He wants believers to persevere. For, as is clear from history, he calls the parameter of the Roman Empire "the world." In the persecution of those times, the bishop of Thessalonica was killed, in whose place he substituted. Or, in the last time of Antichrist.[13]

Although mentioning both interpretations, Alexander seems to have leaned toward the preterist interpretation of the passage, that this was a prophecy of a persecution that was to come in John's "own times." Alexander even gives an anecdote from this first-century persecution about which he had heard or read concerning the martyrdom of the bishop of Thessalonica and John filling the vacancy for a time. Interestingly, Alexander views "the whole world" as the Roman Empire. For support of this interpretation, he claimed that it was common knowledge from history that the word "world" was used to mean the Roman Empire.

Vital du Four, a fourteenth-century exegete gave a similar interpretation of "the whole world" in Rev. 3:10. On this passage he wrote in his *Exposition of the Apocalypse*: "*And I shall save you from the hour of testing which is going to come upon the whole world*, namely, from the tribulation that should be carried out through the Roman Empire, or through Antichrist at the end of time."[14] Nicholas of Lyra (d. 1349) likewise interpreted the hour of testing coming upon the whole world as a reference to "the Roman emperors ruling in the whole world."[15] This is in harmony with present-day preterist interpretation of "the whole world" in this passage. Steve Gregg, in his parallel commentary on

Revelation, sums up the preterist position nicely: "*Preterists* argue that an empire-wide crisis would satisfy the normal use of the terminology in Rev. 3:10. The **whole world** is a term used to designate the Roman Empire in Luke 2:1 and elsewhere."[16]

An unknown commentator from the thirteenth century wrote an *Exposition of the Apocalypse* that was published among the works of Thomas Aquinas, but is not believed to be his. This expositor also provided two options for his readers regarding the interpretation of the time of the hour of testing. On Rev. 3:10 he wrote:

> *I*, who am able, *shall save you from the hour of testing . . . which is coming on the whole earth to try the inhabitants of the earth*. Moreover, this can be understood of either the general persecution which was after Nero, or that which will be in the time of Antichrist.[17]

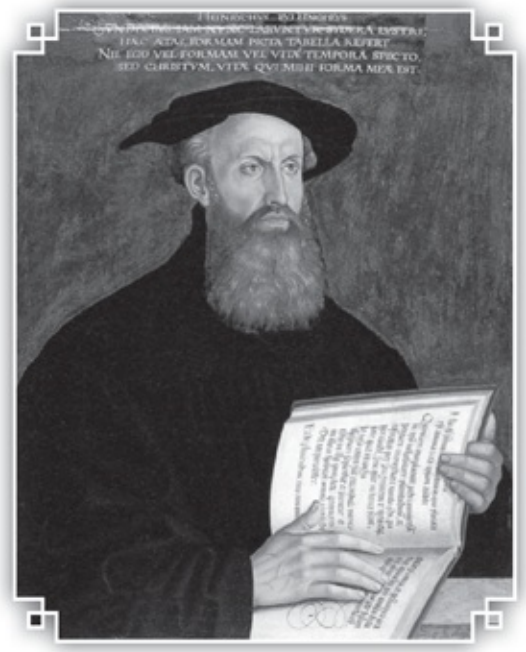
Nicholas of Gorran, a Dominican who wrote an Apocalypse commentary between 1263 and 1285, commented on Rev. 3:10 that the hour of testing about to come upon the whole earth was "either immediately after the death of Nero, or in the time of Antichrist."[18]

Some sixteenth-century interpreters of Revelation, writing before Alcasar's seventeenth century commentary, held that the tribulation John prophesied about in Rev. 3:10 was a persecution of Christians that was fulfilled historically during the reign of the Roman emperor, Trajan, who ruled 98–117 A.D. On this Henry Bullinger wrote in the eighteenth of his *Hundred Sermons Upon the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ*, first published in 1557. The archaic English reads:

> For it followeth: And I will kepe thee agayne from the houre of temptation, etc. The houre of temptation is expounded in two wayes. For eyther he speaketh of heresies and of heretikes, by whose talke, and craftie iuggeryinge leudencs and disceiptfulnes is tempted the faythe, simplicitie, and integrities of the faithful . . . Or els he speaketh verily of the persecutions, whiche the emperours of Rome have inflicted, emonges whome Traiane a most mightie Prince set forth fore proclamations agaynste the Christians. Whereof Plinie also made mention in the 10 boke of Epistles, the hondreth and one . . ."[19]

Bullinger said that "the hour of temptation" could be interpreted in two ways. The second way, in contemporary English, would read: "Or else he speaks truly of the persecutions, which the emperors of Rome have inflicted. Among them Trajan, a most mighty Prince, set forth four proclamations against the Christians, about which Pliny [the Younger] also made men tion in the *Tenth Book of Epis tles*, Letter 101."

John Napier, who published *A Plaine Discovery of the Whole Revelation of S. John* in 1593, wrote similarly on "the hour of temptation" coming upon the whole world in Rev. 3:10: "This was (appearingly) that great and universal persecution during the last ten yeares of Traianus raigne, mentioned before, Apoc 2.10, and note b, thereof."[20]



HENRY BULLINGER

Summary

Many commentators from the early and medieval periods held that the hour of testing in Rev. 3:10 was, or could be interpreted as, a first-century persecution. These included Ecumenius of Tricca, Andrew of Caesarea, Ralph of Laon, Hugh of St Cher, Alexander of Bremen, Vital du Four, Nicholas of Lyra, and Nicholas of Gorran. This corresponds with contemporary partial preterist interpretation of the passage. For example, Larry T. Smith writes that if Rev. 3:10 is interpreted in its proper context, "it becomes evident that this is referring to a temptation that they would soon face and not to a time of tribulation thousands of years away."[21]

Some of these biblical exegetes, for example Hugh of Saint Cher and Nicholas of Gorran, believed that the hour of testing specifically referred to a period "immediately after the death of Nero" (*statim post mortem Neronis*). Geoffrey of

Auxerre commented that the preservation promised perhaps referred to "the faithful of that time," meaning the time near when John wrote the book of Revelation. Some early Protestant commentators saw the hour of testing in Rev. 3:10 as the persecution of Christians under Trajan in the first decades of the second century. These preterist interpretations of this passage are certainly no modern innovation created by the Jesuit Alcasar or by liberals. They have a long history within Christian exegesis.

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1. Bruce Bickel and Stan Jantz, *Revelation. Unlocking the Mysteries of the End Times* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2003), 70; Robert L. Thomas, "The 'Comings' of Christ in Revelation 2–3," in Richard L. Mayhue and Robert L. Thomas, eds., *The Master's Perspective on Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2002), 113–39 at 127; Edward Hindson, *The Book of Revelation: Unlocking the Future* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2002), 47; Tim La- Haye, *The Rapture* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2002), 49–50; Mal Couch, ed. *A Bible Handbook to Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2001), 222; Richard L. Mayhue, *Snatched Before the Storm! A Case for Pretribulationism* (Sun Valley, CA: Grace Books International, 2001), 10; LaHaye, *Revelation Unveiled* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 81; LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Are We Living in the End Times?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1999), 107; Thomas Edgar, "An Exegesis of Rapture Passages," in Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master, eds., *Issues in Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 202–23 at 215; Jeffrey L. Townsend, "The Rapture in Revelation 3:10," in Roy B. Zuck, ed., *Vital Prophetic Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1995), 232–43; Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept From the Hour: Biblical Evidence for the Pretribulational Return of Christ* (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle, 1991), 46–50.

2. Ecumenius, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. On Rev. 3:10. Marc de Groote, ed., *Oecvmenii Commentarivs in Apocalypsin* (Louvain: Peeters, 1999), 98. Translation courtesy of Dr. Lloyd Pierson of Kalispell, Montana.

3. I am indebted to John C. Lamoreaux for that observation. "The Provenance of Ecumenius' Commentary on the Apocalypse," *Vigiliae Christianae* 52 (1998): 88–108 at 103, no. 72.

4. Jerome, *On Illustrious Men*, 9. NPNF, 2nd series, 3:365. Cited in R. Alan Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 162.

5. Ibn Katib Qaysar, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. On Rev. 1:9. Translation by Stephen Davis of Yale University in personal correspondence reads: "After nine years of emperor Domitian's reign, he exiled him (John), on account of his preaching, to this land where he wrote this revelation." Domitian began his reign in 81. Nine years later would be about the year 90 A.D..

6. Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. On Rev. 3:10–*11. Cited in William C. Weinrich, ed., *Revelation*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. New Testament XII. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 46. The translation of Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou, ("Andrew of Caesarea and the Apocalypse in the Ancient Church of the East. Part 2: Translation of the Apocalypse Commentary of Andrew of Caesarea," diss. Université Laval, Quebec, 2008, 48–9) reads: "*At the hour of trial*, has been said either (in reference to) the persecution by the impious kings of Rome against the Christians which will come immediately at that particular time, from which he promises she (the church) is to be delivered; or (it refers to) the world-wide movement at the end of the age against those who believe in the Antichrist . . ."

7. Robert W. Thomson, trans., *Nerses of Lambron: Commentary on the Revelation of Saint John* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 64.

8. Ralph of Laon, *Ordinary Gloss*. On Rev. 3:10. PL 114: 716 (under the pseudonym of Walafrid Strabo). My translation of the Latin *Ab hora tentationis, vel generalis persecutionis in Christianos statim post Neronem futurae, vel ultimo tempore Antichristi.*

9. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, Dominion Press, 1997), 135. Cf. Chilton, *Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Tyler, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), 129.

10. Joseph Gibbons, trans., *Geoffrey of Auxerre. On the Apocalypse* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2000), 186.

11. Hugh of St. Cher, *Exposition of the Apocalypse*. On Rev. 3:10. In *Vgonis de S. Charo . . . opera omnia*, Vol. 7 (Venice: Sessas, 1600), 378v. My translation of the Latin *Ab hora, quae fuit, vel tempore Neronis, vel erit tempore Antichristi*.

12. Hugh of Saint Cher, *Exposition on the Apocalypse*. On Rev. 3:10. This commentary begins with the words *Vidit Jacob*, and is found in a printed edition in the works of Thomas Aquinas. *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici . . . opera omnia*, Vol. 23 (New York: Musurgia Publishers, 1950), 355. My translation of the Latin *Et ego te servabo, qui servasti verbum ad [sic] horam tentationis, quae ventura est in orbem universum, vel statim post mortem Neronis, vel tempore Antichristi, tentare habitants in terra.*.

13. Alexander Minorita, *Exposition in Apocalypsim [Exposition on the Apocalypse]*. On Rev. 3:10. Alois Wachtel, ed. (Weimar: Hermann Bohlaus Nachfolger, 1955), 43. My translation of the Latin *et ego servabo tea b hora temptationis, quae ventura est in orbem universum, id est generalis persecutionis, quae ventura erat temporibus suis per orbem universum regni Romanorum, temptare habitants in terra . . . Nam historia manifesta circulum Romani imperii orbem appellat. Vel: ultimo tempore Antichristi. Temporibus istius in persecutione est interfectus Thessalonicensis episcopus, in cuius locum est ipse subrogatus*.

14. Vital du Four [pseudo-Bernardino of Sienna], *Exposition on the Apocalypse*. On Rev. 3:10. In Bernardinus Senensis, *Opera omnia*, 5 volumes in 2, Vol. 5 (Paris, 1650), 31. My translation of the Latin *ego te servabo ab hora tentationis quae ventura est in universum orbem, scilicet a tribulatione exercenda, per Romanum imperium, vel per Antichristum in fine temporis*.

15. Nicholas of Lyra, *Apocalypse Commentary.* Philip D. W. Krey, trans., *Nicholas of Lyra's Apocalypse Commentary* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), 59.

16. Steve Gregg, ed., *Revelation Four Views A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville: Nelson, 1997), 76–7. Cf. Gary DeMar, *End Times Fiction: A Biblical Consideration of the Left Behind Theology* (Nashville: Nelson, 2001), 222, no. 3: "The Greek word translated 'world' (*oikoumene*) in Revelation 3:10 is best translated 'inhabited earth' or 'Roman Empire'"; Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 129–30: "The entire Roman world itself would be thrown into massive convulsions, part of which would involve the persecution of Christians by a crazed, self-deified emperor, with the aid of the Jews."

17. pseudo-Thomas Aquinas, *Exposition of the Apocalypse*. On Rev. 3:10. In *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici . . . opera omnia*, Vol. 23 (New York: Musurgia Publishers, 1950), 538. My translation of the Latin *Ego qui possum servabo te ab hora tentationis . . . quae ventura est in orbem universum tentare habitantes in terra . . . Hoc autem potest intelligi vel de generali persecutione, quae fuit post Neronem, vel ea quae erit tempore Antichristi*.

18. Nicholas of Gorran, *On the Apocalypse of the Apostle John.* On Rev. 3:10. In *Acta Apostolorum et singulas apostolorum Iacobi, Petri, Iohannis et Iudae canonicas epistolas et Apocalypsim commentarii* (Antwerp, 1620), 200. My translation of the Latin *vel statim post mortem Neronis, vel tempore Antichristi*.

19. Heinrich Bullinger, *A Hundred Sermons Upo [sic] the Apocalips of Jesu Christe* (London: Iohn Day, 1561), 117. http://rarebooks.dts.edu

20. John Napier, *A Plaine Discovery of the Whole Revelation of S. John* (London: John Norton, 1611),

125. http://rarebooks.dts.edu

21. Larry T. Smith, *The Coming of the Lord, the Last Days, and the End of the World as Taught by Jesus and the Apostles* (El Campo, TX: Rightly Dividing the Word, 2000), 44.

FOUR

NERO SITTING ON A RED HORSE

(REV. 6:3–4)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides commentary from a variety of medieval writers on Revelation who saw the emperor Nero (54–68 A.D.) as one of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, the one seated on a red horse in Rev. 6:3–4.

REVELATION 6:3–4

The Opening of the Second Seal and the Emperor Nero

> And when He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come." And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men should slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.

About the year 1150, Anselm of Havelberg (d. 1158) wrote *Dialogues* in which he discussed the seven seals of Revelation. The opening of the second seal, which brought forth a red horse, he understood as the earliest Christian persecution waged against the apostles. He writes:

> And when he opened the second seal, a red horse went forth. He who sat on him was given the power to take peace from the earth so that men might kill each other, and he was given a great sword. (Rev. 6:3) Behold the second state of the Church is openly revealed to the disciple that Jesus loved. For what is the going forth of the second except the blood of the martyrs poured forth as a testimony of Christ when peace was taken from the earth and a great sword was given to persecute the Church? This state of persecution began with the glorious proto-martyr Stephen, whom the Jews stoned. After his triumph, such a great persecution blazed forth that the Church was no longer able to remain in the sole location of Jerusalem; but the apostles, having dispersed throughout the whole world, preached the faith of Christ and by preaching ended their lives in martyrdom.[1] Accordingly, the apostles were crowned with glorious martrydom—Peter and Paul in Rome, James in Jerusalem, Andrew in Achaia, Bartholemew in India, Matthew in Ethiopia, and each of the other apostles in their respective provinces.[2]

Anselm believed that the opening of the second seal had been fulfilled in the first-century.

Alexander Minorita of Bremen (d. 1271) wrote an Apocalypse commentary between 1230 and 1240, in which he clearly viewed Nero as the rider on the red horse. He wrote on the second seal:

> And I looked and *there went out another horse that was red*. That was the reign of Nero, red with the blood of many humans. *And he who sat upon it*, namely Nero himself, *it was given to him*, that is, permitted by God *to take peace from the earth*. Because he did that, when he destroyed the senate of Rome. . . . He also committed many parricides, having killed his mother, brother, sister, wife and the rest of his relatives, and his teacher. He set fire to Rome, which burned for three days or more, so that he might see how Troy once burned. *And so that they might kill one another*. For Nero killed himself, and the emperors Galba in Spain, Otto in Rome, and Vitellius in Germany killed each other over a period of a year and six months, as Roman history shows. Here again he [John] repeats in prophetic fashion concerning Nero, so that it is understood that there would be another persecution of Christians. *And a great sword was given to him*, because through the sword he brought about the first persecution against the Christians, beginning with the leaders, namely Peter and Paul, whom he killed.[3]

Peter Auriol (d. 1322), who became archbishop of Aix in 1321, explained the passage similarly. In the year 1319 he wrote a *Compendium on Holy Scripture*, a summary of the whole Bible. In its section on the book of Revelation, he interpreted the red horse as the Roman Empire, and correlated its redness to certain deeds of the emperor Nero. He wrote:

> The Second Seal. The Edict of the First Persecution. *And when he had opened the second seal*. John signifies and shows the edict of the first general persecution. I say general so that a partial persecution is excluded, which the faith had immediately from the beginning in Jerusalem and Judea. But Nero was the first among the Roman emperors who issued an edict that Christians should be punished, as Eusebius says. And I say that he martyred the most blessed apostles Peter and Paul and many others throughout diverse parts of the world.[4]
>
> Through the horse therefore the Roman Empire is understood. For, horses in Scripture have customarily designated kingdoms, as is evident in Zechariah 6:2, etc. But the red horse was the Roman Empire, red through the shedding of blood. Because, as Eusebius narrates, Nero progressed into such evil that he did not temper the sword even from his own family and household, and committed murder against his mother, his brothers, his wife and all his nearest relatives, and was incestuous. Or, it is called red by reason of his many abominable wicked deeds, since among all the emperors he led a life that was most evil and abominable, as is shown from the histories. Or, by reason of the conflagration and fire, since he wanted to see Rome burn. Accordingly, it had seemed as if red and flame-colored by reason of the combustion.[5]
>
> And so *it was given* to Nero to sit upon the red horse, upon the Roman Empire, *that he might remove peace from the earth and that they might kill one another* on account of the murders he committed even against Romans. . . . Therefore, *a great sword was given to him*, since it was

> given to him by divine permission, that he might kill the great Apostles and that he might begin the first great persecution against the faithful.[6]

While many modern interpreters give a futuristic interpretation of the horsemen of the Apocalypse, Auriol believed that at least part of the vision of the red horse referred to Nero, a Roman emperor of the first-century. To confirm his interpretation, he used Eusebius' *Church History*, written in the early fourth century. Interestingly, the full title of Auriol's compendium is *Compendium of the Literal Sense of the Entire Divine Scripture*. Those who insist on a futuristic view of the book of Revelation frequently state that when people apply a literal hermeneutic to the book of Revelation, it results in a futurist interpretation. However, in the case of Auriol, he applied a literal hermeneutic, and saw events of the first-century prophesied in the visions of the Apocalypse.

Nicholas of Lyra (d. 1349), another fourteenth-century commentator on Revelation, also saw the opening of the second seal as having reference to the church under the Roman emperor Nero. I have used the translation of Philip D.W. Krey, retaining his punctuation and capitalization. However, for uniformity I have italicized the phrases of Scripture. Nicholas wrote:



NERO

> *And out came another horse, bright red*. That is, the Roman people, which is called red at the time of Nero because Nero killed many of the Romans out of cruelty—even his own mother and wife, and he is said to have killed his brother, sister, and even his teacher, Seneca. In another way more properly "red;" because Nero caused the City of Rome to be burned for it to seem like the fire of

> ancient Troy. In such a fire, out of the mixture of smoke and fire the appearance of redness is caused.
>
> *Its rider.* Namely, Nero having the power. *Was permitted.* That is, having been permitted by God. *To take*. That is, to carry off. *Peace from the earth*, Because the populace was thrown into confusion throughout the Roman Empire due to his evil deeds. *So that the people would slaughter one another*; As a result of Nero's perfidy and after he killed himself, Otho, Galba, and Vitellius wanted to usurp the office. Out of their mutual struggle many were killed. *And he was given a great sword*. That is, the power of killing Christians. He started the first persecution against the Church, that is, persecutions instigated by Roman emperors. The Church had endured persecution earlier by the Jews. Indeed, the severe commands of Caligula were not directed against the Church, but against the inhabitants of Judah, of whom comparatively few were Christian; nor was the order executed, and, therefore, the first persecution of the Church is attributed to Nero. Even Claudius, who was emperor between Caligula and Nero, is not reputed to have persecuted Christians. Nero, however, killed the leaders of the Apostles, namely, Peter and Paul, and ordered many other Christians in Rome to be killed.[7]

In the fifteenth-century Apocalypse commentary of Dennis the Carthusian (d. 1471), the author did not believe that the rider of the red horse referred to Nero. But understanding the exegetical tradition of previous commentators, he mentioned his awareness of that interpretation. He wrote that some think "that through the red horse and its rider, the Roman people and the emperor Nero presiding over them should be understood. They are signified through the red horse and its rider because of the blood of the faithful, which he shed." Dennis continues, "But against this interpretation many things are able to be introduced."[8] Certainly, interpretations of the second horseman as Nero were circulating widely in the theological world of late medieval Europe, and Dennis was in dialogue with that interpretation. It was definitely not an invention of Luis Alcasar in the seventeenth century or of modern liberal scholarship.

Also on the second seal, Francisco Ribera (d. 1591) wrote in his commentary on the Apocalypse:

> . . . When this red horse went forth, many, as if calves on the altar, were sacrificed for the faith of Christ by their persecutors. . . . For emperor Nero persecuted the Christians. This was the first persecution of the Church. He inflamed the rage of both the Jews and especially of the Gentiles against the Christians, bringing them to hatred for fear of punishment, because if they were silent, they would seem to be favoring the Christians.[9]

Summary

Late medieval commentators on John's Apocalypse, among them Anselm of Havelberg, Alexander of Bremen, Peter Auriol, Nicholas of Lyra, and Francisco Ribera, all interpreted the rider of the red horse in Rev. 6:3–4 as the emperor

Nero. Another late medieval commentator, Dennis the Carthusian, did not hold that interpretation, but was well aware of it. This variety of evidence shows that correlating the going forth of the horsemen with events in the first-century was not a figment of Luis Alcasar's seventeenth-century imagination, as is often alleged. Rather it was part of the medieval exegetical tradition on Revelation.

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1. Anselm of Havelberg, *Dialogues*, 1.8. Translated in Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 115. For uniformity, I italicized the verse of Scripture.

2. Anselm of Havelberg, *Dialogues*, 1. 8. SC 118: 72. My translation of the Latin *Unde Petrus et Paulus Romam, Jacobus Jerosolymam, Andreas Achaiam, Bartholomaeus Indiam, Matthaeus Aethiopiam, et alii apostoli singuli singulas provincias gloriosissimo, martyrio decoraverunt.* Rupert of Deutz, in his *Commentaries on the Apocalypse*, saw Rev. 6:3–4 and the opening of the second seal, in part as a reference to the siege of Jerusalem by Titus and Vespasian. He wrote: "And therefore *to take peace from the earth was given to him, that they should kill one another*. How true this is, one more fully sees and wonders, reading what happened in that destruction of Jerusalem, as amazing as it was miserable, under Titus and Vespasian, of whose destruction it will be necessary for us to mention again in the opening of the sixth seal." PL 169: 943.

3. Alexander Minorita, *Expositio in Apocalypsi [Exposition of the Apocalypse]*. Alois Wachtel, ed. (Weimar: Hermann Bohlaus Nachfolger, 1955), 94–5. My translation of the Latin *Et vidi et exivit alius equus rufus. Quod erat Neronis regnum rufus multorum hominum sanguine. Et qui sedebat super eum, scilicet ipse Nero, datum est illi, id est permissum a Deo, ut sumeret pacem de terra. Quod tunc fecit, quando senatum Romae destruxit . . . . Qui et parricidia multa commisit, matre, fratre, sorore, uxore ceterisque consanguineis interfectis atque magistro. Romam tribus diebus sive sive amplius fecit incendi, ut videret quomodo olim Troia arderet. Et ut se invicem interficiant. Nero enim seipsum interfecit, Galba in Hispania, Otto Romae, Vitellius in Germania imperatores per annum et sex menses se invicem interfecerunt, sicut Romana narrat historia. Hic iterum repetit more prophetico de Nero, ut intelligatur alia persecutio fuisse Christianorum, dicens: Et datus est illi gladius magnus, quia ipse primam persecutionem per gladium intulit Christianis, incipiens a maioribus, scilicet Petro et Paulo, quos interfecit.*

4. Peter Auriol, *Compendium sensus litteralis totius divinae scripturae [Compendium of the Literal Sense of the Entire Divine Scripture]*(Quaracchi: College of St. Bonaventure, 1896), 464. My translation of the Latin, *II. Sigillum. Primae persecutionis edictum. Et cum aperuisset sigillum secundum, designat Ioannes et demonstrat primae generalis persecutionis edictum; generalis dico, ut excludatur partialis, quam statim fides habuit a principio in Ierusalem et Iudaea. Nero autem primus inter imperatores Romanos dedit edictum, ut punirentur Christiani, sicut dicit Eusebius, et dico martyrizavit beatissimos apostles Petrum et Paulum et plures alios per diversos partes orbis.*

5. Peter Auriol, *Compendium*, 464–5. My translation of the Latin *Per equum ergo intelligitur Romanum imperium. Nam equi in scriptura conseverunt designare regna, ut patet in Zach. C.6,2 etc. Rufum autem tunc fuit Romanum imperium vel per effusionem sanguinis; quia, ut narrat Eusebius, in tantum sceleris Nero progressus est, ut nec a propriis quidem ac domesticis temperavit gladium, sed in matrem et in fratres et in uxores atque in omnes sanginis proximos patricida extiterit et incestuosus. Vel dictum est rufum ratione multiplicis nefandi sceleris, quia inter omnes imperatores nequissimam ac nefandissimam vitam duxit, ut ex historiis patet. Vel ratione incendii et ignis, quia voluit videre Romam ardere. Unde visa fuit*

quasi rufa et flammea ratione combustionis.

6. Peter Auriol, *Compendium*, 465. My translation of the Latin *Neroni itaque sedenti super equum rufum super Romanum imperium datum est, ut sumeret pacem de terra et us se invicem interficiant propter mortes, quas exercuit etiam in Romanos . . . .Isti ergo datus est gladius magnus, quia permissione divina sibi datum est, ut magnos Apostolos interficeret et ut primam magnam persecutionem in fideles excitaret.*

7. Nicholas of Lyra, *Apocalypse Commentary.* Philip D.W. Krey, *Nicholas of Lyra's Apocalypse Commentary* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), 82–3.

8. Dionysius the Carthusian, *Enarrationes in Apocalypsim*. In *Doctoris ecstatici D. Dionysi Cartusiani opera* omnia, Vol. 14 (Monstrolii: Typis Cartusiae S. M. De Pratis, 1901), 274–5. My translation of the Latin *Et exivit alius equus rufus, et qui sedebat super eum, datum est illi ut sumeret pacem de terra . . . Alii . . . putantes . . . ut per equum rufum et ejus sessorem, intelligatur populus Romanus et Nero imperator ei praesidens: qui propter sanguinem fidelium quem fuderunt, per equum rufum ejusque sessorem, signatur. Insuper, per equum nigrum et ejus sessorem, intelligunt populum Romanum et Titum imperatorem: qui nigro equo signati sunt, quoniam Judaeos ad tantam calamitatem duxerunt. . . . Verum, contra hoc multa possent induci.*

9. Francisco Ribera, *Commentaries on the Apocalypse*. In *Francisci Riberae Villacastinensis presbyteri Societatis Iesu, doctorisque theologi, In sacram beati Ioannis apostoli & evangelistae Apocalypsin commentarij* . . . (Antwerp: Ex officina Martini Nutii, ad insigne duarum Ciconiarum, 1603), 221-2. My translation of the Latin *quoniam exeunte hoc equo rufo plurimi, quasi vituli ante Aras, pro Christi fide a persequutoribus immolati sunt . . . nam Nerone principe Christianos persequente, quae prima Ecclesiae persecutio fuit, rabies Iudaeorum & Gentilium maxime in Christianos saeviebat; accedente ad odium timore poenarum, ne si tacerent, favere Christianis viderentur.*

FIVE

TITUS RIDING A BLACK HORSE

(REV. 6:5–6)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides selections from three medieval commentaries on Revelation which saw the Emperor Titus (79–81 A.D.) as the rider on the black horse in Rev. 6:5–6. As a Roman general before he became emperor, Titus was responsible for completing in 70 A.D. the siege of Jerusalem that Vespasian had begun two years earlier.

REVELATION 6:5

On the Opening of the Third Seal During the Siege of Jerusalem

> And when He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, "Come." And I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand.

On this third seal, Alexander Minorita of Bremen (d. 1271), who authored an Apocalypse commentary between 1230 and 1240, wrote:

> *And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast saying*—that was Matthew [the apostle and author of the Gospel of Matthew]—*Come and see. And behold . . . a black horse.* That signified the reign of Vespasian and Titus. Black, because they had risen up obscurely. And it should be noted that the preceding horse was red because then the blood of Romans was shed. Here indeed it is black because he blackened other people with death. *And he who sat upon it had a pair of balances in his hand.* This was Titus presiding over the empire from the authority of his father. He would weigh the punishment upon Jerusalem, that is, *so that might come upon her all the righteous blood which was shed upon the earth from the blood of righteous Abel even to the blood of Zachariah, son of Barachiah,* as Matthew [23:35] says.[1]

Alexander saw the opening of the third seal as the reign of Vespasian and Titus, Roman generals who besieged Jerusalem in the Roman-Judean conflict of the first-century.

Peter Auriol, who commented on Revelation in the year 1319, also interpreted the opening of the third seal as a symbol of the siege of Jerusalem under Vespasian and Titus in the first-century. He wrote:

> Third Seal. The Just Judgment of God. There: *And when he had opened the third seal* prefigures the just divine judgment of the punishment of the Jews. . . . For Vespasian and Titus were sent against the rebellious Jews by Nero, after whose death Vitellius, Otto, and Galba succeeded and reigned for a limited time. Afterward Vespasian was elected emperor by the soldiers stationed in Judea. When he left for Rome, he left it to his son Titus to procure the siege of Jerusalem. He, in the second year of the reign of his father, took Jerusalem.[2]
>
> And so the *black horse* represents the kingdom of the Romans under Vespasian and Titus, either by reason of their animosity, since the color black is a sign of animosity in a horse, or because in that time the Roman kingdom blackened and exterminated Judea. Therefore, he who then sat for a time as emperor, namely Vespasian and Titus, has *a pair of balances in his hand*, that is, divine justice and equity. And concerning the first part [i.e. justice], blame was attached to the Jews since they had made war against Jesus Christ by crucifying Him and by persecuting and killing His disciples. And concerning the other part [i.e. equity], their punishment was merited. Accordingly Vespasian and Titus were sent by God so that they might punish the Jews according to the balance of justice. . . . [3]

Auriol related the details of the opening of the third seal, for example, the black color of the horse and the balances in the hand of the rider, to the Roman siege upon Jerusalem in the first-century. Interestingly, Auriol said that the third seal *prefigures* (Lat. *praefigurat*) those events. With this vocabulary, it is very possible that Auriol believed that John received and wrote the Apocalypse before the destruction of Jerusalem, but further research is needed to substantiate this.

In 1349, Nicholas of Lyra also interpreted the third seal as a figure of the first-century affliction of the Roman army upon Jerusalem. He wrote:

> *When he opened the third seal*, Here is the third part in which the status of the Church under Titus is described, when it is said: *I heard the third living creature*, That is, the first patriarch of the Church in Alexandria, St. Mark, as it is held in the *Lives of Illustrious Men*. *And there was a black horse!* That is, the Roman army, which is effectively called black, just as the sun is called hot. For the Roman army under Titus so afflicted the inhabitants of Jerusalem that they were blackened by famine and by other afflictions, as Josephus relates in the book of *The War of the Jews*.
>
> *Its rider,* Titus ruling that army. *Held a pair of scales,* That is, divine justice, which he pursued in the siege; for he proceeded out of the ordination of divine justice. The Roman army partly killed and partly captured the Jews, in punishment for the death of Christ, just as was clearly predicted in Lk. 19:43: *Indeed the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you* . . . Nevertheless, this was not the intention of Titus and his army, who came against the Jews for another reason, namely, their rebellion against Roman rule (as is clear from Josephus in the book of *The War of the Jews*). Therefore, it is said that he was holding the

> scales in his hand and not in his mind. The work of divine justice was executed in this way, by the hand the work is understood, because thus it is effected.[4]

Nicholas of Lyra saw the opening of the third seal as a fulfillment of Jesus' prediction of Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, recorded in Luke 19. And as many preterist interpreters of Revelation do today, Nicholas also used the writing of Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian who related details of the Roman-Judean conflict, to interpret the symbols in Rev. 6:5.

Revelation 6:6

On the Inflated Price of Food During the Roman-Judean Conflict

> And I heard as it were a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine."

Again, Alexander Minorita of Bremen interpreted this description by John with reference to the Roman general Titus and the Roman-Judean war of the first-century. He wrote:

> *And I heard as it were a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying*, That voice was the inspiration of the Lord, which inspired Titus so that he might afflict the house of the Jews. For when he afflicted the Jews with many calamities, he ascribed the glory not to himself, but to the Lord, saying: "O fellow soldiers, we are ministers of divine punishment." In this he understood that this punishment had been inspired by God.[5]

> Peter Auriol too saw the details of Rev. 6:6 as fulfilled in the first-century siege of Jerusalem by the Romans. He wrote:



TITUS

> But he continues: *Do not harm the oil and the wine*, because Titus, when he overturned Judea and Jerusalem, literally hurt no Christian. For, Eusebius says in his third book that the church had been gathered in Jerusalem when the siege was nearing. Having received an oracle from God, she was ordered to emigrate and to travel across the Jordan to a certain town named Pella. Therefore through the wine and oil are understood the Christians who fled into Pella, because they were not hurt. For, they were full of the wine of charity and the oil of piety.[6]

Hence, Auriol interpreted the command to the rider on the black horse as a divine decree that Christians were not be harmed in the first-century siege of Jerusalem. And Auriol uses the fourth-century historian, Eusebius, to confirm that Christians indeed had fled from Jerusalem to Pella before the siege.

In a similar manner, Nicholas of Lyra interpreted the opening of the third seal, writing:

> *And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures*, That is, from the throne of God around which there were four living creatures, as has been said above in chapter 4, and this indicates that what Titus did against the Jews proceeded from divine ordination from whom punishment proceeds, according to Amos 3:6, *Does disaster befall a city, unless the Lord has done it?*

Two pounds of wheat for a denarius, To understand this, one must know what Hugh of Fleury says about the end of the war of the Romans against the Jews. Weary of much slaughter, the Romans finally sought to whom they might sell slaves, but, because many slaves were found for sale but few buyers, those who were buying did not fail to obtain thirty slaves for one coin. Just as they had bought the Lord for thirty denarii, so conversely for one denarius thirty were

bought. Moreover, a coin and a denarius are one and the same, as the Lord says in Matt. 22:19, *Show me the coin used for the tax*. And it is added, *And they brought him a denarius*. Moreover, it was called a denarius because it was worth ten ordinary coins. Similarly, *bilibris* (of two pounds) is a word composed of *bis* and *libra*, because it contains two pounds.

Indeed, here, five Jews are designated by one pound, because the five books of Moses are accepted by all the Jews. However, the Jews, who are called Sadducees, do not accept other books. Therefore, this is the sense of: *Two pounds of wheat for a denarius, and three pounds of barley for a denarius*, Just as from the cheaper Jews, who were for sale (who are designated by the barley which is a cheap grain), thirty were given for one denarius, as it has been said, so, from the stronger and more capable of serving, ten Jews were sold for one denarius.

But do not damage the olive oil and the vine! By the "vine," that is, "joy," the Christians are understood, who were filled with spiritual joy, according to what is said in Acts 13:52, *And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit*. And similarly the "oil" refers to the devotion and mutual charity, as it is said in Acts 4:34, *For as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold, and laid them at the feet of the apostles, who distributed to each as any had need*. These were not hurt by the army of Titus. Having been warned by an angel before his arrival, the Christians living in Jerusalem and in Judaea had crossed beyond the Jordan to a city called Pella, ruled by Agrippa, who was allied with the Romans.[7]

In this vision, Nicholas of Lyra saw the aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus symbolized. For support for this interpretation, Nicholas used the "analogy of faith," the hermeneutical principle which says that Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture. He cross-referenced Amos 3:6; Matt. 22:19; Acts 13:52, and Acts 4:34 for support of his interpretation. He also used an historical work written around 1109 by Hugh of Fleury (d. 1124).[8]

The view that the opening of the third seal with its release of the black horse in Rev. 6:5-6 is a symbolic description of what occurred in the first-century Roman-Judean conflict corresponds with what several contemporary partial preterists say about the passage. For example, Kenneth Gentry writes that the famine during the Jewish War which ravished Jerusalem "is graphically depicted

in Revelation 6:5-6."[9] And Arthur M. Ogden affirms: "We believe this horse and rider represent the powers of the Roman force for conquering rebellious foes."[10]

Summary

Three different interpreters from the middle ages—Alexander of Bremen, Peter Auriol, and Nicholas of Lyra—taught that the opening of the third seal in Rev. 6:5–6 contained symbols related to the first-century destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans under the generals Vespasian and Titus. These serve as evidence that preterist interpretations of the seals existed centuries before the seventeenth-century commentary on Revelation by Luis Alcasar.

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1. Alexander Minorita, *Expositio in Apocalypsim [Exposition on the Apocalypse]*. Alois Wachtel, ed. (Weimar: Hermann Bohlaus Nachfolger, 1955), 95-96. My translation of the Latin *Et cum aperuisset sigillum tertium, audivi tertium animal dicens:—quod erat Matthaeus—Veni et vide. Et ecce . . . equus niger. Quod designavit regnum Vespasiani et Titi. Niger, quia obscure erant nati. Et etiam notandum, quod praecedens equus fuit rufus, quia tunc Romanorum sanguis fusus est. Hic vero dicitur niger, quia alios homines morte denigravit. Et qui sedebat super eum, habebat stateram in manu sua. Quod erat Titus, ex auctoritate patris praesidens imperio; qui super Jherosolimam debuit ponderare vindictam, id est, ut veniret super eam omnis sanguis iustus, qui effusus est super terram a sanguine Abel iusti usque ad sanguinem Zachariae filii Barachiae, sicut Matthaeus narrat.*

2. Peter Auriol, *Compendium sensus litteralis totius divinae scripturae [Compendium of the Literal Sense of the Whole Divine Scripture]* (Quarachhi: College of St. Bonaventure, 1896), 465. My translation of the Latin, *III. Sigillum. Iustum Dei iudicium. Ibi: Et cum aperuisset sigillum tertium, praefigurat iudaicae punitionis iustum Dei iudicium . . . Vespasianus enim et Titus contra Iudaeos rebellantes missi sunt a Nerone. Quo mortuo succedentibus Vitellio, Othone et Galba, qui modico tempore regnarverunt, post Vespasianus est electus imperator a militibus existentibus in Iudaea, qui Romam petens Titus filium suum ad procurationem obsidionis Hierosolymorum religqui, qui anno secundo imperii patris sui Hierosolymam cepit.*

3. Peter Auriol, *Compendium*, 465–6. My translation of the Latin *Equus itaque niger designat regnum Romanorum sub Vespasiano et Tito, vel ratione animositatis, quia color niger signum est animositatis in equo, vel quia Romanum regnum illo tempore Iudaeam denigravit et exterminavit. Qui ergo sedebat tunc temporis imperator, Vespasianus scilicet et Titus, habent stateram in manu, hoc est divinam iustitiam et aequitatem; et in una parte appendebatur Iudaeorum culpa, quam exercuerant in Christum Iesum crucifigendo et discipulos ipsius persequendo; et ex altera parte poena condigna, unde mittebantur a Deo Vespasianus et Titus, ut secundum stateram iustitiae punirent Iudaeos.*

4. Nicholas of Lyra, *Apocalypse Commentary*. Philip D.W. Krey, trans., *Nicholas of Lyra's Apocalypse Commentary* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), 83–4.

5. Alexander Minorita, *Exposition on the Apocalypse*, 96. My translation of the Latin *Et audivi tamquam vocem in medio quatuor animalium dicentem. Quae vox erat inspiratio Domini, quam inspiravit Tito, ut faceret domum Judaeorum desertam. Cum enim ipse multis calamitatibus afficeret Judaeos, non sibi, sed Domino victoriam adscribebat, dicens: O commilitones, ministri sumus divinae vindictae. In hoc intelligitur ei hanc vindictam a Deo esse inspiratam.*

6. Peter Auriol, *Compendium*, 466. My translation of the Latin *Sequitur autem: Vinum et oleum ne laeseritis, qui Titus ad litteram cum subverteret Iudaeam et Hierusalem, nullum Christianum laesit. Nam Eusebius narrat tertio libro, quod ecclesia, quae in Hierosolymis fuerat congregata, appropinquante obsidione, responso a Deo accepto, emigrare iubetur et transire ad oppidum quoddam, Pellam nomine, trans Iordanem. Per vinum ergo et oleum intelliguntur Christiani, qui fugerunt in Pellam, quia non sunt laesi. Erant enim pleni vino caritatis et oleo pietatis.*

7. Nicholas of Lyra, *Apocalypse Commentary*, translated in Krey, *Nicholas of Lyra's Apocalypse Commentary*, 84–6.

8. "Hugh of Fleury" http://en.wikipedia.org. accessed March 22, 2009.

9. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell. Dating the Book of Revelation*, Revised (Atlanta: American Vision, 1998), 243.

10. Arthur M. Ogden, *The Avenging of the Apostles and Prophets. Commentary on Revelation*, 2nd ed. (Somerset, KY: Ogden Publications, 1991), 199.

SIX

THE ROMAN SIEGE OF JERUSALEM AND THE SIXTH SEAL

(REV. 6:12–17)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter shows that many interpreters of Revelation before the modern era saw references to the first-century destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the sixth seal of Rev. 6:12–17. These include Ecumenius, Andrew of Caesarea in Cappadocia, Arethas of Caesarea, Nerses of Lambron, Berengaudus, a gloss based on Berengaudus, a non-Berengaudus gloss, Rupert of Deutz, Peter John Olivi, and Francisco Ribera.

REVELATION 6:12–13

On the Opening of the Sixth Seal in the First Century

> And I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind.

Many interpreters of the Apocalypse believe that the things described here by John refer to the cosmic upheaval accompanying the return of Jesus Christ at the end of the world. The sixth-century Greek speaking commentator on Revelation, Andrew of Caesarea in Cappadocia, also believed that. However, he was aware of others who held a preterist interpretation of the passage, and interacted with that interpretation. He wrote: “There are not wanting those who think that all these things, and refer each one of these things which are said, to the siege and destruction of Jerusalem which happened by Titus Vespasian.”[1]

Arethas (d. 940), a bishop of the same location as Andrew, wrote a Greek commentary on Revelation. On Rev. 6:12–13, he also knew that some interpreted this passage with reference to the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in the first-century. He wrote, “Moreover, some by understanding all these predicted things morally, referred them to the siege of the city which happened under Vespasian.”[2]

Nerses of Lambron, who explained the book of Revelation in 1180 in the Armenian language, wrote on this passage: “Some have said that this indicates the afflictions of Vespasian; but we, linking it to the sequence of what went previously, recognized this prophecy as the disturbance of the years which precede the coming of Antichrist.”[3] Nerses, although holding a futurist view of this vision, was interacting with the idea of “some” that had referred the details to “the afflictions of Vespasian.”

Berengaudus, whose person is obscure and whose Latin Apocalypse commentary is dated between the ninth and twelfth centuries, also interpreted the opening of the sixth seal as having reference to the first-century destruction of Jerusalem. On Rev. 6:12, he wrote: “The ‘opening of the sixth seal’ refers to the rejection of the Jews and the calling of the pagans. He opened the sixth seal when he fulfilled what he had predicted. *Great earthquake*. By the earth here the Jews are meant. There was an earthquake when this people were [sic] destroyed by the Romans.”[4] Berengaudus’ commentary was very popular in the middle ages. Consequently, his interpretation, that the sixth seal was opened in the Roman-Judean war of 68–70 A.D., was widely disseminated throughout Europe. The earthquake in the passage, he believed, had occurred in Palestine concurrently with the war between the Romans and Jews in the first-century.

Many glosses on the Apocalypse in the thirteenth century were based upon the commentary of Berengaudus. (A gloss was a commentary accompanying a text containing brief explanations in the margins or between the lines of the text.) However, one thirteenth-century gloss on the Apocalypse, referred to as a “non-Berengaudus” gloss, contains a similar interpretation of Rev. 6:12. It reads: “The opening of the sixth seal pertains to the rejection of the Jews and the calling of the Gentiles. *And a great earthquake [*literally, *moving of the land] occurred*. Through the land in this passage, the Jews are designated. A great earthquake occurred when this nation was devastated by the Romans.[5]

Peter John Olivi wrote an Apocalypse commentary in the year 1298. He also saw the earthquake in the opening of the sixth seal in Rev. 6:12 as a reference to an earthquake that occurred during the first-century Roman siege of Jerusalem. He wrote, “Then Vespasian and Titus were sent by Nero against Judea, and an earthquake occurred [Rev. 6:12], as if overturning another Babylon [cf. Rev. 14:8; 18:2, 10].[6]

In the late sixteenth century, Francisco Ribera (d. 1591) wrote a commentary on Revelation. He believed that the earthquake in Rev. 6:12 was yet to be fulfilled in the last days, but he shows awareness of two commentators before him who believed that it referred to earthquakes that occurred at the death of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. He wrote:

> *And behold a great earthquake occurred*. Concerning this, some writers are clearly altogether convinced, and have referred these things to other things, as Ambrosius[7] who interpreted it about the destruction of Jerusalem, which had already happened when John wrote these things, and Arethas who interpreted them about the passion of Christ and the earthquake at that time.[8]

REVELATION 6:14–17

On the Flight to the Mountains During the Siege of Jerusalem

> And the sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?

Ecumenius wrote a Greek Apocalypse commentary in the sixth century. He interpreted the details in Rev. 6:14–17 as the demons who sought to escape punishment by Christ. But he concluded his thoughts on the passage saying that it could also refer to when the Jews fled into mountains and caves during the first-century Roman-Judean conflict. He wrote:

> One could also suppose that these things recounted in the Revelation were the sufferings not only of demons but also of the lawless Jews who erected the cross for the Lord, when they were oppressed by the war against the Romans and became fugitives in the mountains and caves and holes of the earth, and on every side were afflicted by hardship and stress.[9]

Unlike some futurists who believe that the contents of the opening of the sixth seal will be fulfilled only at the end of the world, Andrew of Caesarea in

Cappadocia believed that some of these disasters in Rev. 6:14–17 had already taken place in the siege of Jerusalem in the first-century. To support this interpretation he used the first-century Jewish historian, Josephus. He wrote:

> Our Lord Jesus Christ preached to the apostles about the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and about the end of the age, when they were asking when these great things, which were then in the future, would take place. Of these disasters and sufferings many indeed happened to the Jews who killed Christ on the cross, in Vespasian's siege, as the Hebrew writer Josephus explained thoroughly in his history.[10]



COIN OF VESPASIAN

Rupert of Deutz (d. 1130), abbot of the monastery of Saint Héribert near Cologne, wrote a commentary on Revelation between the years 1117 and 1125.[11] Rupert saw in the vision described in Rev. 6:14–17, the destruction and captivity of the Jewish people by the Romans. Using the "analogy of faith" principle for support of this interpretation, he cited cross references from Luke 21 and Luke 23. Rupert also drew upon the first-century historical account by Josephus, of Jews seeking refuge in mountains and caves during the Roman-Judean conflict, and drew upon Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* about the first-century flight to Pella. He wrote:

> What else was our Lord saying, as He turned to the women who were mourning and lamenting over Him, because He had been handed over by the guard to the will of the Jews and was being led out to be crucified? Daughters of Jerusalem, he said, Weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming in which they will say, "Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bare, and the breasts that have not given milk" (Luke 23). Then they will begin to say to the mountains, Fall upon us; and to the hills, Cover us [Luke 23:30]. For, He signifies the coming days of destruction and captivity by the Romans about which He earlier said to His disciples among other things: Then those who are in Judea will flee to the mountains (Luke 21), etc. And further, Josephus says that when the Romans were pressing themselves upon the Jews, they eagerly sought the caverns of the mountains and the caves of the hills. . . . [12] And who is able to stand? . . . Literally this was accomplished in that same destruction of Jerusalem: "For when the Roman war and extermination of the Jewish nation were approaching, having been warned by an oracle, all who were Christians in the province departed far away," as the Ecclesiastical History tells, "and settling across the Jordan, they remained for a

time in the city of Pella . . . .”[13]

The aforementioned Berengaudus expressed a similar interpretation, that the description in Rev. 6:15–17 represented the hiding of the Jewish people in caves and mountains during the Roman siege of 68–70 A.D. Berengaudus also cited Josephus for support. He wrote:

> Through the kings of the earth, princes, and tribunes, we are able to understand those who seem to rule this nation. Through the rich and strong, servants and freedmen, the rest of the multitude. But how they hid themselves in caves and rocks of the mountains, Josephus manifestly narrates, who describes the destruction of Jerusalem (Josephus, Book VI of the Jewish War, Chapter 11 and following).[14]

Ribera saw in Rev. 6:16 both a picture of the first-century destruction of Jerusalem and a foreshadowing of the consummation of the world. He wrote:

> *Fall upon us*. Clearly he alludes to two Scripture passages, one of which is in Hosea Chapter 10: *And they say to the mountains: Cover us, and to the hills: Fall upon us*. The other is in Luke Chapter 23: *Then they will begin to say to the mountains: Fall upon us, and to the hills: Cover us.* And of course the Lord in Luke spoke about the time near the destruction of Jerusalem, which without doubt was a figure of the consummation of the world. But in Hosea, the captivity of the people of Israel was a figure of both the destruction of Jerusalem and of the consummation of the world, as Jerome indicates on the same passage.[15]

Summary

Ten different Apocalypse commentaries written between the sixth and sixteenth centuries, some of which were very widely circulated, display preterist commentary on Rev. 6:12–17. They interpreted the details of the opening of the sixth seal, or were aware of others who interpreted them, as descriptions of tragedies that befell the Jewish people in their first-century conflict with the Romans. They understood the earthquake and seeking of refuge in caves and mountains as having already been fulfilled when the Romans besieged Jerusalem in 68-70 A.D. For support, these authors used other Scripture references, earlier commentators, and the histories of Josephus and Eusebius. Surely Louis Alcasar in the seventeenth century did not introduce these interpretations into Christianity. There is a tradition of interpreting these passages in that manner which dates back a thousand years before him.

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1. Andrew of Caesarea in Cappadocia, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin [Commentary on the Apocalypse]*. PG 106: 271. My translation of the Latin *Etsi non desint qui haec omnia ad Hierosolymorum obsidionem et*

eversionem quae a Tito Vespasiano facta est, pertinere existiment, eoque referant, singula quae hic dicuntur . . . For a Greek critical edition of this selection from Andrew's commentary, see Josef Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte des griechischen Apokalypse-Textes, I Teil: Der Apokalypse-Kommentar des Andreas von Kaisareia* (Munich, 1955), 68–70.

2. Arethas of Caesarea in Cappadocia, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin [Commentary on the Apocalypse]*. On Rev. 6:12–12. PG 106: 598. My translation of the Latin *Quidam autem praedicta omnia moraliter intelligendo, ad civitatis obsidionem quae sub Vespasiano facta est, retulerunt.* A Greek critical edition is in Josef Schmid, ed., *Der Apokalypsetext des Arethas von Kaisareia und einiger anderer jungerer Gruppen.* Texte und Forschungen zur byzantinschneugriechischen Philologie 17. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des griechischen Apokalypsetextes 1. (Athens, 1936).

3. Robert W. Thomson, trans., *Nerses of Lambron. Commentary on the Revelation of Saint John* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 84.

4. Berengaudus, *In Apocalypsin Expositio [Exposition on the Apocalypse]*, quoted in Peter H. Brieger, *The Trinity College Apocalypse*, Vol. 1 (London: Eugrammia Press, 1967), 24. The Trinity College Apocalypse of the 13th century contains the text of Revelation with a condensed Berengaudus commentary in French. Brieger provides an English translation. For discussion of the identity of Berengaudus and the date of his Apocalypse commentary, see Derk Visser, *Apocalypse as Utopian Expectation (800–1500): The Apocalypse Commentary of Berengaudus of Ferriéres and the Relationship between Exegesis, Liturgy and Iconography* (New York: Brill, 1996). The Lambeth Apocalypse with a Berengaudus gloss reads almost exactly: "*There was a great earthquake.* By the earth in this case the Jews are signified: there was a great earthquake when this people was destroyed by the Romans." Nigel Morgan, ed., *The Lambeth Apocalypse. Manuscript 209 in Lambeth Palace Library* (London: Harvey Miller, 1990), 149.

5. *Non-Berengaudus Gloss on the Apocalypse*. Cited in a section entitled "Commentaires du ms. Latin 688 de la Bibliothèque nationale et de cinq autres manuscrits" in L. Delisle and P. Meyer, *L'Apocalypse en Francais au XIII siècle* (Paris: Libraire de Firmin Didot, 1901), page CLXXI. My translation of the later Latin *Apoc. VI, 12. Sigilli sexti apertio ad Judeorum dejeccionem et ad gencium vocacionem pertinet. Et terre motus factus est magnus. Per terram in hoc loco Judei designantur. Terre motus factus est magnus quando a Romanis hec gens est devestata.*

6. Peter John Olivi, *Lectura Super Apocalypsim [Lectures upon the Apocalypse]*. Warren Lewis, ed. *Peter John Olivi: Prophet of the Year 2000.* diss. (Tübingen, 1972), 3: 78. My translation of the Latin *Deinde per Neronem misso contra Iudeam Vespasiano et Tito, factus est terremotus, synagogam quasi alteram Babilonem subvertens.*

7. He refers to the commentary of Berengaudus, which circulated under the name of Ambrose.

8. Francisco Ribera, *Commentaries on the Apocalypse*. On Rev. 6:12. In *Francisci Riberae Villacastinensis presbyteri Societatis Iesu, doctorisque theologi, In sacram beati Ioannis apostoli & evangelistae Apocalypsin commentarij* . . . (Antwerp: Ex officina Martini Nutii, ad insigne duarum Ciconiarum, 1603), 247. My translation of the Latin *Et ecce terraemotus magnus factus est* . . . *Ex quibus omnibus manifeste convincentur nonnulli scriptores, qui ad alia haec retulerunt, ut Ambrosius, qui de excidio Ierosolymtiano interpretatus est, quod iam evenerat, cum haec Ioannes scribebat, & Arethas, qui de passione Christi et de eius terraemotu interpretatur*. Ecumenius of Tricca also interpreted the earthquake as the one which occurred at the Lord's crucifixion. See William C. Weinrich, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. New Testament XII: Revelation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 98.

9. John N. Suggit, trans., *Oecumenius. Commentary on the Apocalypse*. FC **112**: 76.

10. Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. PG 106: 274–5. My translation of the Latin *Dominus noster Jesus Christus apostolis de Hierosolymitani templi eversione et saeculi consummatione interrogantibus, quae olim futura erant, quatenus ejus rei capaces erant, praedixit. Ex quibus quidem*

cladibus et incommodis multa in Vespasiana obsidione Judaeis, qui Christum in crucem egerunt, ut Josephus scriptor Hebraeus diffuse in sua historia explicat, evenerunt. For a Greek critical edition of this selection from Andrew's commentary, see Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte des griechischen Apokalypse-Textes, I Teil: Der Apokalypse-Kommentar des Andreas von Kaisareia*, 70–3.

11. On Rupert's commentary, see Michael Curschmann, "Imagined Exegesis: Text and Picture in the Exegetical Works of Rupert of Deutz, Honorius Augustodunensis, and Gerhoh of Reicherberg," *Traditio* 44 (1988): 145–69;John H. Van Engen, "The Labors of the Church: *Commentary on the Apocalypse*," in his book *Rupert of Deutz* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 275–81; and P.K. Klein, "Rupert of Deutz et son commentaire illustré de l'Apocalypse," *Journal des savants* (1980): 119–39.

12. Rupert of Deutz, *Commentarius in Apocalypsim [Commentary on the Apocalypse]*, 4.7. PL 169: 957. My translation of the Latin *Quid aliud Dominus noster dicebat, conversus ad mulieres quae plangebant et lamentabantur eum, quod traditus esset a praeside voluntati Judaeorum, et duceretur ad crucifigendum? Filiae, inquit, Jerusalem, nolite flere super me, sed super vos ipsas flete, et super filios vestros, quoniam ecce venient dies in quibus dicent: Beatae steriles et ventres qui non genuerunt, et ubera quae non lactaverunt (Luc. XXIII). Tunc incipient dicere montibus, cadite super nos; et collibus, operite nos. Dies namque venturae a Romanis obsidionis et captivitatis significat, de quibus superius inter alia disciplis ait: Tunc qui in Judaea sunt fugient in montes (Luc.XXI), etc. Tunc, inquit, incipient dicere montibus, cadite super nos; et collibus, operite nos. Denique et Josephus refert, insistentibus sibi Romanis, Judaeos certatim cavernas montium et collium petisse speluncas . . . .*

13. Rupert of Deutz, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 4.7. PL 169: 958. My translation of the Latin *Et quis poterit stare? . . . Simile quid in eodem Hierosolymorum excidio juxta litteram factum est: Appropinquante namque bello Romano et exterminio Judaicae gentis, oraculo admoniti omnes, qui erant in provincia Christiani, longius discesserunt, ut ecclesiastica narrat Historia, et trans Jordanem sedentes manebant ad tempus in civitate Pella. . . .*

14. Berengaudus [pseudo-Ambrose], *In Apocalypsin Expositio*. PL 17: 841. My translation of the Latin *Et regnes terrae, et principes, et tribuni, et divites, et fortes, et omnis servus et liber absconderunt se in speluncis, et in petris montium, et dicunt montibus: Cadite super nos, et abscondite nos a facie Sedentis super thronum, et ab ira Agni; quoniam venit dies magnus irae ipsorum, et quis poterit stare? Per reges terrae principes et tribunos, eos qui hanc gentem regere videbantur, possumus intelligere: per divites et fortes, servos and liberos, caeteram multitudinem. Qualiter autem se in speluncis et petris montium absconderunt, Josephus manifeste narrat, qui eversionem Hierusalem describit (Joseph. Lib. VI de bello Judaico c. 11 et seq.).*

15. Ribera, *Commentaries on the Apocalypse*, 251. My translation of the Latin *Cadite super nos. Aperte alludit ad duos locos scripture, quorum alter est apud Hos. Cap 10. Et dicent montibus: Operte nos, & collibus: Cadite super nos. Alter apud Lucam cap 23. Tunc incipient dicere montibus: Cadite super nos, & collibus: Operite nos. Et quidem Dominus apud Lucam de tempore proxime excidio Iersusalem loquitur, quod sine dubio figura erat consummationis mundi: apud Hosem autem de captivitate populi Israel, quae excidii Ierusalem figura fuit, & consummationis saeculi, ut Heironymus in eundem locum subindicat.*

SEVEN

144,000 FIRST-CENTURY JEWISH BELIEVERS

(REV. 7:1–8:12)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides selections from commentaries on Revelation from early and medieval Christianity which interpreted the 144,000 of Revelation 7 as Jewish believers in the early church.[1] In addition it provides various preterist interpretations of passages in Rev. 8 related to the seven trumpets, from ancient and medieval commentators on the Apocalypse.

REVELATION 7:1

The Angels Holding Back Four Winds and the Roman-Judean War

> After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree.

Andrew of Caesarea in Cappadocia in his early seventh-century Greek commentary on Revelation believed that this passage referred to an end-time Antichrist. However, he was aware of others before him or contemporaneous with him who thought that they referred to the first-century sufferings of the Jews at the hands of the Romans. He wrote: “Although these things are referred by some to those injuries which the Jews once suffered at the hands of the Romans, . . . nevertheless this passage is more correctly referred to the coming of Antichrist.”[2]

REVELATION 7:2-3

Not Harming the Earth and Sea and the Judean War

> And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.

Andrew wrote that this passage was partially fulfilled in the salvation of certain Jewish believers from the Roman siege on Jerusalem, but that it will be ultimately fulfilled in the time of the Antichrist at the end of the world. He explained:

> Moreover, although this once happened in part to those from the Jews believing in Christ, who admirably evaded that depopulation which was brought about on the city of Jerusalem by the Romans, . . . nevertheless this passage will have [its ultimate fulfillment] especially in the time of the coming of Antichrist, as was also said previously.[3]

Arethas, a tenth-century bishop of Caesarea who also wrote a Greek Apocalypse commentary, provides a more descript preterist interpretation of this same passage, saying:

> Here in a suitable manner are shown those evangelists which openly remained among the Jews in the war against the Romans in the avenging affliction of the Lord. For, the four angels saved the guards upon the four corners of the land of the Jews putting to flight their fear, whether it be fear of the certain sufferings and injuries or the unseasonable affliction of the country or of their beloved wives. These things, which were a near threat to Judea, are designated figuratively. But also the winds are to be prohibited from blowing *upon the land or upon the sea*. *Upon the land* indeed, lest either they find a small consolation in the time of war against the Romans or the vegetable farmers diligently arise rejoicing because their plants are being refreshed by the blowing of the winds. [Or *the land or the sea* may designate] the foot soldiers fighting in the war or the navy, since as Josephus says, ships also were used in the attack. For all these misfortunes happened to them.[4]

Here Arethas interpreted the symbols in Rev. 7:1–3 as having taken place during the siege of Jerusalem in the first-century; and he confirmed his interpretation with the historical account of the first-century Jewish historian, Josephus.

Nerses of Lambron, who commented on the book of Revelation in 1180 in the Armenian language, saw Rev. 7:2–3 as having been partially fulfilled in the first-century. He wrote: "This also happened partially under Vespasian; for those who were ministers of Christ in Jerusalem fled from the Romans at the time of the destruction of the city. And that their number was large, we heard from the great James speaking to the blessed Paul [cf. Acts 21:20]. But it is fulfilled especially

at the time of the Antichrist . . . ”[5]

REVELATION 7:4–8

On The 144,000 Sealed, First-Century Jewish Believers

> And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.

Hippolytus of Rome (d. 235) was one of the earliest commentators on Revelation in church history.[6] Although his *Apology for the Apocalypse and Gospel of John the Apostle and Evangelist* against Gaius did not survive, later commentators cited from it. Fragments of that work have been found in the Greek Apocalypse commentary of Andrew of Caesarea, an anonymous thirteenth-century Arab Apocalypse commentary, and a twelfth-century Syriac commentary on Revelation by Dionysius Bar Salibi. John Gwynn published a few of the fragments in English translation, Adolf Harnack and Hans Achelis in German, and Pierre Pigent and Ralph Stehly in French.[7] The first fragment found in the Arab commentary is on Rev. 7:4–8. If it accurately reflects Hippolytus’ view, as it claims, Hippolytus interpreted the 144,000 as Jewish believers in the first-century.[8] It reads:

> As to the fact that they [the 144,000] are of Hebraic origin, from the fact it is clear that their tribes were privileged. It is undeniable that the majority of this group was firstborn (in Christianity) with respect to the whole of the members of the tribes of Israel who believed in the Christian gospel.
>
> For, as one reads in the book of Acts, that the priests who were in Jerusalem said to Paul, when he came back to them from those regions where he announced the Good News: *Have you seen, my brother, how many myriads of Jews have already believed?* (Acts 21:20) And if that is the case in the city of Jerusalem alone, what must one think of the entire world where the tribes have dispersed, which is proven by the word of Jude [sic], in the beginning [James 1:1]? But the admirable thing is the concordance between the numbers of these firstborn. The number (furnished by) one tribe is not greater than that (furnished by) the other. Glory to those who know these eternal mysteries! Hippolytus, the bishop of Rome, in his explication of this part of the vision is of this opinion, which is the true one.[9]

On this passage in Rev. 7, a comment attributed to Origen (d. 254) said that the

144,000 sealed Jews probably did not mean Israelites according to the flesh in the lifetime of John, but "the true Israel" made up of Jews and Gentiles who came to Christ at that time. He wrote:

> One must seek, if possible, from Israel according to the flesh who still remained in this lifetime of John, [that] so many male virgins are [counted] as thousands. Indeed a physical interpretation brings a great impossibility, but it is necessary for the things which are in the holy book to be true. [Therefore] it is necessary to receive what has been set forth according to a spiritual formula. For, it follows that the true Israel, which has no deceit (cf. John 1:47), was divided into tribes. And so were we to say that there was so great a multitude of male virgins from this Israel, we would not say what [is] impossible. For everyone, both Jews and Greeks, who came to Christ, fulfilled this supra-mundane nation. And since the [spiritual] Jews in this way have great harmony and accord, engaging with themselves by being fashioned in one mind and one thought (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10), [they are] also equal to so great a number, [for] they are allocated in Israel's divisions . . .[10]

According to Origen, the interpretation of the vision of the sealing of the 144,000 was related to those "who came to Christ" in the early church.

In the sixth-century, Ecumenius, who wrote an Apocalypse commentary in Greek, referred these 144,000 to the Jews who escaped the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the first-century and to Jewish believers in the first-century who were "sealed" in the faith of Christ. Using the first-century history of Josephus, Ecumenius wrote:

> And the sealed, it says, was [sic] 144,000. For those from the Jews who believed in Christ were numerous and greater than [this] number, and they were accounted worthy to be saved from the common destruction, as those testified who spoke to Paul when he was in Jerusalem: *Do you see, brother, how many thousands there are of the Jews who have believed?* [Acts 21:20] And it was likely that not only the faithful escaped, but also those who were deceived and in ignorance assisted in the crucifixion of the Lord, about whom he said, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do* [Luke 23:34] . . . And perhaps not only these [escaped], but also those who were not present at that time or were not living in Jerusalem and so were not complicit in the impious plot of the accursed high priests concerning the crucifixion, and also those who were perhaps present but were not involved in that murderous defilement. Indeed, [Christ] himself blessed everything under heaven, in contrast to what the irreligious council of transgressors had wanted. It is likely that all of these were later sealed in the faith of Christ; otherwise the angel would not have called them the servants of God. And when these had been rescued, either by flight or by desertion to the Romans, those wicked ones who remained were destroyed in a terrible manner, *having become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men* [1 Cor 4:9] in a way quite different from what Paul had said of the blessed apostles. And of these things, Josephus is again witness, counting those who were killed by famine as more than ten thousand.[11]

Andrew of Caesarea, commenting on Rev. 7:8, gave two interpretations, both of which he said are acceptable. The first is that the 144,000 refers to believing Jews who took flight from the Romans during the siege of Jerusalem in the first-

century. The second interpretation, which he preferred, is that it refers to Jews that will be saved at the end of the world. He explained:

> This refers either to those believers from the Jews who fled the siege of the Romans and equaled this number, or, what is rather more likely, to those from the Jews who are saved at the consummation when, as the apostle puts it, after *the full number of the Gentiles come in, all Israel will be saved.* Either interpretation is acceptable.[12]

Arethas, commenting on Rev. 7:4–8, referred the 144,000 to first-century Jews who believed in Christ and others who fled from Jerusalem when the Romans attacked it. In the comment, Arethas gave a brief history of the life of John, saying that the apostle took care of the Lord's mother in Judea until she died fourteen years after the death and resurrection of Christ. John then traveled to Ephesus. Interestingly, he said that when John had received the oracles contained in the book of Revelation, "the devastation that had involved the Jews was not yet inflicted by the Romans." Arethas, therefore, stands as another ancient witness for a pre-70 A.D. date of the Apocalypse. He wrote:

> For, there were many, a very large number, who had believed in Christ from the Jews. There were witnesses of this who said to Paul the divine when he had come to Jerusalem, *Do you see, brother, how many myriads there are of those of the Jews who have believed* (Acts 21:20)? But He who gives oracles to the evangelist says that those [myriads] would not be participants in the slaughter that would be brought in by the Romans. For, the devastation that had been brought against the Jews had not yet been inflicted by the Romans when the evangelist received these oracles, not in Jerusalem but in Iona[13] which is near Ephesus. For, he remained in Jerusalem only fourteen years from the passion of Christ. Also, in these years the tabernacle of the mother of the Lord, which had received God into herself, was preserved in this temporal life after the passion and resurrection of her incorruptible offspring. He, to whom the Lord's mother had been handed over by the Lord, was always present with her here. But after her death he no longer remained in Judea, but traveled to Ephesus, in which also, as was said, the things which are contained in this Apocalypse were written. This Apocalypse is a sign of future things, because the affliction against the Hebrews took place after the fortieth year from the ascension of our Lord. But the large number that had been saved is clear. For, not only believers had fled from the coming destruction by the Romans, but also those who had unknowingly cooperated in the death of the Lord.[14]

Nerses of Lambron interpreted Rev. 7:8 as fulfilled in the first-century, but that it will be ultimately fulfilled at the end of the world under Antichrist. He wrote:

> So this number was fulfilled bodily regarding the salvation of those faithful who took refuge with the Lord from the rule of the Romans at the destruction of Jerusalem. . . . Therefore, as under Vespasian the faithful of the Jews were saved, likewise the spiritual offspring of the holy apostles will be saved from Antichrist throughout the whole world.[15]

In viewing the 144,000 of Rev. 7 as Jewish believers of the first-century,

Hippolytus of Rome, Ecumenius, Andrew of Caesarea, and Arethas of Caesarea all used Scripture to interpret Scripture, namely Acts 21:20 to interpret Rev. 7:4–8. Their belief that the 144,000 were Jewish believers in the early church or those who escaped the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem corresponds to what contemporary partial preterists are saying about this passage. For example, Hank Hanegraaff believes that the 144,000 were "sealed prior to Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70" and Jay Adams described the group as "Hebrew saints who were to be preserved during the impending siege and destruction" and those Christian Jews "who escaped to Pella" during the destruction in 70 A.D.[16]



SOUNDING OF THE TRUMPETS

REVELATION 8:1, 7

On the Sounding of the First Trumpet in 71 A.D.

> And when He broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. . . . And the first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

John Napier, whose Apocalypse commentary was first published in 1593, saw these passages as having been fulfilled historically beginning in 71 A.D. He explained, "The last of the seven seales [sic], and first of the seven Trumpets or vials, begin both at once, in Anno. 71."[17]

REVELATION 8:8

On the Proclamation of and Resistance to the Gospel in the First Century

> And the second angel sounded, and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown in to the sea; and a third of the sea became blood.

Arnold of Villanova in his *Exposition on the Apocalypse*, written in 1306, interpreted the sounding of this second trumpet as the early proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ among the Gentiles. He wrote:

> *And the second angel*, because in the second time of the Church the sounding of the trumpet of the proclamation of Christ was among the people of the Gentiles. Therefore, he describes the event, which arose among them on the occasion of the preaching of those things. He said, *as it were a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea*, that is, among the Gentile people, who were most bitter toward God on account of the error of idolatry and their incessant raging in carnal inclinations.
>
> But since the devil had already reigned powerfully among the Gentile nations, when the heralds of Christ brought themselves to them from Judea, it does not come according to one's first understanding to think that the mountain, of which he speaks here, is the devil, but the people of the Jews themselves, especially the assembly of the teachers of the law, which is, or was then, a mountain from the height of their presumption and pride. And since it regarded itself so much higher and richer than the other people on account of the privilege of the divine law, therefore as if great in the truth of God it was thrown by the devil into all parts of the Gentile world for the purpose of resisting the proclamation of Christ and arousing the Gentiles against them, as is recited fully in the Acts of the Apostles. And it was permitted to the devil to send them under the color or cloak of defending and guarding divine truth. This he did so that they might burn with the fire of fury and envy.[18]

For Arnold, who was very influential among certain Franciscans, the burning mountain represented the devil who, with the permission of God, inflamed first-century Jewish religious authorities to resist the proclamation of the Gospel as it spread to Gentile lands.

REVELATION 8:12

On First-Century Believers in Christ

> And the fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were smitten, so that a third of them might be darkened and the day might not shine for a third of it; and the night in the same way.

According to the early medieval Apocalypse commentary of Berengaudus, the fourth trumpet represented first-century believers. He wrote:

> And so through the *third part of the sun*, which was stricken, that is, was darkened, those who believed in Christ from the people of the Jews are designated. For, they were darkened to the impious Jews, but shined in the sight of God. Similarly also through the third part of the moon and of the stars which were darkened, those who believed in Christ from the rulers of the

> synagogues and priests and from the Pharisees are designated, since also they, because of the true light which is Christ whom they received, were darkened to those whose minds the devil had blinded so that they should not believe in Christ.[19]

The Trinity Apocalypse, a Latin illuminated manuscript of the book of Revelation with commentary, written between 1255 and 1260, carries a similar interpretation of the fourth trumpet that seems to be an abbreviated form of the Berengaudus comment above. It reads: "By *the third of the sun* that was *darkened* are understood those among the Jews who believed in Christ; similarly by *the third of the moon and of the stars* the chiefs of the priests, the priests and the Pharisees who believed in Christ; they are darkened as far as the Jews are concerned but they shine in the sight of God."[20]

As with the seven seals, the seven trumpets are very often interpreted by futurists as symbols of events that will happen at the end of the world. However, many commentators long before Alcasar and the modern era saw in these trumpets symbols of the first-century proclamation of the Gospel and diabolical resistance to it, as well as the embracing of Jesus Christ by a portion of first-century Jews.

Summary

Several ancient and medieval commentators on Revelation believed that the 144,000 in Rev. 7 were not a group of evangelists that will preach during the Great Tribulation at the end of the world. Rather, they believed that the vision was fulfilled in the first-century conversion of a large number of Jewish people to faith in Jesus, or in the temporal salvation of a large number of Jewish people from slaughter when the Roman generals, Vespasian and Titus, besieged Jerusalem in 68–70 A.D. Some commentators did not hold this position, but were aware of it; and even though they personally were not persuaded by it, they considered it an acceptable interpretation. Furthermore, several commentators from the middle ages, long before Alcasar's writing, interpreted the trumpets of Rev. 8 as symbols of events that were fulfilled historically in the first-century. These include the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles, the resistance to the early heralds of Christ that occurred simultaneously with it, and the reception of Jesus Christ by a number of Pharisees and Jewish priests in the first-century.

1. On the interpretation of the 144,000, see Hank Hanegraaff, “Who Are the 144,000 of Revelation?” *Biblical Worldview* 23:5 (May 2007): 20; Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2001), 128–36; Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2001), 118; Francis X. Gumerlock, *The Day and the Hour: Christianity’s Perennial Fascination with Predicting the End of the World* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2000), 23; Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 409–23; André Feuillet, “Les 144,00 Israélites marqués d’un sceau,” *Novum Testamentum* 9 (1967): 191–224; and William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1940, 1967), 110-11.

2. Andrew of Caesarea in Cappadocia, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin [Commentary on the Apocalypse]*. On Rev. 7:1. PG 106: 275–8. My translation of the Latin *Etsi isthaec ad illa incommode a quibusdam referuntur, quae Judaei quondam a Romanis perpessi sunt . . . tamen rectius ad Antichristi adventum locus hic refertur.* Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou (“Andrew of Caesarea and the Apocalypse in the Ancient Church of the East,” diss. Université Laval, Quebec, 2008, 2: 85) translates the passage from the Greek: “If some have interpreted these things as having happened to the Judeans under the Romans of old . . . much more, this looks forward to the things that will occur in the time of the Antichrst.”

3. Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. On Rev. 7:2–3. PG 106: 278. My translation of the Latin *Hoc autem etsi iis quondam ex parte acciderit qui ex Judaeis in Christum credentes depopulationem illam quae Hierosolymorum civitati a Romanis illata est, admirabililter evaserunt . . . verumtamen adventus Antichristi tempore maxime, ut ante quoque dictum est, hoc locum habebit.* For the Greek critical edition of these selections from Andrew’s commentary see Josef Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte des griechischen Apokalypse-Textes, I Teil: Der Apokalypse-Kommentar des Andreas von Kaisareia* (Munich, 1955), 73–5.

4. Arethas of Caesarea in Cappadocia, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin [Commentary on the Apocalypse]* On Rev. 7:2–3. PG 106: 602–3. My translation of the Latin. *Hinc consequenter ipsi evangelistae ostenduntur quae aperte manebant Judaeos in bello adversus Romanos in ultionem afflictionum Domini. Quatuor enim angeli servabant excubias super quatuor angulos terrae Judaeorum, fugae timorem illis immittentes, aut intempestivam patriae afflictionem ac dilectissimarum uxorum: quae tropice designantur imminere Judaeae, sed et ventos prohiberi nequando flent neque super terram neque super mare. Super terram quidem, ne vel in minimo refrigerium inveniant tempore belli adversum Romanos: neque agricolae plantarum diligentia diligentia assurgant, quoniam et arbores ventorum commotione gaudentes refocillantur: neque pedestri pugna certantes, neque navali, quoniam navali quoque pugna impetebantur, juxta Josephum; nam omnia mala comprehenderunt illos.* For a Greek critical edition of Arethas’ commentary see Josef Schmid, ed. *Der Apokalypsetext des Arethas von Kaisareia und einiger anderer jungere Gruppen*. Texte und Forschungen zur byzantinischneugrieschischen Philologie 17; Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des grieschischen Apokalypsetextes 1 (Athens, 1936).

5. Robert W. Thomson, trans., *Nerses of Lambron. Commentary on the Revelation of Saint John* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 88.

6. There is some scholarly debate over whether the writings that make up the Hippolytus corpus came from one author or two Hippolyti, one from the east and one from the west. For a summary of the issue, see chapter one of W. Brian Shelton, *Martyrdom from Exegesis in Hippolytus: An Early Church Presbyter’s Commentary on Daniel* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008).

7. John Gwynn, “Hippolytus and his ‘Heads against Caius,’ *Hermanthena: A Series of Papers on Literature, Science, and Philosophy* by members of Trinity College, Dublin. No. XIV (1888): 397–418; Adolf Harnack, *Die Gwynnschen Caius-und Hippolytus-Fragmente*. Texte und Untersuchungen 6:3 (Leipzig, 1890), 121–33; Hans Achelis, *Hippolytus Werke: Exegetische und homiletische* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1897), 229–47; Pierre Prigent and Ralph Stehly, “Les fragments du De Apocalypsi d’Hippolyte,”

Theologische Zeitschrift 29 (1973):313–33.

8. Doubts about the existence of two separate works, an *Apology for the Apocalypse and Gospel of John the Apostle and Evangelist* and *Chapters against Gaius* abound in scholarship. The tendency is to view them as one work. However, some scholars think there may have been a florilegia of Hippolytus' comments on the Apocalypse gathered from his other works that later commentators used. There are also questions about the extent to which the fragments attributed to Hippolytus reflect his thought and the editorializing of the later commentators. Other passages attributed to Hippolytus' lost writing on the Apocalypse are extant in Coptic and Old Slavonic. See Bernard McGinn, "Turning Points in Early Christian Apocalypse Exegesis," in Robert J. Daly, ed., *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 81–105 at 91. According to McGinn, fragments are still being discovered.

9. Prigent and Stehly, "Les fragments du De Apocalypsi d'Hippolyte," 320. My translation of the French. Special thanks to Stephanie Brown of Denver, Colorado who assisted me with the translation.

10. Origen, *Scholia in Apocalypsin*. Scholium 31. Constantin Diobouniotis and Adolf Harnack, eds., *Der Scholien-Kommentar des Origenes zur Apokalypse Johannis* (Leipzig: J.C. Hincrich, 1911), 37–8. Translation by Thomas Schmidt of Utica, New York with slight alterations by me. Used by permission. While some of the scholia are clearly not Origen's, Schmidt believes Scholium 31, from which this paragraph came, is Origen's. In a personal correspondence dated May 24, 2011, Schmidt wrote: "I believe Scholium 31 is from Origen. It greatly parallels his comments in his *Commentary on John* 1.1–2." Cf. Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 1.1–2. ANF 10: 297–8.

11. Ecumenius, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. On Rev. 7:4. Translated in William C. Weinrich, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. New Testament XII. Revelation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), **105**.

12. Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. On Rev. 7:8. Translated in Weinrich, *Revelation*, 108. Constantinou ("Andrew of Caesarea" 2:90) translates the passage: " . . . either the faithful from among the Hebrews who have escaped the captivity of the Romans who complete this number, or more correctly, those saved from among the Jews in the end of time when, as the Apostle says, after *the complete number of Gentiles enters all Israel will be saved.* Neither of these is unacceptable."

13. Dennis Eugene Engleman, *Patmos: Isle of the Apocalypse* (Indianapolis: Christ the Savior Brotherhood Publishing, 2004), 7, explains: "The German archeologist Ludwig Ross, professor at Athens University in 1837, wrote that the initial inhabitants of the island were Dorians. Patmos later became an Ionian colony, paying tribute to Athens in the fifth century B.C. It belonged to the Macedonians in the fourth century B.C., and in the second-century B.C. was taken by the Romans."

14. Arethas of Caesarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. On Rev. 7:4–8. PG 106: 606. My translation of the Latin *Multi siquidem erant maximoque numero qui e Judaeis in Christum crediderant: cujus rei testes erant qui divo Paulo, cum Hierosolyma venisset dicebant, "Vides, frater, quot myriades sint eorum qui crediderunt Judaeorum?" Hos autem is qui evanglistae [sic] dat oracula, ait non fore participes internecionis inducendae a Romanis: nondum enim Judaeos comprehenderat vastatio a Romanis adducta, cum evangelista haec susciperet oracula: nec id Hierosolymis, sed in Ionia quae est juxta Ephesum. Siquidem quatuordecim duntaxat annis a Christo passo permansit Hierosolymis, quibus etiam tabernaculum Matris Domini quod Deum in se susceperat, in hac temporali vita post passionem ac resurrectionem sui incorrupti partus servatum est: cum qua hic semper aderat, ut cui mater tradita fuerat a Domino. Post hujus namque interitum fertur non amplius permansisse in Judaea, sed transisse in Ephesum: in qua etiam, ut dictum est, conscripta sunt quae in hac habentur Apocalypsi, quae est significatio futurorum: eo quod post quadragesimum annum ab assumpto Domino successit afflictio adversus Hebraeos. Quod autem vehementi numero servati fuerint, manifestum est. Neque enim soli fideles effugerant interitum a Romanis provenientem, sed et hi qui ignoranter ad Domini passionem cooperati fuerant.*

15. Nerses of Lambron, *Commentary on the Revelation of Saint John*, 90–1.

16. Hank Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code* (Nashville: Nelson, 2007), 127; Jay E. Adams, *The Time is at Hand. Prophecy and the Book of Revelation* (Woodruff, SC: Timeless Texts, 2000), 63, 65, 74.

17. John Napier, *A Plaine [sic] Discovery of the Whole Revelation of S. John* (London: John Norton, 1611), 13. http://rarebooks.dts.edu

18. Arnold of Villanova, *Expositio super Apocalypsi [Exposition upon the Apocalypse]* Ioachim Carreras I Artau, Olga Marinelli Mercacci, and Iosepho M. Morató I Thomàs, eds. (Barcelona: Institut D'Estudis Catalans, 1971), 124–5. My translation of the Latin *ET SECUNDUS ANGELUS. Quia secundo Ecclesiae tempore tubicinatio praeconum Christi fuit in populis gentium, idcirco describit eventus, qui occasione praedicationis ipsorum orti sunt apud eos, dicens quod MONS TANQUAM MAGNUS IGNE ARDENS MISSUS EST IN MARE, id est in populum gentilem, qui erat amarissimus Deo propter errorem idolatriae, ac incessanter fluctuans carnali lubricitate. Cum autem in gentilitate iam esset ac regnaret potenter diabolus, quando praecones Christi ad illam de Iudaea se transtulerunt, non convenit secundum principalem intellectum existimare quod mons, de quo loquitur hic, sit diabolus, sed ipse populus Iudaeorum, praecipue legis-doctorum coetus, qui est vel erat tunc mons ab altitudine praesumptionis et superbiae; cumque ceteris populis reputaret se tam altiorem quam ditiorum propter privilegium divinae legis, ideo tanquam magnus in veritate Dei missus est a diabolo in omnes partes gentium ad resistendum praeconibus Christi et suscitandum gentiles adversus eos, sicut in Actibus apostolorum plene recitatur; et licet diabolus ad hoc mitteret eos sub colore vel pallio defendendi et custodiendi vertiatem divinam, nichilominus fecit ut igne furoris arderent atque invidiae.*

19. Berengaudus [pseudo-Ambrosius], *Exposition upon the Apocalypse*. PL 17:853–4. My translation of the Latin *Per tertiam itaque partem solis, quae percussa, id est, obscurata est, ii qui ex populo Judaeorum in Christum crediderunt, designantur; obscurati sunt namque impiis Judaeis, sed refulserunt in conspectus Dei. Similiter et per tertiam partem lunae atque stellarum quae obscurata est, ii qui ex archisynagogis atque sacerdotibus et ex pharisaeis in Christum crediderunt designantur; quia et ipsi propter lumen verum, id est, Christum, quem perceperunt, obscurati sunt eis, quorum mentis oculos diabolus obcaecaverat, ne in Christum crederent.*

20. David McKitterick, ed., *The Trinity Apocalypse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 141–2. This book includes an English translation.

EIGHT

THE FORTY-TWO MONTH SIEGE

(REV. 9:5–11:2)

INTRODUCTION

Several early medieval commentators saw a reference to the first-century siege of Jerusalem in the prophecies of Rev. 9 about locusts and the army of 200 million. In addition, several early medieval commentators interpreted the vision in Rev. 11:2, where it speaks of the holy city being tread under foot for forty-two months, as a reference to the siege of Jerusalem under Vespasian in 68–70 A.D.

REVELATION 9:5

Five Months of Torment by Locusts as the Siege of Jerusalem

> And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man.

The earliest Syriac commentary on Revelation said that this passage represents the first-century capture and destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman general Titus. A manuscript from the year 1088 was the basis for the translation into English by Stan Larson. Although the commentary was transcribed and rubricated in 1088, Larson dates its composition to the ninth or tenth century. On Rev. 9:5, the anonymous commentator wrote:

> Concerning the *five months* which John said *they should be tormented* (Rev. 9:5): each month represents a week, which is seven days. Thus, the *five months* represent five weeks, or 35 days; and these 35 days represent 35 years, during which time the Jews ruled after the crucifixion of Christ, until Titus, the son of Vespasian, came, captured Jerusalem, destroyed it, and killed the Jews; and their kingdom has ceased until the present time.[1]

While many biblical scholars today would look with disdain on the way that the

commentator came up with 35 years from five months (the commentator justified his interpretation by cross-referencing Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:5–6; 46:1; Isa. 66:23[2]), the point of correspondence with preterist interpretation of Revelation is that he believed the torment in Rev. 9:5 referred not to an end-time tribulation but to the destruction of Jerusalem in the first-century.

REVELATION 9:10

On the Tails Like Scorpions as the Roman-Judean War

> And they have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months.

Theodulph, bishop of Orleans, wrote a Latin commentary on the book of Revelation in the year 810. On Rev. 9:10 he interpreted the "five months" as "the years in which there was a persecution in the time of John."[3] Unlike futurist interpretations of the locusts common today, this early medieval expositor saw this vision as representing a persecution in the lifetime of John.

The earliest Syriac commentary on Revelation also interpreted this passage as a reference to the destruction of human life in the Roman-Judean war of the first-century. It says:

> John said in the Apocalypse: *By means of their tails they had power to harm men for five months* (Rev. 9:10). John said this concerning the later generations and the later tribes of the children of Israel, even the Jews who crucified Christ, and who after the crucifixion of Christ lived in Jerusalem for 35 years. Then Vespasian sent his son, Titus, who took the Jews by force and killed some and took some captive, because of the time they acted insolently against Christ and crucified him. Because of it God took vengeance on the Jews, and 1,000,000 fell due to famine and murder, and 100,000 others were taken captive and sold.[4]

Some partial preterists today, like Kenneth Gentry, also hold that the "five months" of torment mentioned in Rev. 9:5 and 9:10 refer to the final siege of Jerusalem between April and August of 70 A.D.[5]

REVELATION 9:15–16

On the Army of 200 Million and the Judean War

> And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they might kill a third of mankind. And the number of the armies of horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.

A very common modern interpretation of this passage, by those who believe that most of the visions in Revelation refer to an end-time tribulation, is that the army of 200 million will be an army from China which in the future will come to Israel for the Battle of Armageddon.[6] The earliest Syriac commentary on Revelation, however, saw it as having a two-fold reference. It is a prophecy, it said, of both the slaughter of unbelieving Jews by the Roman general Titus in the first-century and the final judgment of unbelieving Jews by God in hell. The commentator wrote:

> John said in the Apocalypse: *They had been prepared for this hour and day and month and year, in order to kill a third* and so forth (Rev. 9:15). Now these concerning which John said *that they might kill a third of mankind, and the number of soldiers in the cavalry* (Rev. 9:15–16), represent the Jews who did not believe in Christ and did not hearken to the preaching of the apostles. For the Lord said to his disciples: "Go out and teach all nations, and baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit," [Matt. 28:19] and "He who believes and is baptized is going to be saved, but he who does not believe is going to be condemned" [Mark 16:16]. The Jews in Jerusalem were put to death, when Titus ravaged and killed them. The Jews were also going to be killed in the fire of hell, which is a bitter death. Just like what the Lord[7] said in the gospel: "Bring my enemies, who did not want me to rule over them, and kill them in front of me" [Luke 19:27].[8]

REVELATION 11:2

The First-Century Siege of Jerusalem for Forty-Two Months

> And leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months.

In this passage John is told to measure the temple, but not to measure the court which is outside the temple, as it has been given to the nations. Berengaudus, whose commentary is dated between the ninth and twelfth century, saw this as a reference to the Roman-Judean conflict in the first-century, and wrote, "And this court is said to have been given to the nations, since the Jews, because of their unbelief, were joined with pagan nations. Or, they were handed over to the nations, that is, to the Romans, so that they might be destroyed and exterminated by them."[9] This corresponds with modern preterist interpretation of Rev. 11, which also sees the vision as a reference to the first-century siege of Jerusalem by the Romans. However, Berengaudus, unlike many modern preterists, interpreted the rest of Rev. 11 as a reference to times under an end-time

Antichrist.

In the twelfth century, Dionysius Bar Salibi, a Syrian commentator on the Apocalypse and bishop of Amid (1166–1171), believed that the forty-two months in Rev. 11:2 referred to a time of persecution under a last days Antichrist. To support his view, he cites Hippolytus (d. 235) several times. Interestingly, in Bar Salibi's quotations from that church father, one sees Hippolytus interacting with people who interpreted the passage in a preterist manner, that is, that the forty-two months did not refer to the times of an end-time Antichrist but to the time of the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman general Vespasian. Bar Salibi wrote:

> *And they will trample the holy city forty two months*, that is, the city is the church, and they will persecute and kill her in these months when the false Christ will come, because she will not worship him. And Daniel the prophet said this: *And he will make a pact with many for one week; in the middle of the week sacrifice will cease.* (Dan. 9:27) Moreover, half a week is three and half years, and these constitute the aforementioned forty-two months. [Regarding] "sacrifice" (Dan. 9:27), he does not say this of lambs, but [about] the prayers of the righteous. *The holy city* he calls the righteous ones, that is, those who will be oppressed and trampled by that horn which came up in the middle, which is Antichrist, as Daniel says (cf. Dan. 7:20–21).
>
> Hippolytus writes[10] in another way, applying [to this passage] what was said in the Gospel: *When you will see the abomination of desolation* (Matt. 24:15). For, he says that these words are not about the Jews, nor about the destruction of Jerusalem, but about the end and Antichrist.
>
> The "elect" (Matt. 24:22, 24) he calls the Christians of that generation. And he says: *Pray that your flight may not be on the Sabbath or in winter* (Matt. 24:20), that is, He exhorts us that we not be preoccupied with these things which are coming upon us, when we are leisurely in righteousness just as the Jews on the Sabbath or are disturbed in the affairs of this world just as in a winter storm.
>
> *There will be tribulation such as has not been seen since the beginning of the world*, etc. (Matt. 24:21), that is, Hippolytus says: this did not happen in the siege of Vespasian, for nothing new occurred in the world in those days besides those things which had already happened before. If you say war, it happened in times before with many misfortunes. And if [you say] captivities, [the fact is that] slaughters and the shedding of blood did not cease in it, especially [among] the ancients. And if [you say] the eating of children and unclean animals, these things also happened in the days of Ahab (cf. 2 Kings 6:28–29). Therefore, the Lord did not say this about Jerusalem. For, when He wanted to speak about it, He said: *When you see an army surrounding the city, know that its desolation is near* (Luke 21:20). Therefore He calls the Antichrist the "abomination of desolation." And Daniel said that ungodliness will stand in the sanctuary for half a week (cf. Dan. 9:27; 11:31). And Vespasian did not erect idols in the temple, but that legion, which the noble man of the Romans Quintus Trajan gathered, erected in that place an idol which is called "Kore."
>
> Also the Apostle wrote these things about Antichrist: *Unless the rebellion first comes and the man of sin will be revealed, so that he should sit in the temple as God, whom Jesus Christ the Lord will*

> *consume*, etc. (2 Thess. 2:3–4, 8). From these it is clear: Vespasian did not call himself God, nor sit in the temple, nor was he killed by the Spirit of the Lord. Therefore, it is clear that tribulation is going to rise up against the church in the end, the quality of which there has been nothing similar.[11]

In the commentary above, the demarcations of where quotations from Hippolytus end, and where Bar Salibi's own comments resume, are not always clear. But the point of both Hippolytus and Bar Salibi is clear: the trampling under foot of the holy city refers to the time of a future Antichrist. In this argument, however, Hippolytus, and by extension Bar Salibi, go to great lengths in stating that the passage does not refer to the siege of Jerusalem by Vespasian in 68–70 A.D. Bar Salibi writes: "For, he [Hippolytus] says that these words are not about the Jews, nor about the destruction of Jerusalem, but about the end and Antichrist." Then he quotes Hippolytus as saying that the tribulation of Matt. 24:21 "did not happen in the siege of Vespasian." And about the abomination of desolation, he wrote that "Vespasian did not erect idols in the temple" but the emperor Trajan (98–117 A.D.) did. About Paul's description of the "man of sin" in 2 Thess. 2 he says: "Vespasian did not call himself God, nor sit in the temple, nor was he killed by the Spirit of the Lord." For the purposes of this book, it shows that both Hippolytus in the early third century[12] and Bar Salibi in the twelfth century are in dialogue with the idea, very obviously held by some, that the forty-two months of Rev. 11:2 refer to the time of the Roman siege of Jerusalem under Vespasian.

Summary

The earliest Syriac commentary on the Apocalypse interpreted some of the torments in Rev. 9 in light of the first-century Roman-Judean conflict. Theodulph of Orleans interpreted the torment of the locusts as a symbol of a persecution that took place during the lifetime of John. Hippolytus in the third century and Dionysius Bar Salibi in the twelfth century were very familiar with an interpretation of the forty-two months of Rev. 11:2 as a reference to the siege of Jerusalem by Vespasian in 68–70 A.D., although they themselves held a futuristic interpretation of that passage. Today some partial preterists believe similarly, that the three and a half years mentioned in Revelation had a first-century fulfillment. For example, Larry T. Smith wrote: "This three and one-half year persecution of the Church occurred in the last days of Nero's reign and

ended with his death in 68 A.D."[13]

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1. Stan Larson, "The Earliest Syriac Commentary on the Apocalypse: Transcription, Translation, and Importance of Brit. Lib. Ms. Add. 17, 127," diss. (University of Birmingham, UK, 1984), 239. The Marriot Library at the University of Utah owns a copy of this dissertation.

2. Larson, "The Earliest Syriac Commentary on the Apocalypse," 245, 247.

3. Theodulph of Orleans, *Expositio in Apocalypsin Iohannis [Exposition on the Apocalypse of John]*. On Rev. 9:10. CCSL 107: 321. My translation of the Latin *Quinque mensibus, id est . . . anni in quibus fuit persecutio in tempore Iohannis.*

4. Larson, "The Earliest Syriac Commentary on the Apocalypse," 245.

5. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell. Dating the Book of Revelation*, Rev. (Atlanta: American Vision, 1998), 248.

6. This view is explained in Grant R. Jeffrey, *Triumphant Return: The Coming Kingdom of God* (Toronto: Frontier Research Publications, Inc., 2001), 245; and Mark Hitchcock, *101 Answers to the Most Asked Questions About the End Times* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2001), 55–56, although Hitchcock prefers a different interpretation.

7. The nobleman in the parable of the pounds said this.

8. Larson, "The Earliest Syriac Commentary on the Apocalypse," 255, 257.

9. Berengaudus [pseudo-Ambrosius], *Expositio super septem visiones libri Apocalypsis [Exposition upon the Seven Visions of the Book of the Apocalypse]*. PL 17: 867–868. My translation of the Latin *Hocque atrium datum esse gentibus dicitur; quia Judaei propter incredulitatem suam paganis gentibus erant conjuncti: sive traditi erant gentibus, id est, Romanis, ut ab eis delerentur atque exterminarentur.*

10. The footnote in the edition of Bar Salibi indicates that this comes from Hippolytus' *On the Exposition of the Gospel*. Apparently, only fragments on Matt. 24 from it are extant. See Siegmar Döpp and Wilhelm Geerlings, eds., *Dictionary of Early Christian Literature* (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 287.

11. Dionysius Bar Salibi, *In Apocalypsim, Actus et Epistulas Catholicas.* Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 60 (Rome: Karolus De Luigi, 1910), 12–13. My translation of the Latin.

12. Some scholars are doubtful about the authenticity of citations from Hippolytus in medieval Apocalypse commentaries. However, even if these citations are from a pseudo-Hippolytus work available to Bar Salibi, the point still stands, that in the twelfth century (and whenever the pseudo-Hippolytus work was authored), dialogue about preterist interpretation of Rev. 11:2 was taking place.

13. Larry T. Smith, *The Coming of the Lord, the Last Days, and the End of the World as Taught by Jesus and His Apostles* (El Campo, TX: Rightly Dividing the Word, 2000), 67.

NINE

GOD'S TWO WITNESSES

(REV. 11:3–12:14)

INTRODUCTION

Who are the two witnesses of Rev. 11 and the beast that opposes them? How are the three and half years mentioned in Rev. 11 & 12 to be understood? This chapter explains how some writers in early and medieval Christianity associated the two witnesses with first-century apostles, the beast and dragon with the Roman emperor Nero, and the three and a half years with the siege upon Jerusalem under the Roman general Vespasian.

REVELATION 11:3–4, 6

The Two Witnesses as Peter and Paul

> And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth . . . These have the power to shut up the sky, in order that rain may not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.

On this passage, a fifth-century bishop of Carthage, Quodvultdeus, writing from exile in Naples about the year 450, understood the vision of the two witnesses as having a three-fold reference.[1] He saw in it a depiction of Moses and Aaron contending with the magicians of Pharaoh, the apostles Peter and Paul martyred by the Roman emperor Nero, and Enoch and Elijah whom he believed would return to earth at the end of the world and preach against Antichrist. He wrote:

> In the prophet Malachi it says: *Behold, the Lord says, I shall send to you Elijah the Tishbite before the great and manifest day of the Lord will come, who will restore the heart of a father to a son, and the heart of a man to his neighbor, lest coming I utterly smite the earth* (Mal. 4:5–6). For, thus

> these two prophets will convert the hearts of the fathers to their sons that they may show what the patriarchs or prophets said about Christ who was going to come in humility, and convince [people] that the Antichrist is not the Christ. This John shows more clearly in the Apocalypse: *I will give,* the Lord says, *my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive branches and two candlesticks standing in the sight of the Lord of the earth* (Rev. 11:3–4). And a little after: *These have the power of closing heaven that it should not rain throughout the days of their prophecy. And they have the power over the waters to turn them into blood, to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they want* (Rev. 11:6). Behold, also here a threefold division even of the witnesses. Against Pharaoh two witnesses were sent, Moses and Aaron, and the two magicians of Pharaoh, Jamnes and Mambres, who resisted Moses [and] who perished together with their king. And the two apostles, Peter and Paul, [were sent] against Nero. Simon Magus, who both perished himself and deceived Nero, opposed them. And against Antichrist two prophets, Enoch and Elijah, will rise against those three false prophets of Antichrist.[2]

Interestingly, in his three-fold interpretation Quodvultdeus saw in the two witnesses a picture of the ministry of the apostles Peter and Paul who were martyred by the Roman emperor Nero.[3]

REVELATION 11:5

The First-Century Opponents of the Two Witnesses

> And if anyone desires to harm them, fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies; and if anyone would desire to harm them, in this manner he must be killed.

On this passage, the earliest Syriac commentary on Revelation written in the ninth or tenth century, reads:

> The term *their enemies* represents the Jews, Christ's enemies, who in this world were killed by the sword and harsh captivity at the hands of Titus, the son of Vespasian, and were kept for hell and harsh punishment and unquenchable fire. Just like what the Lord said in the gospel: *Bring my enemies, who did not want me to rule over them, and kill them in front of me* [Luke 19:27].[4]

This medieval commentary saw in Rev. 11:5 yet another reference to the Roman-Judean conflict of the first-century.

REVELATION 11:7

The Beast Ascending from the Abyss, Nero Raised from Hell

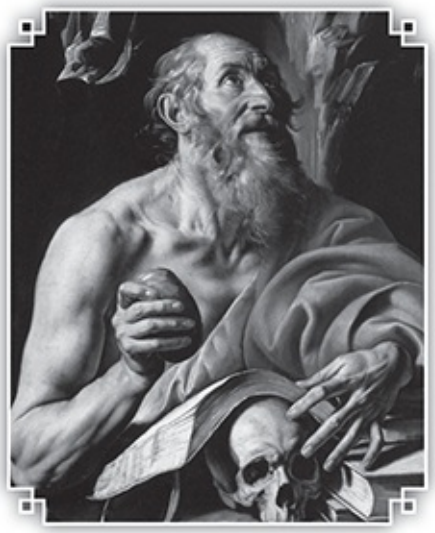
> And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them.

Probably with this passage as a basis, which speaks of a beast coming up out

of the abyss, the writer Commodian (3rd– 5th c.) described the end-time beast saying, “Nero shall be raised up from hell.”[5] “For us Nero has become Antichrist . . .”[6] he also wrote in a poem.

About the year 398, the church father Jerome wrote a Latin commentary on Revelation. When explaining the identity of the beast in Rev. 11:7, he cited cross-references from Ezekiel and Isaiah. He then continued:

> Moreover, he [the beast] was already in the kingdom of the Romans and was among the Caesars, [about which] the apostle Paul also testifies. For, he said to the Thessalonians: *Let him who now restrains, restrain, until he comes from [your] midst. And then that wicked one will appear, whose coming is according to the working of Satan with lying signs and wonders* (2 Thess. 2:7–9). And so that they might know that the one, who is going to come, was he who was ruler at that time, he added: *The mystery*, he said, *of lawlessness is already at work*, that is, the lawlessness which he is going to do, works mysteriously, but he is not raised by his own power nor by the power of his father but by the order of God. Therefore, this is why Paul says to the same: *For this reason, because they did not receive the love of God, God sends them a spirit of error* . . . (2 Thess. 2:11).[7]



JEROME

It seems that for Jerome, the beast of Rev. 11:7 was none other than Nero. For, Jerome says that, according to the apostle Paul, the beast was already in the kingdom of the Romans, was among the Caesars, and “was ruler at that time,” that is, during the ministry of the Apostle. When Jerome mentioned that this beast will be “raised,” he seems to have held to a common belief among early Christians that at the end of the world Nero would be raised up from hell to

torment the church again. Furthermore, Jerome makes the comment that this would not happen through his own power, nor even from the power of his father (i.e. Nero's spiritual father, the devil), but it would happen by the order of God, since Paul wrote that *God* would send them a spirit of error.

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."[8] Domitius was Nero's family name.[9]

Commodian and Jerome, like many other church fathers, believed in an end-time Antichrist. For them, Rev. 11:7 taught or confirmed that he, also identified with the *wicked one* of 2 Thess. 2, would be Nero resurrected in the last days. While this concept is dissimilar to that of modern preterist interpretation of Revelation, which sees in the Apocalypse references to the historical Nero but not an end-time resurrected Nero, it is similar to modern preterist views in that it deciphers in the prophecies of the Apocalypse references to the first-century emperor Nero. Jerome's opinion on Rev. 11:7 was circulated in the middle ages not only in the manuscripts of his own Apocalypse commentary, but also in the surviving manuscripts of the sixth-century Apocalypse commentator, Apringius of Beja, which contain Jerome's words verbatim.[10]

REVELATION 12:6

The Flight of the Early Church from Judaism

> And the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she might be nourished one thousand, two hundred, and sixty days.

Peter John Olivi, in his Apocalypse commentary from the year 1297, wrote on this passage: "Here he speaks about the flight of the church from the Jewish people to the nations."[11] That, of course, happened in the first-century.[12]

REVELATION 12:7

The Martyrdom of Peter and Paul

> And there was a war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war.

According to Olivi on this passage, Michael and his angels "here designate

Christ and the chief princes of the martyrs, that is, Peter and Paul and those similar; also Stephen the first martyr about whom it is said in Acts 6 that ‘all who’ were ‘in the Council’ against him ‘saw his face like the face of an angel’ (Acts 6:15).”[13] Olivi here saw the angels as a figure of the martyrs of the early church such as Stephen, Peter, and Paul. While I am not aware of any modern interpreters that see this as a reference to the persecution of the early church, it is still another witness that medieval commentators often saw references to first-century historical events in the visions of the book of Revelation.

REVELATION 12:13

Persecution by the Roman Emperors

> And when the dragon saw that he was cast into the earth he persecuted the woman that brought forth the man child.

On this verse the *Lambeth Apocalypse*, written between the years 1270 and 1280 reads: “The Devil, seeing that he had lost a great multitude of the elect, and that he was confined within the hearts of the reprobates, persecuted the woman, that is the church; for he incited the emperors of the Romans and all the multitude of the wicked to persecute the people of God.”[14] The author of this book interpreted the persecution of the dragon here, not as a persecution that will take place in a last-days tribulation of Antichrist, but that which already occurred under the Roman emperors, persecution which of course began in the first-century.

REVELATION 12:14

The Three and a Half Year Siege of Jerusalem

> But to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.

On this passage, the notes in the 1599 edition of the *Geneva Bible* say that a time, times, and half a time represent the three and half years before the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and its temple in the first-century. The notes read as follows. I have retained the older English wording, spelling, and capitalization.

> This space of time is reckoned in manner from the last and most grievous rebellion of the Jews, unto the destruction of the city and Temple, for their destrution [sic] or falling away, began in the twelfth year of Nero, before the beginning whereof, many fore-signs and predictions were showed from heaven, as Josephus writeth, lib. 7, chap. 12, and Hegesippus, lib. 5, chap. 44, amongst which this is very memorable, that in the feast of Pentecost, not only a great sound and noise was heard in the Temple, but also a great voice was heard and many out of the Sanctuary which cried out to all, Let us depart hence. Now three and half years after this defection was begun of the Jews, and those wonders happened, the City was taken by force, the Temple overthrown, and the place forsaken of God: and this compass of time Saint John noted in this place. [15]

Summary

The comments of the earliest Syriac commentary on the Apocalypse of John saw in Rev. 11:5 a reference to the first-century Roman-Judean conflict. Several early interpreters of Revelation interpreted the beast ascending from the abyss as Nero being raised from hell; and Jerome wrote that *many* thought that Nero was the Antichrist. Other interpreters of early and medieval Christianity saw in the visions of the combat between the two witnesses and the beast, Michael and the dragon, and the dragon and woman, references to the first-century persecution of Christians by Roman emperors and the martyrdoms of the apostles. These included Quodvultdeus of Carthage, the author of the *Lambeth Apocalypse*, and Peter John Olivi. The author of the notes in the 1599 *Geneva Bible* interpreted the time, times, and half a time in Rev. 12:14 as a reference to that same period preceding the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

All these comments lead to the conclusion that Christians long before the modern period interpreted visions in the book of Revelation, specifically the visions contained in Rev. 11 and 12, as referring to historical events that took place in the first-century.

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1. On interpretations of the two witnesses, John C. Poirier, “The Endtime Return of Elijah and Moses at Qumran,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 10 (2003): 22736; Christine Joy Tan, “The Identity of the Two Witnesses in Revelation 11,” Master’s thesis (Dallas Theological Seminary, 2002); Francis X. Gumerlock, *The Day and the Hour: Christianity’s Perennial Fascination with Predicting the End of the World* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2000), 49; Steve Gregg, ed., *Revelation. Four Views. A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville: Nelson, 1997), 226–45; Thomas W. Mackay, “Early Christian Millenarianist Interpretation of the Two Witnesses in John’s Apocalypse 11:3–13,” In John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also By Faith*, Vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1990), 222–331; B. P. Robinson, “The Two Persecuted Prophet-Witnesses of Rev. 11,” *Scripture Bulletin* 19 (1988): 14–19; C.H. Giblin, “Revelation 11:1–13: Its Form, Function and Contextual Integration,” *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984): 433–59; Kenneth A. Strand, “The Two Witnesses of Rev. 11:3–12,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 19:2

(1981): 127–35; B.E. Thiering, “The Three and a half Years of Elijah,” *Novum Testamentum* 23 (1981): 41–55; M. Black, “The ‘Two Witnesses’ of Rev. 11:3f. in Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic Tradition,” In E. Bammel, C.K. Barrett, and W.D. Davies, eds., *Donum Gentilicum: New Testament Essays in Honour of David Daube* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1978), 227–37; Richard Bauckham, “The Martyrdom of Enoch and Elijah: Jewish or Christian?” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95:3 (1976): 447–58; Andre Feuillet, “Essai d’Interpretation du Chapitre XI de l’Apocalypse,” *New Testament Studies* 3 (1956–1957): 183-200;and Johannes Munck, *Petrus und Paulus in der Offenbarung Johannis. Ein Beitrag zur Auslegung der Apokalypse* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde & Bagger, 1950); and Joseph S. Considine, “The Two Witnesses: Apoc. 11:3–13,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 8 (1946): 377–92.

2. Quodvultdeus of Carthage, *Book on the Promises and Predictions of God*. Dimidium temporis, XIII. CCSL 60: 207. My translation of the Latin *Ecce et hic tripertita etiam testium divisio. Contra Pharaonem duo testes Dei missi sunt, Moyses et Aaron, et duo magi Pharaonis Iamnes et Mambres resistentes Moysi qui simul cum suo rege perierunt. Et contra Neronem duo Petrus et Paulus apostolic; a contrario Simon magus qui et se perdidit et Neronem decepit. Et contra Antichristum duo Enoch et Helias prophetae adversus quos tres pseudoprophetae Antichristi exsurgent.* On the eschatology of Quodvultdeus, see Daniel G. Van Slyke, *Quodvultdeus of Carthage: The Apocalyptic Theology of a Roman African in Exile.* Early Christian Studies 5 (Strathfield, Australia: St. Pauls Publications, 2003).

3. Several commentators on Revelation today hold a similar view, that the two witnesses were references to Peter and Paul. George Wesley Buchanan (*The Book of Revelation. Its Introduction and Prophecy* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005], 280) writes: “Giet followed Munck and Boismard in thinking they were Peter and Paul and that their testimony and martyrdom took place in Rome rather than Jerusalem.” Gregory K. Beale (*The Book of Revelation* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999], 583) writes that “It is not beyond possibility that Peter and Paul are part of the model here along with Moses and Elijah, since they represented respectively the church’s witness to Jews and to Gentiles (Gal. 2:7–9).” Earlier commentators holding this view include Munck, *Petrus und Paulus in der Offenbarung Johannis* and T.A. Lacey, “The Two Witnesses,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 11 (1909–1910): 55–60 at 55: “The two witnesses, slain by the Beast, whose carcasses lie ‘in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt’ (XI 10), will be the Apostles Peter and Paul, whose martyrdom at Rome had just seemed to indicate the coming of the last days.” Considine (“The Two Witnesses: Apoc. 11:3–13,” 391) mentioned that Fr. Juan de Mariana, S.J. (1536–1624) saw the two witnesses as “Saints Peter and Paul, who were put to death by Nero.”

4. Stan Larson, “The Earliest Syriac Commentary on the Apocalypse: Transcription, Translation, and Importance of Brit. Lib. MS. Add. 17, 127,” diss. (University of Birmingham, UK, 1984), 283.

5. Commodian, *Instructions*, 41. ANF 4: 221. Commodian’s *Instructions* have been variously dated from the mid-third century to the early fifth century.

6. Commodian, *Carmen*, 933. Cited in Pierre Prigent, “Au temps de l’Apocalypse,” *Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 55 (1975): 215–35at 231. My translation of the Latin *Nobis Nero factus Antichristus . . .*

7. Jerome, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. CSEL 49: 103. My translation of the Latin *fuisse autem eum iam in regno Romanorum et fuisse inter Caesares et Paulus apostolus contestatur. ait enim ad Thessalonicenses: qui nunc tenet, teneat, donec de medio fiat. et tunc apparebit iniquus ille, cuisu est adventus secundum efficaciam satanae signis et portentis mendacibus. et ut scirent illum venturum, qui tunc erat princeps, adiecit: acranum, inquit, malitiae iam molitur, id est, malitiam quam facturus est, arcane molitur, sed non sua virtute nec patris suis suscitatur sed dei iussu. quare ergo Paulus eisdem dicit: idcirco quod non receperunt amorem dei, mittit eis dues spiritum erroris . . .*

8. *Jerome’s Commentary on Daniel*. Gleason L. Archer, Jr., trans. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1958), 133. However, G. W. Lorein, “The Antichrist in the Fathers and their Exegetical Basis,” *Sacris Erudiri* 42

(2003): 5–60 at 50–51, citing the Latin, gives an alternative translation: “multi nostrorum putant, ob saevitiae et turpitudinis magnitudinem, Domitianum vel Neronem Antichristum fore. (Many of us are of the opinion, because of the size of his anger and disgrace, that Domitian or Nero will be the Antichrist.)”

9. Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*. Catherine Edwards, trans. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 195–7.

10. Alberto Del Campo Hernandez, ed., *Comentario al Apocalipsis de Apringio de Beja: Introduccion, Texto Latino y Traduccion* (Navarra, Spain: Editorial Verbo Divino, 1991), 95.

11. Peter John Olivi, *Lectures on the Apocalypse.* Warren Lewis, ed. “Peter John Olivi: Prophet of the Year 2000,” diss. (Tübingen, 1972), 643. My translation of the Latin *Hic loquitur de fuga ecclesie a Iudeis ad gentes.*

12. Some medieval interpreters saw in the 1,260 days a reference to events even in John’s past. Theodulph of Orleans in 810 wrote that the flight of the woman was the flight of “Mary into Egypt” when Jesus was an infant. CCSL 107: 325. The earliest Syrian commentary (Larson, 279) commented:

> John said in the Apocalypse: *They will prophesy 1,260 days, wearing sackcloth* (Rev. 11:3). These (days) extend from the time that Christ, the Son of God, was baptized by John and went forth to teach and to declare to men and to perform mighty works and miracles, until the day of his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. In the book of (Eusebius’) Chronicle it is written: ‘In Tiberius’ fifteenth year Christ came to his baptism, and in Tiberius’ nineteenth year Christ came to his suffering and crucifixion.’ This is what John meant when he said: *They will prophesy 1,260 days, wearing sackcloth* (Rev. 11:3).”

Nicholas of Gorran (*Acta Apostolorum et singulas apostolorum Iacobi, Petri, Iohannis et Iudae canonicas epistolas et Apocalypsim commentarii [Commentaries on the Acts of the Apostles and Each of the Canonical Epistles of the Apostles James, Peter, John, and Jude, and the Apocalypse]* Antwerp, 1620, 241) in the thirteenth century saw the 1,260 days as “the preaching of Christ for three and a half years. According to George H. Williams (*Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962], 57), Rupert of Deutz (d. 1129) in his commentary on Rev. 12:6 “understood the passage as a reference to the primitive Church in Jerusalem which, according to Acts, held all things in common for approximately this time, namely, three and a half years.” For a recent article which suggests that Rev. 12 is an apocalyptic narrative rooted in past history, see Paul Barnett, “Revelation 12: An Apocalyptic ‘Church History’?” in P.J. Williams, Andrew D. Clarke, Peter M. Head, and David Instone-Brewer, eds., *The New Testament in Its First Century Setting* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 292–300.

13. Olivi, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*. Lewis, ed., 671. My translation of the Latin: *designat hic Christum et summos principes martirum, puta Petrum et Paulum et consimiles; et Stephanum portomartirem, de quo Act. VI dicitur quod omnes, qui errant in consilio contra ipsum, viderunt faciem eius tanquam faciem angeli.*

14. Nigel Morgan, ed., *The Lambeth Apocalypse. Manuscript 209 in Lambeth Palace Library* (London: Harvey Miller, 1990), 178.

15. *1599 Geneva Bible* (White Hall, WV: Tolle Lege Press, 2007), 1323.

Ten

Nero's Fatal Wound

(Rev. 13:1–12)

Introduction

Who is the "beast coming out of the sea" whose "fatal wound was healed"? Some dispensationalists, like the late John Walvoord, think that the healing of the wound of the beast in Rev. 13 teaches a revival of the Roman Empire. Others, like Tim LaHaye, assert that these passages prophesy that the Antichrist himself will die and rise again in the middle of the Great Tribulation.[1] This chapter illustrates that many in early and medieval Christianity connected the sea beast of Rev. 13, whose fatal wound was healed, with the first-century emperor Nero.

Revelation 13:1b

Nero as the Second Head of the Beast

> And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names.

A fourteenth-century text entitled *Breviloquium*, written by a follower of the teachings of Joachim of Fiore, interpreted Nero and Simon Magus as the second head of the dragon. In that text, Distinction 14, lines 373–376 read:

> The second order of the visions of the Apocalypse concern the second time of the church under the second candlestick, second star, the second church, that is, of Smyrna, the second seal, the second trumpet, the second vial full of the wrath of God, and the second head of the dragon, that is, Nero and Simon Magus.[2]

This citation shows clearly that the author of it believed that the book of Revelation was recapitulatory, that is, that it repeats certain themes or historical events under various visions. In other words, the book of Revelation, especially

Chapters 6–19, are not visions setting forth events that will happen in chronological order throughout the last seven years before the Second Coming. Interestingly, the author saw the second head of the beast as the emperor Nero.

REVELATION 13:3, 12B

Nero's Fatal Wound

> And I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. . . . And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed.

Victorinus of Pettua, who commented on Revelation about the year 260, Jerome who revised Victorinus' commentary about 398, and the surviving manuscripts of the sixth-century Apocalypse commentary of Apringius of Beja all have on this passage: "He is referring here to Nero."[3] The expanded comments, in Jerome's version, read:

> Moreover, *one of the heads slain unto death, and his fatal wound was healed*, he speaks of Nero. For it is plain that while the cavalry sent by the senate pursued him, he cut his own throat. Therefore, after he is raised, God sends this one, a worthy king for a worthy people. And the Jews merited such a Christ. And because he will bear another name, he will establish another life, so that the Jews should welcome him as Christ. . . . Moreover, about him rising from hell, we have also spoken above in the word of Isaiah: "Water will nourish him, and hell increased him;"[4] who, however, although he should come with name unchanged, and doings unchanged, the Spirit says: *His number is the name of a man and his number six hundred sixty six.*[5]

Jerome's comment links the fatal wound to Nero's suicide, and then recites the belief that Nero will be raised up from hell to return under another name as a false Messiah for the Jews. In addition, Jerome's narrative links the number of the beast to this revived Nero.

Sulpicius Severus (c. 405), writing a history of the emperor Nero, speaks about the belief that Nero would be revived in the end-time. In it he cites Rev. 13:3. He wrote:

> Also after laws were passed the religion was forbidden, and publicly. With edicts having been put forth, it was not permissible to be a Christian publicly. Then Paul and Peter were condemned to death. Paul's head was cut off with a sword. Peter was hung on a cross. While these things were happening in Rome, the Jews . . . began to rebel. Vespasian, with the command of the proconsul, was sent against them by Nero. After many grave battles, he compelled those conquered to take refuge inside the walls of Jerusalem. Meanwhile Nero, already detestable even to himself on account of the consciousness of his wicked deeds, was removed from human affairs. But it was uncertain whether he had committed suicide. Surely his body was gone. Whence it is believed,

that although he pierced himself through with a sword, he was healed of his wound and was preserved, according to that which was written about him: *And his mortal wound was healed* (Rev. 13:3), that he should return at the end of the world so that the *mystery of iniquity* (2 Thess. 2:7) should be fulfilled.[6]

Severus attributed the origin of the *Nero redivivus* legend to uncertainties raised by the mysterious circumstances of Nero's death. During Nero's lifetime his astrologers "foretold that he would have to leave Rome but would find a throne in the East," and in his fi nal days Nero spoke to some people about a plan for him to flee to Parthia.[7] In addition, the ancient historian Suetonius informs us that public funeral rites had not been held for him, but only about five people—his scribe, his mistress, a freedman named Icelus, and two old nurses—saw Nero's dead body. According to Suetonius, they burned his body on a pyre and entombed it on one of the hills in Rome.[8] This lack of closure for the Roman people sent curious minds sailing with speculation about whether he was really dead. Undoubtedly Rev. 13:3, which speaks of one of the heads of a beast being healed of a mortal wound, played a role in confirming for many early Christians that the emperor Nero would be resurrected, and that he would return at the end of the world.[9]



SUETONIUS

Beatus of Liebana's commentary on Revelation, written in 786, when explaining Rev. 13:3 mentioned the term "Nero Antichrist." Using Jerome's commentary as a base, segments of which I have put in quotation marks, he expanded upon it and wrote:

"Moreover, *one of the heads*" of the beast, which we have said above was in the false prophets, *was as if it had been "slain to death and its fatal wound healed.* He speaks of Nero", who prefigured the Antichrist. And since the eighth is a beast, he is Antichrist himself, who now rules subtly in the church through false priests, but then he will devastate the church openly. Because

> the Jews crucified Christ, they are also expecting **Nero Antichrist** for Christ. “Therefore, after he is raised, God sends this one, a worthy king for a worthy people. And the Jews merited such a Christ. And because” the Antichrist will not have the name Nero, but “will bear another name, he will also establish another life, so that the Jews should welcome him as Christ.”[10]

Beatus believed that a future Antichrist was coming. However, he saw in Rev. 13:3 a reference to Nero’s fatal wound. The healing of that wound, for Beatus, meant that God would raise Nero from hell, who would come back as the Antichrist under a different name. Interestingly, Beatus refers to this person as “Nero Antichrist.” This caught the attention of Ernest Renan in his 1897 treatise on Antichrist, who wrote: “Saint Beatus of Liebana, who wrote on the Apocalypse in 786, asserts (with more than one inconsequence) that the “Beast” of chapters xiii and xvii, who is to reappear at the head of ten kings to annihilate the city of Rome, is Nero the Antichrist.”[11]

The association of Nero with Antichrist can be traced in literature as far back as the late first-century. *The Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* that was written at the end of the first-century associated the Antichrist with Nero. In the passage on Antichrist, who is called “Beliar,” it says that he “will descend from his firmament in the form of a man, a king of iniquity, a murderer of his mother.”[12] Nero had his mother, Agrippina, murdered in 59 A.D.

In Book 5 of the Sibylline Oracles, in a Christian redaction written in the second century, Nero is again associated with Antichrist. Lines 28–34 of Book 5 read:

> One who has fifty as an initial will be commander, A terrible snake, breathing out grievous war, who one day Will lay hands on his own family and slay them, and throw everything into confusion, Athlete, charioteer, murderer, one who dares ten thousand things. He will also cut the mountain between the seas and defile it with gore. But even when he disappears he will be destructive. Then he will return declaring himself equal to God. But he will prove that he is not.[13]

In modern Armenian, or at least in the Armenian language spoken in the late nineteenth century, the word for “Antichrist” is *Neren.*[14] It is very likely derived from the early association of Antichrist with the emperor Nero.

Joachim of Fiore (d. 1202) saw Rev. 13:12 as predicting the coming of two sinister persons—a king and a pope, an end-time secular ruler and a spiritual leader. But these, he said, were typified by the first-century infamous Roman emperor Nero and Simon Magus. Joachim wrote in his *Exposition of the Apocalypse*:

> Just like the beast which *comes up out of the sea* (Rev. 13:1) there will be a certain great king from his own party who is similar to Nero and as emperor of the whole world, so the beast which will *come up out of the earth* (Rev. 13:11) is going to be a certain prelate who is similar to Simon Magus, and as if universal pope over the whole world, and he is that Antichrist about which Paul spoke.[15]

Although Joachim interpreted Rev. 13 in a futurist manner, it is interesting how he saw in the visions of the two beasts, references to first-century persons, namely, Nero and Simon Magus, who for him acted as types of Antichrist figures who would come in the future.

Summary

In the early church, Victorinus of Pettua, Jerome, and Sulpicius Severus interpreted the beast whose fatal wound was healed as a reference to the suicide of Nero. In the middle ages, Beatus of Liebana, Joachim of Fiore, and the author of the fourteenth-century *Breviloquium* all associated that beast with Nero as well. Some of the aforementioned patristic writers, however, believed that the healing of Nero's wound would occur at the end of the world when he would be raised up from hell and persecute the church again. Although that latter belief is generally not held by those today who hold a preterist view of the book of Revelation, seeing references to Nero in the sea beast of Rev. 13 does have correlation with interpretations of that chapter by modern partial preterists like Kenneth Gentry and Gary DeMar.[16]

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1. John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 199; Tim LaHaye, *Revelation Unveiled* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 211.

2. Harold Lee, Marjorie Reeves, and Giulio Silano, eds., *Western Mediterranean Prophecy: The School of Joachim of Fiore and the Fourteenth-Century Breviloquium* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1988), 310. My translation of the Latin *Secundum ordo visionum Apocalipsis respicit secundum tempus ecclesie sub secundo candelabro, secunda stella, secunda ecclesia, scilicet e Smirna, secundo sigillo, secunda tuba, secunda phiala plena ira Dei, et secundo capite drachonis, scilicet Nerone et Symone mago.*

3. Cited in William C. Weinrich, ed., *Revelation.* Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. New Testament XII (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 2005), 200. Weinrich's translation is of the Latin words *Neronem dicit* in Victorinus and Jerome, editions of which are both in CSEL 49: 120–121 (ANF 7:358). For the same words in the manuscripts of Apringius, see Alberto Del Campo Hernandez, *Commentario al Apocalipsis de Apringio de Beja: Introduccion, Texto Latino y Traduccio* (Navarra, Spain: Editorial Verbo Divino, 1991), 95.

4. According to the notes in the edition in CSEL 49, this passage is not found in Isaiah.

5. Jerome, *Commentary on the Apocalypse.* CSEL 49: 121, 123. My translation of the Latin *Unum autem*

*de capitibus occisum in mortem et plaga mortem eius curate est: Neronem dicit. Constat enim, dum insequeretur eum equitatus missus a senatu, ipsum sibi gulam succidisse. Hunc ergo suscitatum deus mittere regem dignum dignis et Christum, qualem meruerunt Iudei. Et quoniam aliud nomen afferturus est, aliam etiam vitam instituru*s, *ut sic eum tamquam Christum excipiant Iudei . . . De inferno autem illum surgere et superius diximus verbo Esaiae: aqua nutriet illum et abyssus auxit illum. Qui tamen licet et nomine inmutato et actu inmutato veniat, ait spiritus: numberus eius nomen hominis est et numerus eius sexcenti sexaginta sex . . .*

6. Sulpicius Severus, *Historia Sacra [Sacred History]*, 2.29. PL 20: 145D. My translation of the Latin *Post etiam datis legibus religio vetabatur, palamque, edictis propositis, Christianum esse non licebat. Tum Paulus ac Petrus capitis damnati: quorum uni cervix gladio desecta. Petrus in crucem sublatus est. Dum haec Romae geruntur, Judaei . . . rebellare coeperunt. Adversus eos Vespasianus proconsulari imperio a Nerone missus, multis gravibusque praeliis devictos coegit intra muros Hierosolymae confugere. Interim Nero jam etiam sibi pro conscientia scelerum invisus, humanis rebus eximitur: incertum an ipse sibi mortem consciverit. Certe corpus illius interemptum. Unde creditur, etiamsi se gladio ipse transfixerit, curato vulnere ejus servatus, secundum illud quod de eo scriptum est: Et plaga mortis ejus curata est (Apoc. XIII, 3); sub saeculi fine mittendus, ut mysterium iniquitati exerceat.* An English translation cited in Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (San Francisco: Christian Universities Press, 1997), 79: "It was accordingly believed that, even if he did put an end to himself with a sword, his wound was cured, and his life preserved, according to that which was written regarding him,—'And his mortal wound was healed,' [Rev. 13:3] . . . "

7. John J. Collins, *The Sibylline Oracles of Egyptian Judaism*. Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 13 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1974), 80–1.

8. Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*. Catherine Edwards, trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 224–5. See also, M.P. Charlesworth, "Nero: Some Aspects," *Journal of Roman Studies* 40 (1950): 69–76.

9. On the *Nero redivivus* legend, J. Nelson Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 161–4; Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 65–7; Martin Bodinger, "Le mythe de Néron de l'Apocalypse de Saint Jean au Talmud de Babylone," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 206 (1989): 21–40; Larry Kreitzer, "Hadrian and the Nero *Redivivus* Myth," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 79 (1988): 92–115; Paul Trudinger, "The 'Nero Redivivus' Rumour and the Date of the Apocalypse of John," *St. Mark's Review* 131 (Sept 1987): 43–4; John M. Lawrence, "Nero Redivivus," *Fides et Historia* 11 (1978): 54–66; J. Rougé, "Néron à la fin du IVe siècle et au déut de Ve siècle," *Latomus* 37 (1978): 73–87; Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 179–90; Eva Matthews Sanford, "Nero and the East," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 48 (193): 75–103.

10. E. Romero-Pose, ed., *Sancti Beati a Liebana commentarius in Apocalypsin*, Vol. Alterum (Rome: Typis Officinae Polygraphicae, 1985), 164-5. My translation of the Latin *Unum autem ex capitibus bestiae, quam supra diximus in pseudoprofetis esse, tamquam iugulatum ad mortem et plaga mortis eius sanata est, Neronem dicit, qui Antichristum praefiguravit: et quia octavus bestia est, ipse Antichristus est, qui nunc in ecclesia per pseudosacerdotes subtiliter regnat, tunc aperte ecclesiam devastabit: quia Iudaei Christum crucifixerunt et pro Christo Neronem Antichristum expectant. Hunc ergo suscitatum Deus mittere regem dignum dignis et Christum qualem meruerunt Iudaei. Et quia non habebit nomen Nero Antichristus sed aliud nomen afferturus est, aliam etiam vitam instituturus, quod sic eum tamquam Christum excipiant Iudaei . . .*

11. Ernest Renan, *Antichrist*. Joseph Henry Allen, trans. (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1897), 356.

12. *The Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah*, 4.2. Translated in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 161.

13. *Sibylline Oracles*, 5. 28–34. Cited in Gregory C. Jenks, *The Origins and Early Development of the Antichrist Myth* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), 263.

14. "Apocryphal Apocalypses and the Apocalypse of St. John," *Church Quarterly Review* 89 (Oct 1897): 151–62 at 160. In the journal article, no author is listed.

15. Joachim of Fiore, *Expositio in Apocalypsim [Exposition of the Apocalypse]* (Venice, 1527; facsimile reprint, Frankford: Minerva, 1964), 168. My translation of the Latin *Sicut bestia illa que ascendit de mari habitura est quondam magnum regem de secta sua, qui sit similis Neronis, et quasi imperator totius orbis, ita bestia que ascendet de terra habitura sit quondam magnum prelatum qui sit similis Symonis Magi, et quasi universalis pontifex in toto orbe terrarium, et ipse sit ille Antichristus de quo dicit Paulus.*

16. Gentry, *Beast of Revelation*, Rev. (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2002), 91; Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church*, 4th ed. (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), 257; DeMar, *End Times Fiction: A Biblical Consideration of the Left Behind Theology* (Nashville: Nelson, 2001), 143. See also Andy M. Woods, "The First Beast of Revelation 13 Has Not Yet Appeared in World History: A Comparison of Preterist and Futurist Views," Master's thesis (Dallas Theological Seminary, 2002), 32–33: "Preterists believe that Nero is the head that is in view in Revelation 13:3. Thus, the head that was fatally injured represents Nero's death . . . "

ELEVEN

THE NUMBER OF NERO ANTICHRIST

(REV. 13:18)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses a patristic text, the *Liber genealogus*, which recommends that the reader use the letters of Nero's name to calculate the number of the beast.[1] The *Liber genealogus*, or *Genealogical Book*, is a chronology written in Latin by an unknown North African Donatist Christian in the fifth century. The Donatists, named after their founding bishop Donatus of Casa Niger, were North African schismatics who separated from the larger Christian body after the Diocletian persecution over issues of ecclesiastical purity.[2] This chronology was originally written between 405 and 427 A.D., but is preserved in four slightly different versions written in the years 427, 438, 455, and 463. It was edited by Theodore Mommsen in 1892 and reprinted in 1981.[3]

In short entries the *Liber* lists persons and events in chronological order from Adam and Eve to the fifth century of the Christian era. In doing so, it makes extensive use of the genealogies in the Old Testament, the genealogies in Matthew and Luke, lists of Persian kings, and lists of Roman kings, dictators, and emperors. Other identifiable sources include a Latin translation of the *Chronicle* of Hippolytus, a recension of Victorinus' *Commentary on Revelation*, and the *Chronology* of Julius Quintus Hilarianus.[4]

Toward the end of the chronology, it speaks about the birth and death of Christ under the emperors Augustus and Tiberius respectively. It then briefly touches upon the persecutions of Christians under the emperors Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Decius, Valerian, and Diocletian, as well as the persecutions of the Donatists. It is in this section of the *Liber*, which deals with the persecuting emperors (pages 194–196 of Mommsen's edition), that the relevant statements are made about

Nero.

REVELATION 13:18

The Number of Nero Antichrist

> Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.

Citing a portion of Rev. 13:18, paragraphs 614–620 of the version that was written in 438 states that the letters of Nero's name are to be used in calculating the number of the beast. It reads in English translation:

> 614. Moreover, from the passion of the Lord to the passion of Peter and Paul are thirty eight years: They suffered when Nero was consul. This first persecution was of Nero, which is going to occur again under Enoch and Elijah.
>
> 615. This Nero is he whose name John called in the Apocalypse 616. *Here wisdom is* (Rev. 13:18) used, that the name of him who is thus called 'Antichrist' may be calculated through letters.

A	N	T	I	C	H	R	I	S	T	
1	13	18	9	3	9	17	9	18	19	2

> The collected number equals 154. This [multiplied by] four "strokes, according to the four letters of the name of Nero" makes 616, which is the name of Antichrist.
>
> 616. But this seems to differ with the established number of the computation according to what other teachers have written about the number of the beast. For, the holy bishop Victorinus says this: "*His number*, the Holy Spirit says, *is the number of a man*" *and the number of his name is 616* (Rev. 13:18), that is, Antichrist. For, he will come with a changed name; and he will ascribe two names to himself, 'Antemus' in Greek and 'Gensericus' in Gothic, so that he may deceive many nations.[5] In the calculation, 'Antemus' is written in letters corresponding to the Greek language, so that you may come to that number, that is 666. Upon this word a wise person is able to calculate: "A=1, N=50, T=300, E=5, M=40, U=70, S=200. This is the number six hundred sixty six, according to the Greeks."
>
> 617. "Again, another Greek name is 'Teitan' which the Gentiles call Sol and Phoebus," according to what another orator says.[6] For, 'Teitan' according to Greek letters adds up to the same sum or number. "It is calculated in this manner: T=300, E=5, I=1, T=300, A=1, N=50, which is 666." This name, that is Phoebus, "if you want to convert it into Latin," you will find the six letters as these: "D-I-C-L-V-X. D surely represents 50, I=1, C=100, L=50, V=5, X=10, which calculated are 666."
>
> 618. "Again, another name in Gothic" is that which he called "'Gensericus,' so that he may deceive the nations." A wise person can calculate through letters, and you will find in this number, that is in Greek, 666. "G=3, E=5, N=50, S=200, E=8, R=100, I=10, C=20, U=70, S=200."[7] This number, [calculated] through the letters of the word 'Gensericus' will yield the same sum.

> 619. Now let us return to a superior way of thinking. For, we have added these things from the sayings of the excellent bishop Victorinus or others because the words calculated above do not match the number of the beast, the sum gathered from the name of Nero.
>
> 620. But Antichrist himself, as is read in the mysteries, "will come from the tribe of Dan, the son of the patriarch Jacob in the spirit of Nero and Saar." There is said to be a city in the west where he is still held "secluded, although now he has satellites everywhere, about which the apostle says, "Antichrist will come. They have gone out from us, but they were not of us. For, if they were of us, they surely would have remained with us" (1 John 2:18–19).[8]

The *Liber genealogus* illustrates that some African Christians saw an allusion to Nero in Rev. 13:18, the passage about the number of the beast. Paragraph 615 shows that that verse of Scripture in the author's copy of the Apocalypse read 616 rather than 666. The 616 variant, found in Papyrus Oxyr. 4499 (also known as P115), uncial manuscript C, cursives 5 and 11 (no longer extant), and *Codex Ephraemi rescriptus*, was known to early Christian writers of the second through eighth centuries including Irenaeus, Tyconius, Caesarius of Arles, and the unknown authors of *De monogramma* and *The Reference Bible*.[9]

According to the writer of the *Liber*, by using wisdom one can calculate the number of the beast by first adding the numerical values of the letters which make up the word 'Antichristus,' which is Latin for 'Antichrist.' Then by taking that sum, 154, and multiplying it by four, according to the four letters in the name Nero, one will arrive at 616, the number of the beast.

In paragraphs 616–618, the writer then reviews three other names of the beast that he gathered from a recension of Victorinus' *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. They are: Antemus, Teitan,[10] and Gensericus. Even though the author of the *Liber* respects Victorinus, calling him a "holy" and "excellent" bishop, he rejects all three of those names because in each case the numerical equivalents of the letters total 666, going beyond 616. In paragraph 619 and 620 the *Liber* then brings the reader back to what he says is a "superior" way of understanding the number of the beast, that is, to use the name of Nero.

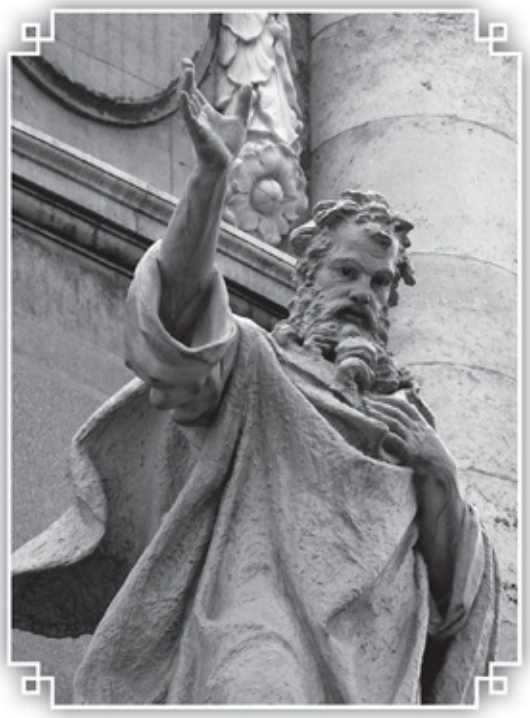
In paragraph 615, the author of the *Liber* was quoting from an ancient source that informed him of the correct way to calculate the number of the beast, i.e., to use the four "strokes, according to the four letters of the name of Nero." In paragraph 620 the writer seems to return to that source to verify that his method of calculation is the best. He writes: "It is read in the mysteries" that the Antichrist "will come from the tribe of Dan . . . in the spirit of Nero and Saar."[11]

Irenaeus, Nero, and the Number of the Beast

The calculation of the number of the beast by early Christians using Nero's name, attested to in the *Liber*, sheds light on the question of whether or not Irenaeus (c. 180), the earliest church father to write about the number of the beast, was aware of this practice. For the past fifty years, scholarly opinion has overwhelmingly asserted that Irenaeus had no knowledge of any Christians in his day associating the number of the beast with Nero. For example, Gregory K. Beale writes:

> Irenaeus discusses various possible identifications for the number of the 'beast' (666). But he does not entertain the possibility that the beast is to be identified with Nero, and he even rejects the possibility that the beast is to be identified with any Roman emperor at all. Such lack of consideration is striking since Nero's infamous reputation as a persecuting tyrant would still have been well known.[12]

> In a 1969 commentary Leon Morris wrote that Irenaeus did not "even include Nero in his list, let alone regard this as a likely conjecture."[13] And Barclay Newman in a 1963 article examining Irenaeus' views on the Apocalypse, claimed likewise: "Where Irenaeus makes reference to the speculation concerning the number 666 . . . in no instance does he even reflect knowledge of the Nero-redivivus myth in the list of interpretations familiar to him."[14]



IRENAEUS OF LYONS

Taking a fresh look at Irenaeus' statements, written about the year 180, one sees in Book 5.30 of *Against Heresies* that Irenaeus reviewed and evaluated three names that equaled the number of the beast, 666. These were 'Evanthas', 'Lateinos', and 'Teitan.' Irenaeus did not want to pronounce positively about any of these names, but thought that it would be better to simply wait for the fulfillment of the prophecy. Nevertheless, he depicted 'Teitan' as the name with the highest probability.

In the same chapter, Irenaeus also explained that there were some in his day who were using a corrupted reading of Rev. 13:18, which read 616 instead of 666. He then informs us that some "have ventured to seek out **a name** which should contain the erroneous and spurious number," and were affirming "that **this name**, hit upon by themselves, is that of him who is to come."[15] From these statements, it seems very likely that Irenaeus knew exactly what that name was, but he never specified for his readership what it was. One reason for this may have been because he believed it was based upon a corrupt version of Scripture, and so he did not want to give it the least bit of credence.[16] Another reason may have been because it was the name of a Roman emperor, and Irenaeus was

adverse to the idea that the number should be interpreted with respect to the Roman emperors.[17] The point is that Irenaeus himself seems to have known the name that these Christians were using to arrive at 616.

What was that name? The *Liber genealogus* may provide a clue. It reveals that some African Christians, whose version of Rev. 13:18 read 616, were using the name 'Antichristus Nero,' and arriving at the number of the beast, 616. No other patristic writing, of which I am aware, provides a name for the beast whose sum totals 616. Therefore, I think it is highly probable that the name to which Irenaeus alluded was Nero, and that he in fact did know of the Nero theory for the number of the beast, but rejected it for the reasons mentioned above.

Summary

Many contemporary commentators believe that the earliest Christians calculated the number of the beast in Rev. 13:18 by adding the sum of the Hebrew letters of the name *nrwn qsr*, transliterated *Neron Kaisar* in Greek.[18] In fact *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* asserts that the Nero identification is "the most popular proposal among scholars today."[19] The *Liber genealogus*, a fifth-century text, spoke of a procedure used by some Christians that adds the sum of the letters in the word "Antichristus" and multiplies it by four, the number of letters in Nero's name. Although these two modes do not correspond exactly, the practice mentioned in the *Liber* may be a vestige of the original method. Another vestige possibly can be found in the anonymous *Handbook on the Apocalypse of the Apostle John* written between the sixth and eighth centuries. On Rev. 13:18 it says: "*The number of his name* is understood according to the Hebrew language."[20]

Against critics who regard the Nero identification of the number of the beast as a novelty not to be found in the early church, the *Liber genealogus* shows that it did in fact exist in the earliest centuries of Christian history.

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1. Much of the information in this essay appeared in Francis X. Gumerlock, "Nero Antichrist: Patristic Evidence of the Use of Nero's Name in Calculating the Number of the Beast (Rev. 13:18)," *Westminster Theological Journal* 68 (2006): 347–60.

2. One indication of Donatist authorship is in section 546: "and there was war between them [Rehoboam and Jeroboam] all the days of their lives, just as there is now between true Christians and false Catholics." Quoted in Maureen A. Tilley, "Sustaining Donatist Self-Identity: From the Church of the Martyrs to the

Collecta of the Desert" *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5:1 (1997):21–35 esp. 30 n. 42. On Donatism, see also Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa*. Translated Texts for Historians 24 (Liverpool, England: Liverpool University Press, 1996); William H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952, 1971).

3. Theodore Mommsen, ed., *Liber genealogus.* In *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi, Vol. 9: Chronica Minora Saec IV. V. VI. VII.* (Berlin: Wedimann, 1892; Repr., Munich: Strauss and Cramer, 1981), 154–93.

4. Brief descriptions of the *Liber genealogus* are in G. Broszio, "Liber genealogus" in *Dictionary of Early Christian Literature*, (ed. Siegmar Döpp and Wilhelm Geerlings; trans. Matthew O'Connell: New York: Crossroad, 2000), 381; Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 139–40; Martine Dulaey, *Victorin de Poetovio premier exégète latin* (2 vols., Paris: Institut d' Études Augustiniennes, 1993), 1: 346; Paula Fredriksen, "Apocalypse and Redemption in Early Christianity from John of Patmos to Augustine of Hippo," *Vigiliae Christianae* 45 (1991): 151–83 esp. 182 n. 86; Antonio Isola, *I Christiani dell'Africa Vandalica nei Sermones del Tempo (429–534)* (Milan: Jaco, 1990), 33; Paul Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire de l'afrique chrétienne*, Vol. 4: Le Donatisme (Paris, 1912; Repr. Brussels: Culture et Civilisation, 1963), 102; Frend, *Donatist Church*, 303.

5. 'Gensericus' is a variant spelling of the fifth century Vandal king, Gaiseric. He ruled in North Africa from 429–477 and established a monarchy there that lasted about a century, until 533.

6. Besides Victorinus among the fathers of the second and third centuries, Irenaeus (*On Heresies*, 5.30,3; ANF 1: 559) thought "Teitan" was the most probable explanation, and Hippolytus (*Antichrist* 50; ANF 5: 215) mentioned it as a possibility.

7. In paragraphs 616–618, the *Liber* is quoting from and paraphrasing a recension of Victorinus of Pettua, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. On Rev. 13:18. CSEL 49: 124–127. ANF 7: 356. Victorinus wrote his commentary about the year 260; and Jerome's recension dates to about 398. The recension that the author of the *Liber genealogus* used, which mentions the Vandal king Gaeseric, is later than Jerome's.

8. The full Latin text upon which this translation is based is included in Gumerlock, "Nero Antichrist," 351–2.

9. Roger Gryson, ed., *Commentaria minora in Apocalypsin Johannis.* CCSL **107**: 143–4, 149, 151, 276; L. J. Lietaert Peerbolte, *The Antecedents of Antichrist* (New York: Brill, 1996), 151; Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece et Latine* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaff, 1993), 659 in apparatus on Rev. 13:18; Kenneth B. Steinhauser, *The Apocalypse Commentary of Tyconius: A History of Its Reception and Influence* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 300; J.M. Lawrence, "Nero Redivivus," *Fides et Historia* 11 (1978): 54–66 at 55; P.J. Williams, "P115 and the Number of the Beast," *Tyndale Bulletin* 58:1 (2007):151-3; David C. Parker, "A New Oxyrhynchus Papyrus of Revelation: P115 (P. Oxy. 4499)," *New Testament Studies* 46 (2000): 159–74; Germain Morin, ed., *Sancti Caesarii Arelatensis opera varia,* 2 vols. (Maretioli [Bruges, Belgium]: Desclée, 1942), 2: 247; Robert H. Charles, *Studies in the Apocalypse* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1913), 47–8.

10. 'Diclvx' was a Latin form of 'Teitan.'

11. The "mysteries" was probably a collection of prophecies similar to the well-known Sibylline Oracles. Lactantius in *Divine Institutes* 1.6,1 (SC 326:72) referred to the Sibylline Oracles as "divine testimonies" (*divina testimonia*).On "Saar" John Lightfoot's comments from his 1655 commentary on the book of Revelation may provide insight. According to David Brady ("The Number of the Beast in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century England," *Evangelical Quarterly* 45:4 [Oct.–Dec. 1973]: 219–240 at 223): "Lightfoot finds a key to interpretation [of 666] in Num. 13:13 where the name of a man is given amongst those who went to search out the land of Canaan. His name is *stwr* (Sethur), a name which means 'hidden' or 'mystery', a name by which Rome is again referred to in Rev. 17:5 and one which has the required numerical value of 666."

12. Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 20.

13. Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 38, 174. Cited in Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation.* Rev. ed. (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1998), 203–4.

14. Barclay Newman, "The Fallacy of the Domitian Hypothesis," *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963): 133–9 esp. 136.

15. Irenaeus, *On Heresies*, 5.30, 1. ANF 1: 558.

16. Gregory C. Jenks, *The Origins and Early Development of the Antichrist Myth* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), 89: "Irenaeus, however, considered this alternative reading [616] to be an error of too great a magnitude to be allowed to pass unrebuked, since it not only involved an alteration to the text of the Bible but would also mislead the faithful into seeking Antichrist under a name whose letters totaled 616 instead of 666."

17. Barclay Newman, "The Fallacy of the Domitian Hypothesis," *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963): 133-9 at 136–7: "Where Irenaeus makes reference to the speculation concerning the number 666, he does so to quell and to refute any mistaken notion that this number should be interpreted with regard to the Roman Emperors . . . . Neither does Irenaeus afford any compassion for those who seek to uncover some contemporary-historical allusion in the reading 616 which occurs in some manuscripts in place of 666." A. J. Visser ["A Bird's-Eye View of Ancient Christian Eschatology," Numen 14 (1967): 4–22 at 11] observed that Irenaeus did not identify "the beasts with the Roman empire (as St. John undoubtedly did)."

18. Some include Ralph E. Bass, *Back to the Future: A Study in the Book of Revelation* (Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press, 2004), 318; Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, Rev. ed. (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2002), 37–50; Gary DeMar, *End Times Fiction: A Biblical Consideration of Left Behind Theology* (Nashville: Nelson, 2001), 148; Jay Adams, *The Time is at Hand: Prophecy and the Book of Revelation* (Woodruff, SC: Timeless Texts, 2000), 73, n. 1. For more comprehensive lists, see Gumerlock, "Nero Antichrist," 348, n. 5; and Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 200.

19. Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary, New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 799.

20. *Commemoratorium de Apocalypsi Johannis Apostoli [Handbook on the Apocalypse of the Apostle John]*. CCSL 107: 221. My translation of the Latin *'numerus nominis eius' intelligitur iuxta hebream linguam.*

TWELVE

NERO THE SIXTH KING

(REV. 16:14–17:11)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents comments on Revelation 16 & 17 by early Christians who interpreted the respective visions in light of first-century historical persons and events. It will show Caesarius of Arles interpreting the Battle of Armageddon as the first-century Roman-Judean conflict. It also gives translations of patristic and medieval commentaries on Rev. 17 in which Nero is listed as the sixth king, the one reigning when John wrote the book of Revelation.

REVELATION 16:14

The "War of the Great Day of God," the Destruction of Jerusalem

> For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.

On this passage Caesarius of Arles, in a homily on Revelation written between the years 510 and 537, interpreted the "great day" of God as the desolation of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. under Titus and Vespasian. He wrote: "On this passage the 'great day' is able to be understood as that desolation when Jerusalem was besieged by Titus and Vespasian, when, with the exception of those who were led into captivity, eleven hundred thousand deaths were reported."[1] The source for Caesarius' knowledge of the number of people who died in that siege was most likely the fourth-or fifth-century text *On the Jewish War*, which was attributed in a manuscript to Ambrose of Milan but has been associated with the name Hegesippus.[2] Interestingly, Caesarius' interpretation here does not

correspond with the concept of a future Battle of Armageddon. Rather, “the war of the great day” prophecy in this passage, he said, could be understood as having been fulfilled in the Roman-Judean war of the first-century.

REVELATION 17:3, 8

Nero as the Beast Who Was and Is About to Come

> And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns . . . The beast that you saw was and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and to go to destruction.

Quodvultdeus, a bishop of Carthage writing in exile about 450, commented on Revelation 17:7-12: “Therefore, the eighth king, whom he [John] calls Antichrist, some want to understand as Nero, so that he is *the beast who was, and is not*, and will come again (Rev. 17:8).”[3] Here Quodvultdeus in the fifth century is aware of some who interpreted “the beast which was and is not and is about to come” as Nero. He is probably referring to those who believed that the end-time Antichrist would be Nero who will have been raised up from hell.

In the ninth century, Haymo of Auxerre (d. 875) commented similarly on Rev. 17:8, writing: “Also we ought to understand this generally about the entire body of evil people, although some refer this to Nero, asserting that he will be raised from hell and receive a future kingdom.”[4] Although he personally did not hold that position, he was aware that some interpreted the beast as Nero, who in the last days would be resurrected from the infernal regions and receive a kingdom.

REVELATION 17:9–11

Nero as the One Reigning When John Prophesied

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

At least four commentators on the Apocalypse from the Middle Ages saw the sixth king, the one who “is” reigning at the time John wrote the book of Revelation, as Nero. According to some contemporary scholars, such as J. Ramsey Michaels, Rev. 17:10 “offers the best hope of dating the book [of

Revelation.]”[5] For, if one can identify the sixth king—the “one” who “is” reigning at the time of John’s vision—then one can fix the date of the Apocalypse within the years of that emperor’s reign. Kenneth Gentry expressed this as well, writing, “We find an extremely important chronology indicator in Revelation 17 where the ‘sixth king’ is mentioned;”[6] and J. Christian Wilson affirmed this saying, “The most important internal evidence for dating Revelation is the passage chapter 17:9–11.”[7]

The four medieval commentaries on Revelation which list Nero as the sixth king, the one who is, are: the Irish Reference Bible from about the year 750, the commentary of Beatus of Liebana from 786, a tenth-century commentary in a manuscript in Cambridge, and the commentary of Nicholas of Gorran c. 1263–1285.

The Irish Reference Bible is an anonymous Latin commentary on the whole Bible, from the second half of the eighth century, perhaps as early as the year 750.[8] On Rev. 17:10 it reads:

> *Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come,* that is, Gaius Julius Caesar the first emperor, the second Augustus under whom Christ was born, the third Tiberius under whom he suffered, the fourth Claudius under whom the famine in the Acts of the Apostles occurred (cf. Acts 11:38), the fifth Galba, the sixth Nero...[9]

Beatus’ commentary on this same passage reads: “Gaius Julius Caesar the first . . . The second . . . Augustus . . . under whom the Lord was born . . . The third Tiberius under whom He died . . . The fourth Claudius, under whom the famine in the Acts of the Apostles is described (cf. Acts 11:38), the fifth Galba . . . the sixth Nero . . . ”[10]

The commentary on this passage in a tenth-century manuscript at Cambridge reads: “Gaius Julius Caesar the first emperor, the second Augustus under whom the Lord was born, the third Tiberius under whom He died, the fourth Claudius under whom the famine in the Acts of the Apostles occurred (cf. Acts 11:38), the fifth Galba, the sixth Nero . . . ”[11]

Finally, the commentary by Nicholas of Gorran has: “The first was Gaius Caesar, the second Augustus, under whom the Lord was born. The third Tiberius, under whom He died, the third [sic] Claudius, under whom occurred the famine, Acts 11. The sixth is said [to be] Nero.”[12]

Martin McNamara, who wrote an article on the commentary in the tenth-

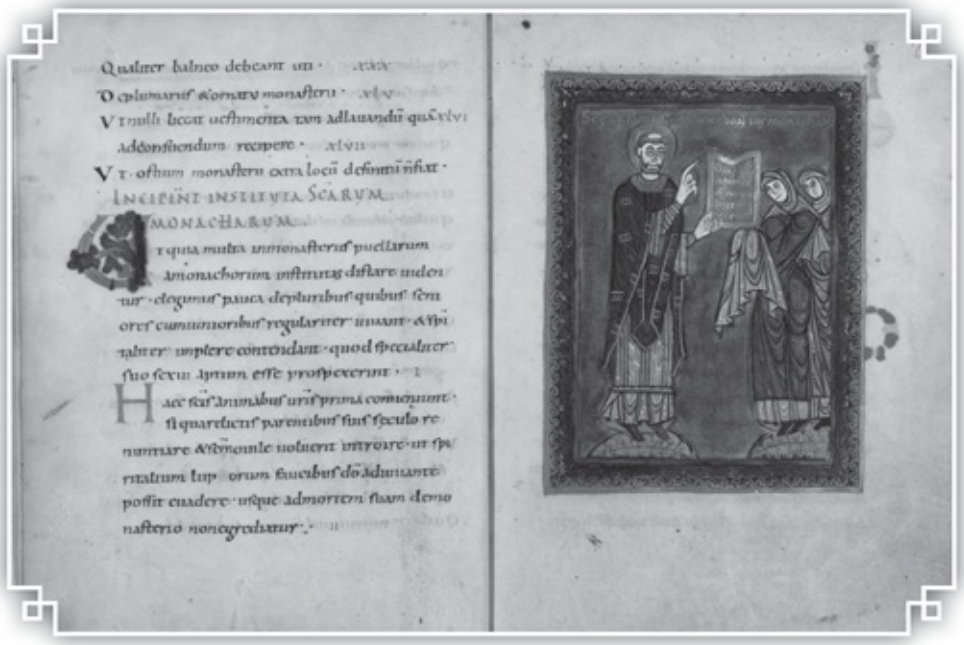
century manuscript at Cambridge, said that the reason that the Cambridge commentary and the Irish Reference Bible have almost identical comments on some passages of Revelation is not because of dependence upon one another, but because they both used a common source, a lost Apocalypse commentary that he dated before 750. It is very likely that all four of these commentators were using that source, that is, the lost commentary.[13] Scholars believe, however, that the lost commentary is almost entirely contained within the Apocalypse commentary in the tenth-century manuscript at Cambridge currently being edited by Roger Gryson for publication by Brepols. After it is published perhaps the lost commentary can be reconstructed and some determination can be made about how far back into the early church that commentary stems.[14]

Gryson believes that the commentary on Rev. 17:10 which lists Nero as the the one who "is" reigning at the time John wrote Revelation, which is also the source of the aforementioned medieval comments, is that of Tyconius of Carthage. Tyconius was a Donatist layman from North Africa who wrote a commentary on the Apocalypse about the year 380. Although Tyconius' commentary has been lost, early medieval exegetes quoted from it so often that scholars believed it could be reconstructed. In 2011, Gryson did just that. His reconstruction of Tyconius' comments on Rev. 17:10 read as follows:

> FIVE HAVE FALLEN, ONE IS, ANOTHER HAS NOT YET COME, AND WHEN HE WILL HAVE COME, IT IS NECESSARY FOR HIM TO REMAIN A SHORT TIME, that is, Gaius Juilius Caesar the first, the second Augustus under whom the Lord was born, the third Tiberius under whom He died, the fourth Claudius under whom the famine in the Acts of the Apostles happened, the fifth Galba, the sixth Nero, the seventh Otho about whom he said 'he has not yet come, and when he will have come, it is necessary for him to remain a short time,' that is, in a figure of the revealed Antichrist; for he reigned for three months and six days.[15]

Despite his exclusion of Gaius Caligula from the list and his incorrect listing of the succession of emperors (The correct succession is Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Gaius Caligula, Nero, Galba), Tyconius listed Nero as the sixth king who was reigning at the time John wrote the Apocalypse. This is another patristic witness for a Neronic date of the Apocalypse. This view is similar to those expressed today by various partial preterists, who see Nero as the sixth king, and who believe that Revelation was written late in his reign. For example, Kenneth Gentry comments that it "seems indisputably clear that the book of Revelation must be dated in the reign of Nero Caesar, and consequently *before*

his death in June, A.D. 68. He is the sixth king."[16] R. C. Sproul expressed that a "more natural approach" to Rev. 17:10 than starting with Augustus "is to begin the list of kings with Julius Caesar . . . In this series . . . the sixth king is Nero. If he is the king referred to in Revelation in the present tense, then this adds considerable weight to the argument for dating the book in the mid- to late-sixties."[17] Hank Hanegraaff, on this passage, sees Nero "presently on the throne," as does Ralph Bass and Kym Smith.[18] And Arthur M. Ogden writes that Rev. 17:9–11 supports an early date for Revelation of 64–68 A.D. For, "[w]hen John sees the Apocalypse, Nero, the sixth Emperor of Rome, is ruling."[19]



CAESARIUS OF ARLES

Summary

In the early sixth century, Caesarius of Arles gave as an acceptable interpretation of Rev. 16:14 about the gathering of people "for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty" the war against Jerusalem by the Romans under Vespasian and Titus 68–70 A.D. Both Quodvultdeus in the fifth century and Haimo in the ninth century mentioned that some believed, whether in their time or before their time, that the beast of Rev. 17:8 referred to Nero.

At least four commentaries on the book of Revelation, written between the

eighth and thirteenth centuries, saw Nero as the sixth king of Rev. 17:10, the one who "is" reigning. Concerning the source of these comments, they are thought to have stemmed from a commentary that dates before 750 but is now lost (although there is great promise for its reconstruction), or from the lost, but now reconstructed commentary of Tyconius of Carthage, who wrote about the year 380. These rather widespread written records of Nero reigning as the sixth king is significant, because in them is the implication that John wrote the Apocalypse at an early date, during the reign of Nero from 54–68 A.D. This corresponds with the many partial preterist interpreters of Revelation in contemporary Christianity,[20] and of course differs from those who hold that John wrote the book of Revelation around 95 or 96 A.D. during the reign of Domitian.

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1. Caesarius of Arles, *Exposition of the Apocalypse of Saint John*, Homily 13. Germain Morin, ed., *Sancti Caesarii Arelatensis opera varia*, Vol. 2 (Maretioli [Bruges, Belgium]: Desclée, 1942), 255. My translation of the Latin *Potest hoc loco dies magnus intellegi desolation, quando a Tito et Vespasiano obsessa est Hierusolima, ubi exceptis his qui in captivitatem ducti sunt, undecies centena milia mortua referuntur.* An English translation by William Weinrich of this commentary is scheduled for publication by InterVarsity Press in their Ancient Christian Texts series.

2.Vincentius Ussani, ed., *Hegesippi qui dicitur Historiae Libri V [Five Books of Hegesippus which are called Histories]*. CSEL 66: 404. I am indebted to Kenneth B. Steinhauser's *The Apocalypse Commentary of Tyconius: A History of Its Reception and Influence* (New York: Peeters, 1987), 49, for pointing out Caesarius' source. The number of eleven hundred thousand Jews killed in that war is also in Caesarius' *Sermon 127*. In Mary Magdeleine Mueller, trans., *Saint Caesarius of Arles. Sermons*, Vol. 2 (81–186) FC 47 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1981), 222. On the text of pseudo-Hegesippus, see Angelo Di Berardino, *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 371.

3. Quodvultdeus, *On the Promises and Predictions of God*, Dimidium Temporis, 8. CCSL 60: 201. On Quodvultdeus' eschatology, Daniel Van Slyke, *Quodvultdeus of Carthage. The Apocalyptic Theology of a Roman African in Exile*. Early Christian Studies 5. (Strathfield, Australia: St Pauls [sic] Publications, 2003).

4. Haymo of Auxerre, *Seven Books of Exposition on the Apocalypse of Blessed John.* PL 117: 1146. My translation of the Latin *Quod et generaliter de omni corpore malorum intelligere debemus, quamvis quidam hoc referent ad Neronem, asserentes eum ab inferis resuscitandum, et regnum futurum accipiendum.* In PL 117, the commentary is attributed to Haimo of Halberstadt, but Eduard Riggenbach demonstrated that it is really the work of Haymo of Auxerre. See Riggenbach, *Die älteste lateinischen Kommentare zum Häbräerbrief* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1907) discussed in Kevin L. Hughes, "The Apostle and Adversary: Paul and Antichrist in the Early Medieval Exegesis of 2 Thessalonians," diss. (University of Chicago, 1997), 143–4.

5. J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1992), 44.

6. Kenneth L. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Atlanta: American Vision, 1998), 146. Similarly, Michael Barber, *Coming Soon: Unlocking the Book of Revelation* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road, 2005), 6: "Another source for determining which tyrant was responsible for banishing John

is the very text of the book of Revelation . . . For example, in Revelation 17, we read about seven hills, which symbolize seven kings . . . ”

7. J. Christian Wilson, “The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation,” *New Testament Studies* 39 (1993): 587–605 at 55. Other contemporary scholars include Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 403: “The references in Revelation 17:8ff certainly appear to give some kind of clue as to the particular historical setting.”; and Albert A. Bell, Jr., “The Date of John’s Apocalypse. The Evidence of Some Roman Historians Reconsidered,” *New Testament Studies* 25 (1978): 93–102 at 97: “The identity of the fifth head or emperor in 17: 9–11 is the crux of the problem.”

8. On the Irish Reference Bible, see Gerard MacGinty, ed., *The Reference Bible, Das Bibelwerk: Pauca problesmata de enigmatibus ex tomis canonicis, nunc prompta sunt Praefatio et libri de Pentateucho Moysi.* CCCM 173 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000); Joseph F. Kelly, “A Catalogue of Early Medieval Hiberno-Latin Biblical Commentaries (I),” *Traditio* 44 (1988): 538–71 at 552; Martin McNamara, “Plan and Source Analysis of *Das Bibelwerk*, Old Testament,” in Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter, eds., *Irland und die Christenheit* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987), 84–112; Kelly, “Das Bibelwerk: Organization and Quellenanalyse of the New Testament Section,” in Chatháin and Richter, *Irland und die Christenheit,* 113–23; Kelly, “Bede and the Irish Exegetical Tradition on the Apocalypse,” *Revue bénédictine* 92: 3–4 (1982): 393–406.

9. CCSL 107: 286. The commentary on Revelation in the Irish Reference Biblewas edited recently under the title “De enigmatibus ex Apocalypsi Johannis [Onthe Mysteries of the Apocalypse of John],” in Roger Gryson, ed., *Commentaria minora in Apocalypsin Johannis*. CCSL 107 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 231–95.In the summer of 2011 Thomas Croteau of Commerce City, Colorado translated the commentary into English, but has not yet been published.

10. Beatus of Liébana, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin*, IX. In E. Romero-Pose, ed., *Sancti Beati a Liebana commentarius in Apocalypsin*, Vol. Alterum (Rome: Typis Officinae Polygraphicae, 1985), 282–3. On the dating of Beatus’ commentary, Steinhauser, *The Apocalypse Commentary of Tyconius*, 143, 1614; and Marcia Cohn Growdon, “The Narrative Sequence in the Preface to the Gerona Commentaries of Beatus on the Apocalypse,” diss. (Stanford University, 1976), 1–2. The hypothesis of Henry A. Sanders (*Beati in Apocalypsi libri duodecim.* Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome, Vol. 7 [Rome: American Academy in Rome, 1930]) that Beatus wrote a first edition in 776, revised it in 784, and wrote a final edition in 786, is widely accepted.

11. Cambridge MS CUL Dd, X. 16, fol. 98v. The Latin was obtained through personal correspondence with Martin McNamara, professor emeritus at Mill-town Institute of Theology and Philosophy in Dublin, who wrote an article about that commentary.

12. Nicholas of Gorran, *Acta Apostolorum et singulas apostolorum Iacobi,Petri, Iohannis et Iudae canonicas epistolas et Apocalypsim commentarii* (Antwerp, 1620), 273. The Anderson rare book room of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania owns a copy of it. Call # BS 2625. N5 1620.

13. Nicholas of Gorran said that his source was Jerome, but the comment does not appear in the authentic Apocalypse commentary of Jerome. Apparently, the now-lost commentary to which he had access in the thirteen-century, was at that time attributed to Jerome.

14. McNamara, “The newly-identified Cambridge Apocalypse Commentary and the Reference Bible. A Preliminary Enquiry,” Peritia. Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland 15 (2001): 208–256 at 250–51. It is possible that the lost commentary is that of Cominus Scotus, a disciple of Saint Columbanus (d. 615). On the lost commentary of Cominus Scotus, see Joseph Kelly, “A Catalogue of Early Medieval Hiberno-Latin Biblical Commentaries,” Traditio 45 (1989–1990): 394–434 at 433.

15. Roger Gryson, ed., *Tyconii Afri Expositio Apocalypseos*. CCSL 107A (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 206. My review of Gryson’s reconstructed commentary of Tyconius is scheduled to be published in the spring

2012 issue of *Westminster Theological Journal.*

16. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation*, Revised (Atlanta: American Vision, 1998), 158.

17. R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 147.

18. Hank Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code* (Nashville: Nelson, 2007), 114; Ralph E. Bass, Jr., *Back to the Future. A Study in the Book of Revelation* (Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press, 2004), 26, 304; Kym Smith, Redating the Revelation and . . . (Blackwood, South Australia: Sherwood Publications, 2001), 50.

19. Arthur M. Ogden, *The Avenging of the Apostles and Prophets: Commentary on Revelation*, 2nd ed. (Somerset, KY: Ogden Publications, 1991), 13, 331.

20. Andy M. Woods, "The First Beast of Revelation 13 Has Not Yet Appeared in World History: A Comparison of the Preterist and Futurist Views" Master's thesis (Dallas Theological Seminary, 2002), 56, notes that "Chilton, Gentry, and Clark view the sixth king as Nero" and provides in footnotes the bibliographical information where their views can be found.

THIRTEEN

A SLAUGHTER IN THE LAST DAYS

(JAMES 5:3–6)

INTRODUCTION

James, in his epistle, wrote very sharply against certain people who were storing up treasure "in the last days" and fattening themselves for a "day of slaughter." At least four medieval commentators on the Epistle of James interpreted the "day of slaughter" in James 5:5 as the first-century destruction upon Jerusalem and Judea at the hands of the Romans. These included a Greek commentary that circulated under the name of Oecumenius and commentaries by Bede, Theophylact, and Martin of Laon.

JAMES 5:3–5

The Day of Slaughter as Destruction of Judea by the Romans

> Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! Behold the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.

On this passage the eighth-century Greek commentary on James that circulated under the name of Oecumenius stated: "*You have lived in pleasures.* The Jewish leaders ran around devouring the poor and they became fat with gifts which were brought to them by all. But they were being prepared for destruction under the hands of the Romans."[1]



THE VENERABLE BEDE

Bede (d. 735), a Latin commentator from eighth-century England, wrote on this passage that “it becomes evident that this was fulfilled in their case after the slaying of James himself, when the city of Jerusalem and likewise the whole province of Judea was taken and destroyed by the Romans . . . ”[2]

In the eleventh century, Theophylact of Ocrida in Bulgaria wrote in his commentary on this passage in James: “This accusation is a digression directed against the Jewish leaders who robbed the poor and covered themselves with all manner of riches. But they were being prepared for destruction at the hands of the Romans, not least because they condemned our Lord to death.”[3]

Similarly, in the thirteenth century, Martin of Laon interpreted James 5:4–6 saying: “Therefore, this wrath of God that they have treasured up for themselves was fulfilled in them not only in the future, but also in the present life, when Jerusalem, indeed all Judea, was besieged and devastated by the Romans in retribution for the blood of the Lord and the other evils that they had committed.”[4]

Summary

Four commentators between the eighth and thirteenth centuries saw the "day of slaughter" in the last days in James 5:3–5 as a prophecy of or reference to when Judea and Jerusalem were destroyed by the Romans in the first-century. This line of interpretation corresponds to how some partial preterists today interpret the same passages in light of the first-century Roman-Judean conflict.

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1. Pseudo-Oecumenius, *Commentary on the General Epistles*. PG 119: 503. My translation of the Latin *In deliciis vixistis. Discurrebant Judaici principes devorantes paupers, et pinguescebant honoribus qui deferebantur ab omnibus, sed parabantur ad occisionem sub minibus Romanorum.*

2. Bede, *Commentary on James*. David Hurst, trans., *Bede the Venerable: Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles.* Cistercian Studies Series, No. 82. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1985), 58.

3. Theophylact, *Commentary on James*. Cited in Gerald Bray, ed., *James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament, Vol. 11 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 55.

4. Martin of Laon, *Exposition of the Epistle of James*. PL 209: 209. My translation of the Latin *In die occisionis . . . Hanc ergo iram Dei, quam sibi thesaurizaverunt, non solum in future, verum etiam in praesenti vita est in eis completa, cum Jerusalem, imo omnis Judea, expugnaretur ac vastaretur a Romanis in ultionem Dominici sanguinis, et caeterorum scelerum quae fecerunt.*

FOURTEEN

NERO AS THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY

(2 THESS. 2:7)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores patristic and medieval interpretation of the phrase "mystery of iniquity" or "mystery of lawlessness" written by the apostle Paul in 2 Thess. 2:7. While many today believe that it refers to a future Antichrist, several well known early Christian writers saw it as a reference to Nero. This corresponds in part to some partial preterist interpretations of 2 Thess 2. For example, Kenneth Gentry wrote that 2 Thessalonians was written during the reign of Claudius, before Nero, and the "man of lawlessness" (2 Thess. 2:8) prophesied as yet coming was Nero. Gentry explained that *the mystery of lawlessness already at work* (2 Thess. 2:7) "could be an allusion to the evil conniving and plotting of Nero's mother Agrippina, who (apparently) poisons Claudius so that Nero can ascend the imperial throne."[1]

2 THESSALONIANS 2:7

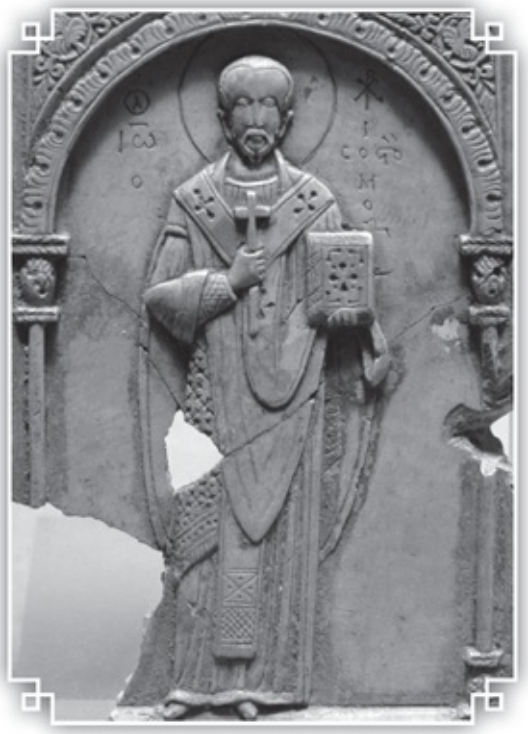
Nero as the Mystery of Iniquity Already at Work

> For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.

An early expositor on Paul's epistles, Ambrosiaster (fl. 370s), wrote that "the mystery of iniquity began with Nero, who in his zeal for idolatry killed the apostles at the instigation of his father the devil, and went on to Diocletian, and most recently Julian."[2] Ambrosiaster associated the "mystery of iniquity" with the persecution and anti-Christian actions of the Roman emperors, beginning with Nero and going right up through to the fourth century when Diocletian tried

to stamp out Christianity and Julian the Apostate attempted to reinstate paganism in the empire.

John Chrysostom (d. 407) preached on this passage from 2 Thessalonians. In that homily he saw the "mystery of lawlessness" as the emperor Nero, whom he said was a type of the Antichrist to come. His homily reads: "'For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work.' He speaks here of Nero, as if he were the type of Antichrist. For he too wished to be thought a god."[3]



JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Jerome (d. 420) commented on this passage in a letter he wrote in response to biblical questions that someone had asked of him. He explained the meaning of 2 Thess. 2:7 in this manner:

> *For the mystery of iniquity is already at work, such that he who now restrains, let him restrain until he be taken from the midst, and then that lawless one will be revealed,* has this sense: With the many evils and sins with which Nero, the most impure of the Caesars, oppresses the world, the coming of the Antichrist shares. And because he [Antichrist] is going to operate afterward, it is fulfilled in him [Nero] in part, in that the Roman Empire, which now holds all nations, should recede and be taken from the midst, and then Antichrist, the fountain of iniquity, will come, *whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth.*[4]

For Jerome, Nero partially fulfilled the "mystery of iniquity," which will

ultimately be fulfilled by a future Antichrist.

Augustine (d. 430) in his *City of God* explained various interpretations that he had heard or read concerning this passage. He wrote:

> For what does he mean by "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now holdeth, let him hold until he be taken out of the way: and then shall the wicked be revealed?" I frankly confess I do not know what he means. I will nevertheless mention such conjectures as I have heard or read.
>
> Some think that the Apostle Paul referred to the Roman empire, and that he was unwilling to use language more explicit, lest he should incur the calumnious charge of wishing ill to the empire which it was hoped would be eternal; so that in saying, "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work,' he alluded to Nero, whose deeds already seemed to be as the deeds of Antichrist.[5]

Augustine confessed that he did not know how to interpret the passage, but related that some thought the "mystery of iniquity" was an allusion to Nero because his wicked deeds seemed to be like those of Antichrist.

In the East a few years later Theodoret of Cyrus (d. 460) commented on the Pauline epistles and touched upon the phrase in this way: "*The mystery of iniquity is in fact already at work* (v. 7). Some commentators claimed that Nero is given the name *mystery of iniquity*, and that he had become a worker of godlessness. It is my view, on the contrary, that the apostle is indicating the heresies that had sprung up . . . [6] Theodoret himself held that the "mystery of iniquity" referred to heresies that had arisen in the time of the apostle Paul. Nevertheless, he was aware that some commentators claimed that the "mystery of iniquity" was a name for Nero.

In the Carolingian era Sedulius Scotus (fl. 848–858) also commented upon this passage in his commentary *On All the Epistles of Blessed Paul.* He explained: "*He who now*, the king of the Romans, *holds* the kingdom, *let him hold* his kingdom *until he is taken from the midst*, that is, until the kingdom which is now holding [the reign] is removed out of the way, then Antichrist will be revealed." Then Sedulius gave an alternative interpretation, writing: "Or in another way of interpreting it: *He who now holds*, that is, Nero, *let* another Nero of the same name *hold* then, *until from the midst*, that is, in the midst the reign of that Nero then, Antichrist will be born."[7] This second interpretation, which in all likelihood he gathered from a patristic source, sees the passage as a reference to both Nero and a last-days emperor named Nero, during whose reign the Antichrist would be born.

A few centuries later Theophylact of Ochrida (d. 1108) in Bulgaria commented in Greek upon the passage, and wrote in a manner similar to that of Chrysostom. "*For the mystery of iniquity is already at work.* In this manner he speaks of Nero, who was a figure of Antichrist. For, he also was unclean and desired to be called God."[8]

Peter Lombard (d. 1160) has been called "the Master of the Sentences." His book, *Sentences*, was used as a theology textbook for hundreds of years in university theology programs of the late middle ages. Lombard also commented upon many books of the Bible. On this passage in 2 Thess. 2 he said that the "mystery of iniquity" was the killing and persecution of Christians carried out by Nero, which was a shadow of the persecution of the Antichrist to come. He wrote:

> For the devil already is working the mystery of iniquity . . . Thus [Paul] calls the killing of the saints and persecution of the Christian faithful carried out by Nero and his captain 'the mystery of iniquity' . . . Even then [in Paul's time], the devil was already secretly at work through Nero and the others, killing the martyrs, just as at that time he will work through Antichrist, killing Elijah, Enoch, and many others . . . And Nero and the rest are shadows of the future, of Antichrist, just as Abel and David were figures of Christ.[9]

Peter Auriol (d. 1332) in his *Compendium of the Literal Sense of the Entire Scripture* actually calls Nero "Antichrist." On 2 Thess. 2:3–7, he explained: "He [Paul] writes about the advent of a certain foreseen Antichrist, namely, of impious Nero, and about the destruction of the Roman empire."[10] Auriol, perhaps thinking that Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians during the reign of Claudius, seems to have interpreted the passage as a prophecy of Nero Antichrist who was still to come. Then, like the other writers cited above, he also believed in a future Antichrist called by him in a later comment the "great Antichrist."

Summary

In the history of biblical exegesis by both Greek and Latin authors, it was very common to see an allusion to Nero as the "mystery of iniquity" mentioned in 2 Thess. 2:7. In Greek commentaries this interpretation appears in Chrysostom, Theodoret, and Theophylact. Among the Latin writers Jerome, Augustine, and a host of medieval commentators were aware of such interpretation. This interpretation corresponds in part with some modern partial preterist interpretation of the passage. However, many partial preterists do not hold that

the emperor Nero *foreshadowed* a last days Antichrist, whose deeds will be similar to those of Nero. Rather, they believe that 2 Thess. 2 is "not describing a future Antichrist who will make a covenant with the Jews during a period popularly described as the Great Tribulation," but a man revealed in Paul's own day.[11]

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1. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Perilous Times: A Study in Eschatological Evil* (Texarkana, AR: Covenant Media Press, 1999), 106.

2. Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on the 2 Thessalonians*. On 2 Thess. 2:7. In Gerald L. Bray, trans., *Commentaries on Galatians–Philemon*. *Ambrosiaster*. Ancient Christian Texts. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 115.

3. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Thessalonians*, 4. On 2 Thess. 2. NPNF, 1st series, 13: 389.

4. Jerome, *Epistle 121 to Algasia*. PL 22: 1037. My translation of the Latin *Jam enim mysterium operatur iniquitatis, tantum ut qui tenet nunc, teneat, donec de media fiat, et tunc revelabitur ille iniquus, hunch abet sensum: Multis malis atque peccatis, quibus Nero impurissimus Caesarum mundum permit, Antichristi parturitur adventus, et quod ille operaturus est postea, in isto ex parte competur, tantum ut Romanum imperium, quod nunc universas gentes tenet, recedat, et de media fiat, et tunc Antichristus veniet, fons iniquitatis quem Dominus Jesus interficiet spiritu oris sui.*

5. Augustine, *On the City of God*, 20.19. Marcus Dods, trans., *The City of God by Saint Augustine* (New York: Random House, 1950), 739.

6. Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentary on the Letters of St. Paul*, Vol. 2. On 2 Thess 2. Robert Charles Hill, trans. (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001), 129.

7. Sedulius Scotus, *On All the Epistles of Blessed Paul*. On 2 Thess. 2. PL 103: **223**. My translation of the Latin *Qui nunc. Rex Romanorum. Tenet. Regnum sum. Donec de medio fiat. Hoc est, donec regnum, quod nunc tenet, de medio auferatur, priusquam Antichristus reveletur. Aliter: Ut qui nunc tenet, id est, Nero, teneat tunc ejusdem nominis alter Nero. Donec de medio, hoc est, regno mediante illius tunc Neronis, nascatur Antichristus.*

8. Theophylact, *Exposition on 2 Thessalonians*. On 2 Thess 2:7. PG124: 1342. My translation of the Latin *Nam mysterium jam operatur iniquitatis. Neronem ita appellat, qui erat figura Antichristi. Etenim immundus erat, ac Deus quaerebat nominari.*

9. Peter Lombard (PL 192: 318C) cited in Kevin L. Hughes, "The Apostle and the Adversary: Paul and Antichrist in the Early Medieval Exegesis of 2 Thessalonians," diss. (University of Chicago, 1997), 228.

10. Peter Auriol, *Compendium Sensus Litteralis Totius Divinae Scripturae [Compendium of the Literal Sense of the Entire Divine Scripture* (Quaracchi: College of St. Bonaventure, 1896), 318. On 2 Thess. 2:3–7. My translation of the Latin *agit de adventu cuiusdam antichristi praevii, scilicet Neronis impii, et de destructione imperii romani.*

11. Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 4th rev. ed. (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), 308.

FIFTEEN

MORE PRETERIST INTERPRETATIONS OF MATTHEW 24

(MATT. 24:5–21)

INTRODUCTION

Most early and medieval commentaries on Matthew 24 and the Olivet Discourse interpreted Jesus' words as prophecies of both the coming calamity upon Jerusalem in the near future and the events associated with the end of the world, such as the general resurrection, the Second Coming of Christ, and the Last Judgment. In a lengthy essay entitled "The Olivet Discourse in Ancient and Medieval Christianity" published in 2006, I showed how many early and medieval Christian authors interpreted the signs of the end, the abomination of desolation, and the flight to the mountains, relating them to events preceding the Roman-Judean war of 68–70 A.D.[1] Demonstrating the same point—that many in Christianity before the modern period saw the prophecies in the early part of the Olivet Discourse as having already been fulfilled in the first-century—this chapter contains texts that I have located, and in some cases translated, after the publication of that essay.

MATTHEW 24:5

On False Christs Before the Siege of Jerusalem

> For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many.

Henry Bullinger (d. 1575) was a famous Swiss Reformer who wrote the Second Helvetic Confession (1566). I recently acquired his *Commentary on Matthew* written in Latin and published in 1542. This essay will translate many

selections from the sections on the early part of Matthew 24.

On Jesus' prophecy of false Christs in Matthew 24:5, he wrote: "Moreover, the histories hand down that after the ascension of the Lord into heaven and before the destruction of the city, not a few came to the Jews, who peddled themselves as the true Messiah and liberator, to whom the wretched people attached themselves."[2] Bullinger saw this prophecy as having been fulfilled in the first-century before the Jewish war.

MATTHEW 24:6

On Christ's Warning about the Roman-Judean War

> And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end.

In the early fifth century Paul Orosius, a Spaniard and friend of Saint Augustine, wrote a history. In it, he quoted Matthew 24:6–9 and said that the Lord was warning believers by predicting the destruction of Jerusalem under Vespasian and Titus. He explained:

> But when at that time the city of Jerusalem had been captured and overthrown, as the prophets foretold, and after the complete destruction of the Jewish people, Titus, who had been ordained by the judgment of God to avenge the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, as victor, holding a triumph with his father, Vespasian, closed the temple of Janus. Thus, although the temple of Janus was opened in the last days of Caesar, nevertheless, for long periods of time thereafter there were no sounds of war, although the army was in readiness for action. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself, then, in the Gospels, when in those times the whole world was living in the greatest tranquillity and a single peace covered all peoples and He was asked by His disciples about the end of the coming times, among other things said this: *"You shall hear of wars and rumors of wars. Take care that you do no be alarmed, for these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nations will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there will be pestilences and famines and earthquakes in various places. But all those things are the beginnings of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and will put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake."* [Matt. 24:6–9] Moreover, Divine Providence, by teaching this, strengthened the believers by giving warning and confounded the unbelievers by His predicting.[3]

On Christ's warning about wars and rumors of wars, Bullinger explained: "[When] the histories are consulted they [tell of] the wars begun and continued by the Romans that were waged between themselves and against other nations under Claudius, Nero, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius . . . For, there was tumult from the Jews for thirty-eight and more years before they were utterly destroyed in the

last and final war."[4]

MATTHEW 24:7

On Famines and Earthquakes in the First Century

> In various places there will be famines and earthquakes.

Photius of Constantinople (d.c. 893), describing the Jewish War of the first-century, wrote: "The city suffered so grievously from famine that the inhabitants were driven to all kinds of excesses; a woman even ate the flesh of her own son. Famine was succeeded by pestilence, a clear proof that it was the work of the divine wrath, in fulfillment of the Lord's proclamation and threat that the city should be taken and utterly destroyed."[5] Photius, commenting on the historian Josephus, clearly saw the famine associated with the Roman-Judean war as a fulfillment of Christ's prophecy of famines in the Olivet Discourse.

On the famines that the Lord prophesied would happen, Bullinger too referred to first-century events, writing: "Luke writes about the famine which occurred under Claudius in Acts Chapter 11, also Josephus in Book 20, Chapter 2 of *Antiquities*, Suetonius also on the life of Claudius."[6]

On Christ's prophecy of earthquakes, Bullinger likewise connected it with events preceding the Roman-Judean war, saying: "Suetonius relates that some cities were destroyed by an earthquake under Nero. And there is no doubt that horrible earthquakes vexed the Jews before the destruction of the city."[7]

MATTHEW 24:14

On the Universal Preaching of the Gospel by the Apostles

> And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.

On this passage, Jerome gave two interpretations: that it was already fulfilled, or would be fulfilled very shortly. He commented: "We perceive that this is either already completed or will be completed in a short time. For I do not think any nation remains that is ignorant of the name of Christ. Even if it does not have a proclaimer; yet it cannot be ignorant of the report of the faith [coming] from surrounding nations."[8]

A Syriac manuscript from about 750 A.D. preserved a text called the *Revelation of James the Apostle*, in which James allegedly claimed that he and his fellow apostles carried out the commission of our Lord to preach the gospel in the whole world. The text is an indicator that whoever wrote it may have believed that this prophecy in Matt. 24:14, or the related Great Commission in Matt. 28:19–20, had already been fulfilled by the apostles. It reads: "Our Lord commanded them and said to them that they should go out and evangelize in the four quarters of the world; and *we* carried out the preaching, lo! from the ends of the earth to the ends of the same."[9]

To help interpret Jesus' prophecy of a universal preaching of the gospel, Bullinger brought to bear three passages from the Pauline epistles to show that it was fulfilled by the apostles in the first-century. He explained:

> By the resurrection, and sending of the Holy Spirit into the apostles, they were brought to the nations throughout the world. But first the city was captured and the Jewish nation was dispersed. The apostles of Christ are carried throughout the whole world announcing the gospel. For, Paul said to the Romans: *From Jerusalem and into the surrounding regions all the way to Illyricum I have fulfilled the gospel of Christ* [Rom. 15:19]. He says to the Colossians that the gospel *was preached to every creature which is under heaven* [Col. 1:13]. He said to Timothy also: *God was manifested in the flesh, was justified in the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached to the nations, believed on in the world, was received into glory* [1 Tim. 3:16].[10]

MATTHEW 24:15

On the Roman Abomination Standing in the Holy Place

> Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place.

Theodoret of Cyrus (d. 457), who wrote a commentary on Daniel in Greek, saw this prophecy about the abomination of desolation foreshowed in the placing of an image in the temple by Pilate and fulfilled in the "disaster" that overtook Jerusalem in the first-century. He wrote:

> And further, *An abomination of desolation on the temple:* as a result of this sacrifice not only will the other sacrifice cease but as well *an abomination of desolation* will be inflicted on the temple —that is, that formerly venerable and fearsome place will be made desolate. A sign of the *desolation* will be the introduction into it of certain images forbidden by the law; Pi-late was guilty of this by introducing into the divine temple by night the imperial images in violation of the law. The Lord also in the sacred Gospels foretold to his holy disciples, "When you see the abomination of desolation . . ." He said this to highlight the rapidity of the disaster about to overtake them.[11]

A tenth-century gloss on the Gospels gives four possible interpretations of the abomination. The first is to interpret it just "simply" which is left unexplained. The second is that it refers to Antichrist. The last two are related to historical events that took place in the first-century and early second century: the placement by Pilate of an image of Caesar in the temple in Jerusalem, and the erection of a statue of the emperor Hadrian (117–138) sitting on a horse where the Holy of Holies used to stand. He writes: "*Abomination standing.* Moreover, it is able to be interpreted simply, or about the Antichrist, or about the image of Caesar which Pilate placed in the temple, or about the state of Hadrian on a horse, which stood for a long time in that place, the Holy of Holies."[12] Three additional glosses on the Gospels from the tenth and eleventh centuries, edited by Paolo Vaciago, have the exact same comment.[13]

Bullinger, drawing insight from Luke's Gospel, interpreted the abomination of desolation as the Roman armies surrounding Jerusalem and their placement of the Roman eagle on the pinnacle of the temple or on a gate. He elucidated as follows:

> Luke more clearly relating the words of the Savior: *When you will see*, he says, *Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near* [Luke 21:20]. Therefore, because Matthew and Mark said *When you will see the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place and where it should not*, for this Luke replaced with *When you will see*, he says, *Jerusalem surrounded by armies* . . . The sense of the words of the Lord here will be: when you will see the land of Galilee and Samaria consumed with devastation, know that He has deserted the place and His people.
>
> . . . There was seen on the pinnacle or the gate the abomination of desolation, the eagle assuredly placed by the Romans upon the pinnacle of the temple, which was a sign of the abomination of desolation.
>
> Or, there will be upon the pinnacle or the gate the abomination of desolation. That is, the army of the Romans will be led under those walls and to those gates, and they will abominably destroy the temple and the city, God permitting this and desolating His own ungrateful people.[14]

MATTHEW 24:16–18

On the First-Century Flight to Pella

> Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; let him who is on the housetop not go down to get the things out that are in his house; and let him who is in the field not turn back to get his cloak.

To assist with his interpretation of this passage, Bullinger turned to Eusebius,

and saw it in relation to the first-century flight of the church to Pella. He wrote:

> Now also Eusebius, in Book 3, Chapter 5 of his *Ecclesiastical History*, says that the church which had been gathered in the city of Jerusalem, having received an oracle from God, were ordered to emigrate and to go across to a certain town which is called Pella, across the Jordan. Indeed Pella was located on the river Iaboc, not far from Philadelphia. Not far from there are the mountains of Thraconitidis of the region of Gilead.[15]



EUSEBIUS

MATTHEW 24:21

On the Great Tribulation During the Jewish War

> For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall.

Bullinger interpreted this passage predicting great tribulation, not as a time in our future right before the Second Coming of Christ, an interpretation that is very popular today. Rather, he explained this tribulation as that affliction suffered by so many in the Roman-Judean war of the first-century, writing: "*For then there will be*, He says, *great tribulation such as has not been from the beginning*, etc. This destructive war against Jerusalem was beyond all others in

the world with respect to calamities and miseries."[16]

Summary

Many early Christian writers interpreted the signs of the end in the first part of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24—such as rumors of war, famines, earthquakes, and the proclamation of the gospel to the ends of the earth—as already fulfilled in events preceding the Roman-Judean war of 68–70 A.D. These include Jerome, Paul Orosius, Photius of Constantinople, and the *Revelation of James*.

Regarding the abomination of desolation, Theodoret of Cyrus and several biblical glosses from the tenth and eleventh centuries saw a reference to when Pilate placed an image of Caesar in the Jewish temple. Henry Bullinger, the famous Swiss Reformer, however, interpreted it as the Roman armies which attacked Jerusalem in the first-century, or their placing of the Roman eagle on a gate or on the pinnacle of the temple in that city. Bullinger also explained the flight to the mountains in Matt. 24:16–18 as the flight of Christians from Jerusalem to Pella before the siege of the city, mentioned by Eusebius. He also interpreted the "great tribulation" (Matt. 24:21) as the calamities and miseries suffered by the Hebrew people in the Roman war.

These brief comments from Christians of early, medieval, and Reformation Christianity demonstrate that the view which sees these signs as referring to the impending destruction of Jerusalem is well supported in the history of biblical interpretation.

For Further Research

For someone doing further research on the interpretation of the Olivet Discourse in medieval Christianity I have found the following references to manuscripts containing commentaries on Matthew, Mark, Luke, and the Gospel, many of which would comment on the Olivet Discourse. They are held mainly in European libraries.

In Fridericus Stegmüller's *Repertorium Biblicum Medii Aevi*, Vol. 3, there are references to the commentaries below, most still in manuscript.[17] Each contains the city, library (in most cases), manuscript number, and folia (pages) on which the commentary is found.

1. John of Wales (d. 1303). *On Matthew*
   Oxford, Magdalen College 27 f. 1–91
   Valencia, Cathedral 181 f. 198–262

2. Jacob of Laussane (d. 1322). *On Matthew*
   Avignon 320 f. 139–171
   Erfurt, Stadtbibl. CA 4 121 f. 60–92
   Paris, nat. lat. 15966 f. 217–234
   Paris, nat. lat. 18102
   Worchester, Cathedra Q 59 f. 90–139
   Toulouse 27 (I. 283) f. 1–27
   On Mark. Escorial d. III. 17 f. 156–160
   On Luke. Avignon 320 f. 172–224
   Erfurt, Stadtbibl. CA 4 121 f. 92-136
   Toulouse 27 (I 283) f. 27–62.

3. John of Bacon (d. 1348). *On Matthew*
   Cambridge, Trinity College 348 f. 99–191. Edited by Marasca and published in Madrid in 1754.

4. Jacob of Susato (d. 1440).
   Lectures at Prague in 1394 *On Matthew*
   Soest, Stadtbibl. 8 col. 381–496

5. John of Graez (d. 1450). *Exposition of the Gospels*
   Agram, Bibl. cathedralis

In Johannes Schneyer's *Wegweiser zu lateinischen Predigtreihen des Mittelalters [Guide to Latin Sermons of the Middle Ages]*, there are bibliographical references to many medieval sermons based on biblical passages in the Olivet Discourse.[18] Most of the sermons are still in manuscript form in European libraries. The entries below may contain the name of the author of the sermon, the city, the library, the manuscript number, and the folia or pages in the manuscript on which the sermon is found. "r" stands for *recto* meaning the front side of the page; "v" stands for *verso*, the back side of the page.

1. On “For just as lightning goes out from the east” (Matt. 24:27)[19]
   Assisi 432 f. 137v
   Neapel, Naz. VIII. A. 37 series IV
   Assisi 470 f. 333v

2. On “The sun will be darkened” (Matt. 24:29)[20]
   Barcelona, Arch. Cor. Arag. Ripoll 226 f. 113v

3. On “But My words will not pass away” (Matt. 24:35)[21]
   Roger of St Victor. Rom, Angel. 212 f. 125v
   Stephen Langton. Brügge, StB 93 f. 45r;
   Troyes 1100 f. 298v

4. On “the powers of the heaven will be shaken” (Luke 21:26)[22]
   Jordan of Quedlingburg. Edd. Strassburg, 1483
   Bertholdus Ratisbon. Linz, Stud. Bibl. 4 f. 8; Clm 8739 f. 193 etc.
   Fr. Thomas “Omnibene”. Vat. Burghes. 80 f. 265r
   Kopenhagen, Ny kgl. S. 2925 4 f. 1r
   Padua, Anton. 445 f. 22 v
   Oxford, Bodl. Laud. Misc. 511 f. 12

5. On “when you will have seen these things happen” (Luke 21:31)[23]
   Odo of Castro Radulphi. Troyes 271 f. 17r etc.
   Nicolaus Aesculanus. Clm 17650 f. 59v etc.

On certain biblical passages, the sermons are too numerous to list, so I refer the reader to Schneyer for the complete listing of bibliographical entries.

On “there will be signs on the sun” (Luke 21:25), Schneyer, 230–266.
On “they will see the Son of Man” (Luke 21:27), Schneyer, 519–530.
On “when these things are beginning to take place . . . lift up your heads” (Luke 21:28) Schneyer, 284–285, 351–358.
On “recognize that the kingdom of God is near” (Luke 21:31), Schneyer, 456–7.
On “heaven and earth will pass away” (Luke 21:33), Schneyer, 62–63.

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2. *In sacrosanctum Jesu Christi Domini nostri Evangelium secundum Matthaeum Commentariorum libri XII per Heinrychum Bullingerum [Twelve Books of Commentaries on the Most Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew]* (Tiguri, Switzerland: Froschoverus, 1542), 209.

3. Roy J. Deferrari, trans., *Paulus Orosius: The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*. FC 50: 289–90.

4. Bullinger, *Commentary on Matthew*, 209.

5. Photius of Constantinople, *Bibliotheca*, 47. http://www.tertullian.org. Accessed July 28, 2005.

6. Bullinger, *Commentary on Matthew*, 210.

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8. Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*. Thomas P. Scheck, trans. FC 117: 271.

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11. Robert C. Hill, trans., *Theodoret of Cyrus: Commentary on Daniel* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 257–8.

12. Paolo Vaciago, ed., *Glossae Biblicae*, Part 2. CCCM 189 B: 663. My translation of the Latin *Abominationem stantem: potest autem simpliciter aut de antixpisto accipi aut de imagine cesaris quam Pilatus posuit in templo, aut de adriani equestris statuo que in ipso sancto sanctorum loco: multo tempore stetit.* The interpretation that the abomination of desolation was fulfilled by a deed of the emperor Hadrian is expressed in John Chrysostom (d. 409), *Interpretation of the Prophet Daniel*. PG 56: 240: “*And the abomination of desolation*, that is, what was committed by Hadrian.” My translation of the Latin *Et abominatio desolationis: id est, quae ab Adriano facta est.”*

13. CCCM 189A, Part 1: 187; CCCM 189B, Part 2: 345, 529.

14. Bullinger, *Commentary on Matthew*, 211.

15. Bullinger, *Commentary on Matthew*, 212.

16. Bullinger, *Commentary on Matthew*, 212.

17. Fridericus Stegmüller, ed., *Repertorium Biblicum Medii Aevi*, Vol. 3 (Madrid, 1951), 206, 217, 252, 337, 338,

18. Johannes Baptist Schneyer, ed., *Wegweiser zu lateinischen Predigtreihen des Mittelalters* (Munich: Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1965).

19. Schneyer, *Predigtreihen*, 465.

20. Schneyer, *Predigtreihen*, 469.

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SIXTEEN

THE BUDDING OF THE FIG TREE

(MATT. 24:32–33)

INTRODUCTION

Many classical dispensationalists have expressed the opinion that the forming of the nation of Israel in 1948 was a fulfillment of prophecy, namely, the budding of the "fig tree." The rhetoric says that after almost nineteen centuries of dispersion from their land, the Jewish people were brought back by God into their land. This, they say, was one of the most significant fulfillments of Bible prophecy and a sign that Jesus is coming back within a generation.

Hal Lindsey expressed this in his 1970 book *Late Great Planet Earth*, which sold over thirty million copies[1] and was listed among the 100 Christian books that changed the twentieth century,[2] saying: "The figure of speech 'fig tree' has been a historic symbol of national Israel. When the Jewish people, after nearly 2000 years of exile, under relentless persecution, became a nation again on 14 May 1948 the 'fig tree' put forth its first leaves."[3]

Harold Camping, infamous for setting dates for the rapture of the church (1994, May 2011, October 2011), published a whole book in 1983 on the subject of the fig tree. He followed the same line of interpretation as stated above in Lindsey's book:

> In 1948 Israel is again a nation amongst the nations of the world. It is an event unmatched in the history of the world. Never has a nation been driven from its homeland and dispersed among the nations only to return almost 2,000 years later to its homeland as an intact nation. But this marvelous event did occur to national Israel. It is the beautiful fulfillment of the promise made in the parable of the fig tree as recorded in Luke 13:6–9.[4]

More recently prophecy teacher Grant Jeffrey weighed in on the issue. "For many years," he said, "critics of modern prophecy teachers have denied that the

prophetic passage of Christ's message in Matthew 24 regarding the 'fig tree' actually referred to the rebirth of the nation Israel." To prove that the critics are wrong and the parable of the fig tree does in fact teach this, Jeffrey retorts that "there is clear and unequivocal evidence from the teachings of the primitive church" to that effect. He then cites a section from the early Christian *Apocalypse of Peter.* He concludes that this statement "about the parable of the figs from the earliest days of the apostolic Church provides compelling evidence that believers who lived closest to the apostles understood the words of Christ in Matthew 24:30 to prophetically foretell the rebirth of Israel in the last days."[5]

This chapter provides texts of early Christian authors who wrote about the parable of the fig tree and a last-days rebirth of the nation of Israel, and evaluates them for their correspondence, or lack thereof, with the views stated above.

MATTHEW 24:32–33

On the Budding of the Fig Tree

> Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; even so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door.

Richard Bauckham, in an article on the fig tree parable as it was understood by the *Apocalypse of Peter,* cited the views of several other early Christian writers on the budding of the fig tree; and these views differed greatly from those of the classical dispensationalists cited above. He summarized them as follows:

> Hippolytus (*In Matt.* 24:32) takes the fig tree to be the world, the branches and leaves to be the miraculous signs given by the Antichrist, which soon pass away, and the summer in which the fruits are harvested to be the end of the world. Tertullian (*Marc.* 4.39) takes the buds that precede the summer to represent the conflicts in the world that precede the coming of the kingdom.[6]

Nothing about the gathering of national Israel back to their land there! Dr. Curt D. Daniel wrote a paper on the concept of Antichrist in the early church in which he mentioned that Nerses Parthevi of Armenia and Ambrose of Milan (d. 397) both held that "Antichrist is the fig tree referred to in Matt. 24:32."[7] Thomas Aquinas in his *Golden Chain*, a commentary on the four gospels collected from works of the church fathers, quoted Hilary (of Poitiers?) as having written on Matt. 24:32: "The Synagogue is likened to the fig tree; its branch is Antichrist,

the son of the Devil."[8]

The citations from some of the church fathers below will demonstrate that many of the early Christians not only did not hold the view that God, in fulfillment of promises to Israel, would mercifully bring them back into the land, but held almost the exact opposite: that the *Antichrist*, in his role as end-time deceiver of the nations and especially of the Hebrew people, would gather the Jewish people back to Palestine.

For example, Hippolytus of Rome (d. 235) wrote about the Antichrist in his *Commentary on Daniel* in this manner:

> He, being lifted up over every king and every god, shall build the city of Jerusalem and he shall raise the converted Temple, ***he shall restore both all the land and its borders to the Jews, and having summoned their people from the slavery of the nations***, he shall exhibit himself to them as king, and at this the faithless shall worship him as God and shall bend the knee to him, considering him to be the Christ . . . [9]

A.J. Visser, in a journal article on ancient Christian eschatology, summarized Hippolytus' views, saying that one of Antichrist's crimes "will be the bringing back of the unfaithful Jews to Palestine; the Antichrist is a Zionist in Hippolytus' opinion."[10]

Another early Christian writing, entitled *On the End of the World*, that was thought to be from the pen of Hippolytus but is among his spurious writings, expressed a similar opinion. "And by the offshoot horn none other is signified than ***Antichrist*** that is ***to restore the kingdom of the Jews***." And later in that treatise: "Christ gathered together the dispersed sheep, and he [Antichrist] in like manner ***will gather together the dispersed people of the Hebrews***."[11]

Augustine (d. 430), in his commentary on the Psalms, exposited Psalm 106:47: *Deliver us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the nations*. He too expressed the ancient belief that not the Lord, but the Antichrist, would restore an earthly kingdom to the Hebrew people. He explained:

> But when the Jews suppose that that prophecy belongeth to their visible kingdom, because they know not how to rejoice in the hope of good things unseen, they are about to rush into the snares of him, of whom the Lord saith, "I am come in My Father's Name and ye receive Me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive." [John 5:43] Of whom the Apostle Paul saith: "that Man of Sin shall be revealed, the son of perdition," [2 Thess. 2:3] etc. And a little after he saith, "Then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the Spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming," [2 Thess. 2:8] etc . . . .***Through that Apostate***, through him who exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, it seemeth to me, that ***the carnal people of Israel will suppose that prophecy to be***

> ***fulfilled, where it is said, "Deliver us, O Lord, and gather us from among the heathen***." . . . Thus they will believe a lie, because they have not received the love of the truth, that they might love not carnal, but spiritual blessings . . . . "Deliver us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the heathen." Not, as the Jews imagine it, fulfilled through Antichrist, but through our Lord Christ coming in the name of His Father.[12]

The widespread patristic idea, that the gathering of the Hebrew people back into the land of Palestine would be the work of Antichrist and not Christ, continued into the Middle Ages. The Coptic *Apocalypse of Daniel* from the year 1197 stated that "the king whose name makes the number 666 . . . will order all the Jews which are in all places to gather in Jerusalem."[13] And Peter John Olivi, a leader of the Spiritual Franciscans, in a lecture on the Apocalypse, taught that "Antichrist will call together the Jews into the earthly city of Jerusalem, preaching himself as Messiah and Savior of the Jews."[14]

Summary

Today some dispensationalists think that the formation of the nation of Israel in 1948 was a fulfillment of the budding of the fig tree, which they say is a biblical prophecy. It is very doubtful, however, that this is a proper interpretation of that passage. Allen Beechick refuted their interpretation, writing that if one takes a Bible concordance and counts the references, "you would discover that the fig tree stands for Israel only *one-tenth* of the times it is used in the Bible. Furthermore, even the few verses where the fig tree does stand for the nation, not one of them supports the idea that the leaves represent Israel's *becoming a nation*."[15] Dr. James McKeever did a lengthy study of the fig tree parable, and concluded: "I would have to say that the statement of many of these people that 'Israel is always represented by the fig tree in Scriptures' is simply a false statement." Another conclusion upon which he arrived was this: Jesus' "mentioning of the fig tree example had *absolutely nothing* to do with the Hebrews forming a nation." One of his arguments was based upon a comparison between Matthew and Luke. Luke's gospel shows that Jesus taught the parable saying *Behold the fig tree* ***and all the trees.*** (Luke 21:29). McKeever explains:

> We see in verse 29 that when the fig tree *and all the other trees* put forth leaves, we know that summer is near. Thus, obviously this illustration has nothing to do with establishing a Hebrew nation. Jesus is simply taking an example out of nature about all the trees putting forth their leaves as a signal that summer is near. If the fig tree represents the nation of Israel being formed in 1948, what do all of the other trees represent? The answer is that they are not meant to

represent anything but trees, and neither is the fig tree.[16]

Gary DeMar refuted the idea that the fig tree in Matthew 24 represented a rebirth of the nation of Israel, saying that if the fig tree represents Israel, "then there is the problem of what Jesus says about the fig tree earlier in Matthew's gospel" when he cursed the fig tree and said *No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you* (Matt. 21:19). "So if the fig tree represents Israel," DeMar continues, "then there is a contradiction."[17]

Even some of Lindsey and Camping's fellow classical dispensationalists do not believe that the budding of the fig tree teaches the 1948 reformation of the nation of Israel. These include the late John Walvoord, Mark Hitchcock, and Thomas Ice.[18] But not only do certain prophecy teachers continue to make their assertions that the formation of the nation of Israel in 1948 was a fulfillment of this parable, but they even assert that early Christian history is on their side in interpreting the budding of the fig tree parable as prophetically symbolizing a rebirth of the nation of Israel in the last days. This essay has shown that many of the early Christian writers believed almost the exact opposite—that *Antichrist*, not God, would reform the nation of Israel in the last days as part of his attempt to deceive them into receiving him as their Messiah. These included Hippolytus, a work attributed to Hippolytus, Nerses of Armenia, Ambrose, Hilary, and Augustine.

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1. Gary DeMar, *End Times Fiction: A Biblical Consideration of Left Behind Theology* (Nashville: Nelson, 2001), xii.

2. William J. Petersen and Randy Petersen, *100 Christian Books That Changed the Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 2000), 165–6.

3. Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970), 55. Cited in Barbara R. Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004), 50.

4. Harold Camping, *The Fig Tree: An Analysis of the Future of National Israel* (Oakland, CA: Family Stations, Inc., 1983), 253.

5. Grant R. Jeffrey, *Triumphant Return: The Coming Kingdom of God* (Toronto: Frontier Research Publications, Inc., 2001), 69–71.

6. Richard Bauckham, "The Two Fig Tree Parables in the Apocalypse of Peter," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104:2 (1985): 269–87 at 279.

7. Curt D. Daniel, "The Concept of Antichrist in Pre-Gregorian Literature," unpublished term paper presented to Dr. Geoffrey W. Bromily (May 1975), 40. Dr. Daniel serves as pastor of Reformed Bible Church in Springfield, Illinois.

8. *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels Collected out of the Works of the Fathers by St. Thomas Aquinas*, Vol. 1. St. Matthew. John Henry Cardinal Newman, trans. (London: Saint Austin Press, 1999), 829.

9. Hippolytus of Rome. *Commentary on Daniel*, 4.49, 5. Thomas Schmidt, trans. (Charleston, SC: T.C. Schmidt, 2010) Available in paperback and digital download at www.chronicon.net

10. A. J. Visser, "A Bird's Eye View of Ancient Christian Eschatology," *Nu-men* 14 (1967): 4–22 at 14.

11. Pseudo-Hippolytus, *On the End of the World.* ANF 5: 246, 247.

12. Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms.* On Ps. 106. NPNF, 1st series 8: 532.

13. *Coptic Apocalypse of Daniel*, 23. This English translation, available at http://www.ccel.org, and accessed August 23, 2010, was made in April 2009 by Roger Pearse of Ipswich, who translated it from the French translation of Frédéric Macler in "The Coptic Apocalypse of Daniel," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 33 (1896): 165–76.

14. Peter John Olivi, *Lectura super Apocalypsim*. Warren Lewis, ed., diss. (Tübingen, 1972), 604. My translation of the Latin *antichristus convocabit Iudeos in Ierusalem civitatem terrenam tanquam messiam et salvatorem se predicans Iudeorum . . .*

15. Allen Beechick, *The Pre-Tribulation Rapture* (Denver: Accent Books, 1981), 235.

16. James McKeever, *The Rapture Book: Victory in the End Times* (Medford, OR: Omega Publications, 1987), 160, 162, 164–5.

17. Gary DeMar, *10 Popular Prophecy Myths Exposed and Answered* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2010), 44–5.

18. John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago: Moody, 1974, 1980), 191–2; Mark Hitchcock, *The Complete Book of Bible Prophecy* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1999), 158; Thomas Ice and Timothy J. Demy, *Fast Facts on Bible Prophecy from A to Z* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1997), 80–1.

SEVENTEEN

DANIEL'S SEVENTIETH WEEK FULFILLED

(DAN. 9:24–27)

INTRODUCTION

Some Bible expositors today teach that only sixty-nine weeks of Daniel's prophecy of seventy weeks (Dan. 9:24–27) have been fulfilled. They believe that from Daniel to Christ sixty-nine of the weeks of years expired, but then the prophecy was halted, and the last week of seven years remains unfulfilled. A gap or parenthesis, they say, is now taking place in the historical fulfillment of the prophecy; and the last week will only be fulfilled in a seven-year period of tribulation at the end of the world.

I am aware that a few people in the early church, such as Hippolytus, held a gap theory, in which the seventieth week was not considered to be fulfilled, but is awaiting fulfillment in the eschaton. To this early Christian writer can be added a treatise once attributed to Cyprian, another attributed to Prosper of Aquitaine, and the views of Ammonius in the East and Primasius in North Africa, all of which express a futurist interpretation of Daniel's seventieth week, or at least the second half of that week.[1]

This chapter shows that many commentators in ancient and medieval Christendom believed very differently than those aforementioned writings and authors. Many believed that the prophecy of the seventy weeks was entirely fulfilled in the first-century. Some of them saw the seventieth week as having been fulfilled during the time our Lord Jesus was on earth, while others explained it as having been fulfilled in the Roman-Judean conflict of 68–70 A.D.

DANIEL 9:24–27

On the Seventy Weeks Fulfilled in the Roman-Judean War

> Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy. So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete desolation, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.

Julianus Africanus (d. c. 240) wrote: “From that time [the decree of Artaxerxes] to Christ should be numbered by us the seventy weeks.” He continued: “But from Artaxerxes to the time of Christ are fulfilled seventy weeks, according to the numerical reckoning of the Jews.”[2] In other words the seventy-week prophecy was fulfilled at the first coming of Christ.

Bede (d. 735) also interpreted the seventy-week prophecy as having been fulfilled in the lifetime of Christ. He wrote:

> Christ was killed not immediately after the sixty-two weeks but at the end of the seventieth week . . . ‘He will confirm a covenant with many during one week,’ that is, in that last week in which John the Baptist, our Lord and the apostles converted many to the faith. ‘And in the middle of the week offering and sacrifice will come to an end.’ The middle of this week was the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, when at the baptism of Christ the purification brought by the sacrifices began to grow obsolete, as far as the faithful were concerned.[3]

For Bede, the seventieth week took place during the last years of the life of Christ. The middle of that seventieth week corresponded to His baptism, and He was killed at the end of the seventieth week.

Clement of Alexandria (d. c. 215) saw the fulfillment of the seventy weeks in relation to the end of the reign of Nero, the year of the three emperors (68 A.D.), and the destruction of Jerusalem by emperor Vespasian. He wrote: “The half of the week Nero held sway, and in the holy city of Jerusalem placed the abomination; and in the half of the week he was taken away, and Otho, and Galba, and Vitellius. And Vespasian rose to the supreme power, and destroyed

Jerusalem, and desolated the holy place."[4]

Similarly, Tertullian of Carthage (d. 220) believed that the prophecy was completely fulfilled when the Roman military leader, Vespasian, stormed Jerusalem around 68 A.D. He wrote: "Vespasian vanquished the Jews in the first year of his reign, bringing the number of years to a total of fifty-two, plus six months. For he ruled for eleven years, and so by the date of his storming Jerusalem, the Jews had completed the seventy-weeks foretold by Daniel."[5]

Eusebius of Caesarea in the early fourth century wrote in his *Eclogues on Daniel* that the fulfillment of the seventieth week took place during Christ's life and the destruction of the Jerusalem thirty-five years after His resurrection. Below are four extracts, rather lengthy, from that work.

> The new covenant of the message of salvation was diffused throughout the whole world, not only among the tribes of the Jews but was announced to many, so that it might be therefore said in this manner: *He will confirm a pact with many for one week*. . . .
>
> *And the people with the coming king will destroy the city and the sanctuary* because indeed in this manner he clearly signified the Eagle [standard of Rome]. . . .
>
> *He will confirm a pact with many for one week.* But this pact is nothing other than the salutary preaching when our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ confirmed the new covenant unto his many disciples, at that time indeed before the passion when He was alive and conversing with them, and then *after His passion, appearing to those gathered throughout forty days, and speaking about the kingdom of God. And* therefore *He commanded them not to leave from Jerusalem* (Acts 1:3–4). But in the middle of this week, with His death, which was perpetrated by the Jews, the rest of the divine Scriptures were fulfilled since indeed He preached the Gospel for three and a half years, and then it was written where it is said: *In the middle of the week offering and sacrifice will cease.*
>
> For, it is agreed that through the passion, offering together with sacrifice ceased, when according to the narrative of the Gospels: *The veil of the temple was cut in two parts from top to bottom* (Matt. 27:51) . . . .For, it is clear in the histories that John the disciple of Christ, after the death of the Lord, lived well beyond seventy years, that is, up to the reign of Trajan. And according to this opinion it is clear that in the middle of the week of decades *offering and sacrifice ceased* and *the abomination of desolation stood in the holy place*. For, thirty-five years elapsed from the resurrection of our Savior to the avenging attack under Vespasian, with which the middle of the aforementioned week corresponded. For this week was ended in flames and devastation when the holy of holies in the old temple was completely destroyed. And that passage [was fulfilled]: *Offering and sacrifice will cease, and the abomination of desolation will be in the temple.* Scripture shows that it will remain to the consummation of life, with these words added: *And the desolation will remain to the consummation and end.*[6]

Ambrosiaster, author of a late fourth-century book of questions on the Old and New Testaments, wrote that if the Jews would inquire concerning the time of the promise shown in Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks, "they would find it

fulfilled in the time in which Christ was born and died. Because," he continued,

> from the time of the first year of Darius, king of the Persians, up to the nativity and passion of the Lord and the destruction of Jerusalem, which was accomplished through Vespasian, a ruler of the Roman empire, seventy weeks were completed, which are four hundred and ninety years. This is shown through a computation through the kingdoms and through the succeeding empires.[7]



ISIDORE OF SEVILLE

Isidore of Seville (d. 636), a learned Spanish bishop, theologian, and encyclopedist, taught concerning the 490 years of Daniel's prophecy, that "it should be believed that all of these years were from Daniel up to Christ." Since the prophecy says that in the seventieth week sacrifice will cease, Isidore concluded that "it is evident that after the seventy weeks, Christ was born and suffered, the city of Jerusalem was exterminated, and sacrifice and anointing ceased. . . . For after the passion of Christ, Titus came and both fought the Jews and destroyed the city and temple, and libations and sacrifices ceased."[8]

In the ninth century the Syriac author Isho'dad of Merv also interpreted the fulfillment of the seventieth week of Daniel as having taken place in the first-century Roman-Judean war. He wrote:

> The words 'seventy weeks will linger,' that is, until the destruction caused by the Romans. In fact, even though, in the meantime, they are sometimes afflicted, they will not be abandoned completely. Seventy weeks make 490 years; they are calculated from the time when they will come back from Babylon and will begin to build the temple to the year when the Romans will make war against them after the ascension of our Lord.[9]

In the twelfth century, Andrew of Saint Victor (d. 1175) commented on the part of Daniel 9:27 which says, *he will make a firm covenant with many for one week*. While some modern interpreters believe the passage refers to a peace treaty that will be issued by the Antichrist during a future tribulation, Andrew referred it to the events of A.D. 70. He clarified, "The Roman emperor Vespasian with Titus his son made a pact of peace with those who ruled among the Jews, or composed a pact of peace with many of the Jews and effected truces for seven years."[10]

Peter of Blois (d. 1204), an archdeacon and secretary to kings of England, also related the fulfillment of the seventy weeks to the siege of Jerusalem, writing:

> From the going forth of the decree up to Cyrus were seven weeks. And there were sixty-two from Cyrus up to Titus, and one week of siege. That is, before the fulfillment of the seventy, when the city was besieged by Titus, *offering and sacrifice were cut off* and *the abomination of desolation was seen in the temple* when the image of Caesar was placed in the temple.[11]

Summary

Many modern preterists believe that the prophecy of Daniel's seventieth week "was completely fulfilled in the first-century A.D. by the combination of Jesus' ministry and the Jewish War."[12] While in the early church Hippolytus believed that the fulfillment of the seventieth week of Daniel would not take place until the near the end of the world, many others believed, like today's preterists, that the seventieth week was fulfilled in the life and ministry of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans several decades afterward. These include Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Julianus Africanus, Eusebius of Caesarea, Ambrosiaster, Isidore of Seville, Isho'dad of Merv, Andrew of Saint Victor, and Peter of Blois. From this long list of witnesses, several conclusions can be drawn. One is that classical dispensationalists who place the fulfillment of the seventieth week of Daniel at the end of the world should be hesitant to claim that their view corresponds with that of *the* early church. For, there were many in early and medieval Christianity who did not hold to Hippolytus' opinion. Secondly, the interpretation that the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy has been fulfilled in the first-century in the Roman-Judean war is not a modern construction. Rather, it has a long history among some of the most illustrious of ancient Christian writers.

1. George Ogg, trans., *The Pseudo-Cyrianic De Pascha Computus* (London: S.P.C.K., 1955); Pseudo-Prosper, *De Enoc et Helia [On Enoch and Elijah]*. In *Monumenta germaniae Historica, Auctorum Antiquissimorum*, Vol. 9 (Berlin, 1892), 63; Ammonius, *Fragmenta in Daniel.* On Dan. 9:27. PG 85: 1377–8; Primasius of Hadrumetum, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin.* On Rev. 11:11. CCSL 92: 171. A study of possible influences of Hippolytus's writings on Daniel, Antichrist, and Revelation on these texts may be profitable.

2. Julianus Africanus cited in Eusebius of Caesarea, *Eclogues in Daniel*, 46. PG 22: 1178. My translation of the Latin *ex quo nobis ad Christum LXX hebdomades sunt numerandae . . . Sed ab Artaxerxe LXX hebdomades ad Christi tempus juxta Judaeorum numeros consummantur.*

3. Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, 9. Cited in Kenneth Stevenson and Michael Glerup, eds., *Ezekiel, Daniel* Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Old Testament, Vol. 13. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 268–9.

4. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 1. 21. Cited in Ronald J. Bigalke, Jr., "Preterism and Antiquity: Was Preterism a View of the Early Church?" *Journal of Dispensational Theology* (March 2008): 49–60 at 58.

5. Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, 9. Cited in Gleason L. Archer, trans., *Jerome's Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1958), 107–8. Cf. ANF 3: 160.

6. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Eclogues on Daniel.* PG 22: 1187–91. My translation of the Latin.

7. Ambrosiaster, *Pseudo-Augustini Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti CXXVII [127 Questions of pseudo-Augustine on the Old and New Testament]*, 44.14. CSEL 50: 79.

8. Vernon Philip Laurentius Ziolkowski, "The De Fide Catholica of Saint Isidorus, Bishop," diss. (Saint Louis University, 1982), 42–43.

9. Isho'dad of Merv, *Commentary on Daniel* 9:24. Cited in Stevenson and Glerup, *Ezekiel, Daniel*, 267.

10. Andrew of Saint Victor, *Exposition of Daniel.* On Daniel 9:27. CCCM 53F: 100.

11. Cited in Franz Fraidl, *Die Exegese der siebzig Wochen Daniels in der alten und mittleren Zeit* (Graz: Leuschner & Lubensky, 1883), 117.

12. John S. Evans (*The Four Kingdoms of Daniel: A Defense of the "Roman" Sequence with A.D. 70 Fulfillment* [Longwood, FL: Xulon, 2004], 3350, cited in Thomas A. Howe, *Daniel in the Preterists' Den* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 402.

EIGHTEEN

THE ROMAN-JUDEAN WAR IN OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

INTRODUCTION

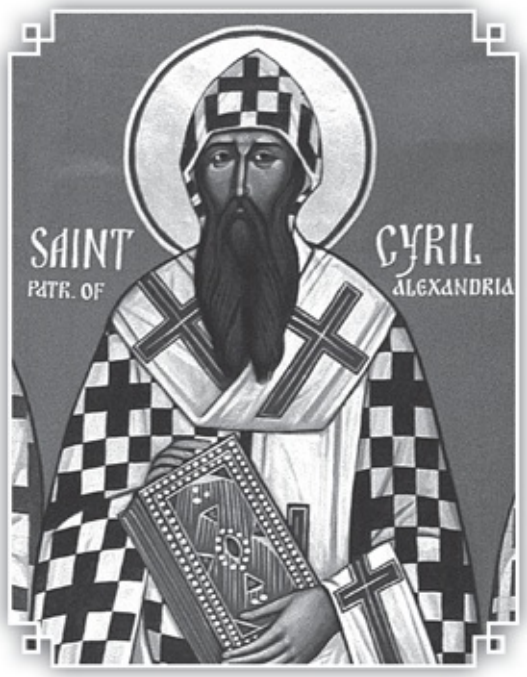
This short chapter provides three selections from patristic commentaries on prophetic passages in the Old Testament. All of them saw the prophecies not awaiting fulfillment at the end of the world but rather as having already been fulfilled in the first-century Roman-Judean war. The prophecies stem from Isaiah 66 and Zechariah 14, and are interpreted by Cyril of Alexandria, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Theodoret of Cyrus.

ISAIAH 66:24

On the Destruction of the Temple by the Romans

> Then they shall go forth and look on the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched; and they shall be an abhorrence to all mankind.

In the early fifth century, Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444), the patriarch of Alexandria and leader of the condemnation of Nestorius at the Council of Ephesus (431), wrote commentaries on many books of the Bible including a *Commentary on Isaiah*. When treating Isa. 66, a chapter which many today say will be fulfilled only in our future, Cyril acknowledged that some in his day referred the passages to events at the end of the world.



CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

But he saw this passage as having already been fulfilled in the Roman-Judean war. He wrote:

> These misfortunes piled on the Jews are meant to be the things we say happened to them at the hands of the Romans, when the temple was destroyed and all were subjected to cruel slaughter. For suffering such things they became a spectacle for all, but their suffering was not prolonged indefinitely. Yet this is what perhaps is meant when it says, "Their worm will not die nor the fire go out." Some, however, want to refer these words concerning them to the time of the end of the age. . . .[1]

ZECHARIAH 14:2

On the Siege of Jerusalem by the Romans

> For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished, and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city.

Eusebius of Caesarea wrote *Proof of the Gospel* around the year 318. In it he commented on Zech. 14:2 and saw in it a prophecy, not of a Battle of Armageddon at the end of time, but of the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans. The remnant in the passage, Eusebius believed, were Christ's apostles. He wrote:

> The fulfillment of this also agrees with the passages quoted on the destruction of the whole

> Jewish race, which came on them after the coming of Christ. For Zechariah writes this prophecy after the return from Babylon, foretelling the final siege of the people by the Romans, through which the whole Jewish race was to become subject to their enemies. He says that only the remnant of the people shall be saved, exactly describing the apostles of our Savior.[2]

ZECHARIAH 14:4

The Division of Roman Troops in the Siege of Jerusalem

> And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south.

Many modern prophecy writers believe that this passage teaches the Second Coming of Christ. The Lord, they say, when He returns from heaven, will touch down on the Mount of Olives causing literal topographical changes to the landscape there. In fact, in expectation of Jesus' return to the Mount of Olives in front of Jerusalem, Horatio Spafford, writer of the beautiful famous hymn "It is Well With My Soul," moved to Jerusalem to await the Second Coming.[3] In the years preceding the year 2000, apocalyptic minded believers relocated to Israel in order to meet the Lord there as He returned. One such group, the Denver-based Concerned Christians, were promptly deported back to the United States, as the Israeli government feared they were going to carry out violent acts.[4]

This is not to imply that everyone who believes that Jesus will literally touch down on the Mount of Olives when He returns is a kook. Some illustrious figures in Christian history, like Albert the Great and his student Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), believed, based on Joel 3:12, that the Last Judgment would take place in the Valley of Jehoshaphat.[5] But according to most medieval biblical commentators the Last Judgment will take place in the air, perhaps above the Mount of Olives or Valley of Jehoshaphat.[6] The fact is that no one needs to travel to the Holy Land to see Christ when He appears for that judgment. For, as Scripture says, and John Chrysostom reiterated, the angels will transport us, resurrected in body and soul, to wherever the Last Judgment takes place.[7]

Theodoret of Cyrus (d. 460) thought that the Lord's feet standing on the Mount of Olives did not refer to His Second Coming, but was symbolic of the victory that He gave the Romans in their first-century war against the people of Judea. The splitting of the mountain he saw as a description of the division of the

Roman troops around the city in the siege of Jerusalem. He wrote:

> *On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is opposite Jerusalem from the east* (v. 4). From where he ascended into heaven, from there he gives the victory to those fighting against the Jews. He then says the mountain would be divided into four parts, one going to the east, one to the west, one to the north, and one to the south . . . By *mountain* he refers to the cohort of the enemy divided for the purpose of besieging Jerusalem, some occupying its eastern part, some its western, others guarding the north, others the south.[8]

Summary

Several early Christian writers—Cyril of Alexandria, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Theodoret of Cyrus—perceived in texts of the Old Testament, prophecies of the first-century Roman-Judean war. They included Isa. 66:24 about corpses of men, Zech. 14:2 about a battle against Jerusalem, and Zech. 14:4 about the Lord standing on the Mount of Olives and splitting it apart.

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1. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Isaiah* 5.6. On Isa. 66:22–24. Cited in Mark W. Elliot, ed., *Isaiah 40-66.* Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Old Testament XI (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 291.

2. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Proof of the Gospel*, 2.3.50, 53. Cited in Alberto Ferreiro, ed., *The Twelve Prophets.* Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Old Testament XIV (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 279.

3. Yaakov Ariel and Ruth Kark, "Messianism, Holiness, Charisma, and Community: The American-Swedish Colony in Jerusalem, 1881–1933," *Church History* 65:4 (Dec. 1996): 641–57 at 643; Francis X. Gumerlock, *The Day and the Hour: Christianity's Perennial Fascination with Predicting the End of the World* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2000), 252.

4. Elise Ackerman, "Millennial madness, Jerusalem jitters," *U.S. News & World Report* (Jan 18, 1999), 32–3; Gumerlock, *Day and the Hour*, 309.

5. Albert the Great, *Compendium of True Theology*, 7.17. In *D. Alberti Magni opera omnia*, Vol. 34 (Paris: Ludovicus Vivès, 1899), 247; Thomas Aquinas, *Light of Faith: The Compendium of Theology* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1993), 326.

6. Haymo of Auxerre, *Commentary on 1 Thessalonians*. PL 117: 772; Zacharias Chrysopolitanus, *On the Harmony of the Evangelists*, PL 186: 467; Bernard of Sienna, *Sermon XI On the General Judgment*. In *S. Bernardini Senensis opera omnia*, Vol. 3 (Florence: College of St. Bonaventure, 1956), 211. Dionysius the Carthusian, *Commentary on 1 Thessalonians*, 4. *Doctoris Ecstatici D. Dionysii Cartusiani opera omnia*, Vol. 13 (Monstrolii: Typis Cartusiae S. M. de Pratis, 1901), 388; John Duns Scotus, *Sentences*, Book IV, Dist. 48, Preface. In *Johannis Duns Scoti opera omnia*, Vol. 20 (Paris: Ludovicus Vivès, 1894), 510.

7. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Thessalonians*, Homily 8. NPNF, 1st series 13: 356.

8. Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*. On Zech. **14**:4. In Robert Charles Hill, trans., *Theodoret of Cyrus: Commentaries on the Prophets*, Vol. 3. *Commentary on the Twelve Prophets* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006), 273.

CONCLUSION

The Antiquity of Preterist Interpretations of Revelation

Luis Alcasar's seventeenth-century commentary on the book of Revelation was undoubtedly influential in the presentation of a systematic preterist interpretation of the Apocalypse. But preterist interpretations of passages in the book of Revelation are present in Christianity in the early church, medieval Apocalypse commentaries, and the era of Reformation. This book has cited countless authors who lived before Alcasar and interpreted passages in Revelation, seeing their fulfillments in first-century historical events.

Summary of the Evidence

On Rev. 3:10, about the "hour of testing" or tribulation coming upon the whole earth," Ralph of Laon, Hugh of Saint Cher, and Nicholas of Gorran interpreted it as a time of testing that immediately followed the emperor Nero, who died in 68 A.D. Anselm of Havelberg interpreted John's vision of the opening of the second seal as a reference to the persecutions and martyrdoms experienced by the apostles in the early church. The rider on the red horse, to whom "it was granted to take peace from the earth (Rev. 6:4)," Alexander Minorita of Bremen, Peter Auriol, and Nicholas of Lyra saw as Nero with all of his atrocious behavior. Even Francisco Ribera (d. 1591), whom some consider the father of futuristic interpretation of the Apocalypse, identified the rider as Nero. Alexander, Auriol, and Nicholas of Lyra also correlated the rider on the black horse and the afflictions he unleashes (Rev. 6:5–6) with the first-century Roman-Judean war and siege of Jerusalem under Vespasian and Titus.

In Eastern Christianity three early medieval commentators on Revelation reported that "some" believed the opening of the sixth seal (Rev. 6:12–13) referred to the siege of Jerusalem under Vespasian. In the West, Berengaudus,

Peter John Olivi, and a host of others saw the earthquake of Rev. 6:12 as having occurred when the Romans devastated the Jewish nation. The people hiding themselves in caves and rocks in the mountains in Rev. 6:14–17 Ecumenius, Andrew of Caesarea in Cappadocia, and Rupert of Deutz interpreted as Jewish fugitives during the first-century war against the Romans.

On the 144,000 servants of God sealed (Rev. 7), a medieval Arabic commentary on the Apocalypse claimed that Hippolytus (d. 235) had taught that the 144,000 were Jewish believers in the early church. A collection of scholia on the Apocalypse, attributed to Origen (d. 254), also depicted the 144,000 as those who "came to Christ" in the early church. Ecumenius explained them as first-century Jews who escaped the destruction of Jerusalem. According to several medieval commentators on the book of Revelation, the trumpet blasts of Rev. 8 were symbols of the preaching of the gospel in the first-century and its effect on various people.

The torment by locusts, which the apostle John saw and recorded in Rev. 9, an early Syrian commentator on Revelation said was symbolic of the destruction of life that occurred in the first-century Roman-Judean war. Theodulph of Orleans interpreted the five months of that torment as a persecution that occurred in the lifetime of John. The forty-two months during which the holy city was trampled by Gentiles (Rev. 11:2), Berengaudus referred to the Romans trampling Jerusalem in the first-century. Dionysius Bar Salibi, a Syrian commentator, was aware of some who held the opinion that the trampling of the holy city for forty-two months was a reference to the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans under Vespasian. Peter John Olivi, on the war between Michael and the dragon (Rev. 12:6), said it was symbolic of martyrdoms that occurred in the early church; and the notes in the 1599 edition of the *Geneva Bible* interpreted the "time, and times, and half a time" in Rev. 12:14 as the period from "the last and most grievous rebellion of the Jews, unto the destruction of the city and Temple."

Victorinus of Pettua, Jerome, Sulpicius Severus, and Apringius of Beja all recognized the beast "whose fatal wound was healed" (Rev. 13:12) as the emperor Nero; and Beatus of Liebana even spoke of "Nero Antichrist." A fifth-century North African text recommended that the mystery of the number of the beast (Rev. 13:18) could be solved using the numerical values of the letters of the name of Nero. Caesarius of Arles described the "war of the great day of

God" (Rev. 16:14) as the desolation experienced when Vespasian and Titus besieged Jerusalem. And the aforementioned Beatus, Nicholas of Gorran, and two anonymous early medieval Apocalypse commentaries list Nero as the sixth king, the one "who is" reigning at the time John wrote Revelation (Rev. 17:10).

Furthermore, there were at least ten different traditions in early and medieval Christianity that advocated a date of the writing of the book of Revelation before 70 A.D.

What Does This Mean?

What does all this mean for modern discussions about the history of preterist interpretations of the book of Revelation? It shows that they are not an invention of Luis Alcasar in the seventeenth century, but rather enjoy a long history with Christian exegesis. The idea that John wrote Revelation before the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem, much earlier than the reign of Domitian, has always had its adherents among orthodox Christians. There has been no lack of commentators on the Apocalypse who believed that Nero was reigning at the time John wrote the book.

Many in medieval Christianity believed that the hour of testing or tribulation spoken about by John referred to something that occurred shortly after the reign of the emperor Nero and saw the seal and trumpet judgments as symbols of what had been fulfilled in the first-century devastation that accompanied the Roman-Judean war. And for support, they cited other passages from the Bible and the early historians Josephus and Eusebius.

The 144,000 were not always viewed as they are by some modern prophecy writers, as Jewish evangelists that will appear at the end of the world. Rather, from the earliest days of Christianity, commentators saw them as symbolic of first-century Jews who had come to Christ, or who had escaped the disasters of the siege of Jerusalem. Many Christians, long before the modern period, saw the references to forty-two months and three and a half years not as a time of future tribulation at the end of the world, but as the final years before the first-century destruction of Jerusalem and its temple by the Romans. Furthermore, the idea that Nero was the beast of Rev. 13, whose fatal wound was healed and whose name is hidden in a mysterious number, was held by many in early Christianity. All of these interpretations are similar to modern partial preterist interpretations of the book of Revelation.

The Antiquity of Preterist Interpretations of Revelation

Modern writers from all different eschatological positions are beginning to recognize the historical fact that preterist interpretations of John's visions are not a novelty that has invaded Christian exegesis in recent times. Professor Ron J. Bigalke, Jr. of dispensationalist Tyndale Theological Seminary, in an article on "Preterism and Antiquity," acknowledged that mild forms of preterism appear in the Apocalypse commentaries of Andrew and Arethas of Caesarea in Cappadocia.[1] Jonathan H. Barlow, who opposes a "full preterist" interpretation of Matthew 24, wrote that preterism which finds a near fulfillment in "much of the prophecy of the New Testament including the book of Revelation" is "nothing new and is relatively noncontroversial."[2] C. Jonathan Seraiah, who also opposes full preterism, called the preterist position that views many of the eschatological passages of the New Testament as having been fulfilled in 70 A.D. as an "ancient view" that has had "orthodox adherents to it throughout church history."[3]

Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., discussing the origins of preterist interpretations of the book of Revelation, admits that Alcasar "presents a more consistent, full-scale preterist approach to Revelation"[4] than his predecessors, but concluded: "Traces of preterism appear centuries before Alcazar [sic]."[5]

Revelation and the First Century fortifies these sentiments and conclusions about the history of partial preterist interpretations of the last book of holy Scripture, for these interpretations are not new. They do not merely show up here and there in authors like Andrew and Arethas, but are present in a multitude of Apocalypse commentaries from early, medieval, and Reformation Christianity.

Endnotes

1. Ron J. Bigalke, Jr., "Preterism and Antiquity: Was Preterism a View of the Early Church?" *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 12:35 (March 2008): 49–60 at 60.

2. Jonathan H. Barlow, "A Response to the Preterist Interpretation of the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24)," 1–10 at 1. www.reformed.org/eschaton/barlow. Accessed July 6, 2008.

3. C. Jonathan Seraiah, *The End of All Things: A Defense of the Future* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1999), 14.

4. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Navigating the Book of Revelation* (Fountain Inn, SC: Good Birth Ministries, 2009), 37.

5. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation*, Rev. ed. (Atlanta: American Vision, 1998), xxvi.

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ACW	*Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation.* J.
Quasten,	J.C. Plumpe, W. J. Burghart, J. Dillon, and D.D. Mc-Manus, eds. New York: Newman, 1946–present.
ANF	*Ante-Nicene Fathers of the Church.* Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885–1896.
CCCM	*Corpus christianorum, continuation medievalis.* Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1953–present.
CCSL	*Corpus christianorum, series Latina*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1953–present.
CSEL	*Corpus scriptorium ecclesiasticorum latinorum.* Vienna, Austria: Hoelder-Pichler, Tempsky, 1866– present.
FC	*Fathers of the Church*. New York: Cima Publishing Co., 1947–1949; New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1949–1960; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1960–present.
NPNF	*A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church.* Philip Schaff, ed. 2 series of 14 vols. Each. New York: Christian Literature, 1887–1894. Numerous reprints by various publishing companies including T & T Clark, Eerdmans, and Hendrickson. Available on compact disc.
PG	*Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca*. Jean Paul

Migne, ed. Paris: Petit-Montrouge, 1857–1866.

PL — *Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina.* Jean Paul Migne, ed. Paris: Petit-Montrouge, 1844–1864.

SC — *Sources chrétiennes.* Henry de Lubac & J. Daniélous, eds. Paris: Cerf, 1941–present.

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