

The Identification Of Babylon The Harlot In The Book Of Revelation

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

I did not alter the contents at all. The only editing was minor fixes on form. The pagination will most likely not come out the same for the internet, but at least the table of contents gives the general contents of the various chapters.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Book of Revelation is perhaps the most notoriously cryptic work of literature ever composed. The history of the interpretation of this book leaves most students with more questions than answers. Commentators have come to little, if any, consensus on the interpretation of many key passages, and many of the best scholars of Christian history have simply thrown up their hands in bewilderment at the challenge of scaling its enigmatic heights.¹

Thus, approaching the Apocalypse for analysis necessarily requires the possession of a couple of key items: one, an interpretive grid integrating one's hermeneutics and general theological viewpoint, and two, a healthy dose of respectful reservation. Interpretation of Revelation and dogmatism do not go well together, despite the impression one might draw from the popular literature.

That said, it is the intent of this study to examine what is hopefully a sufficiently narrow issue in the interpretation of the Apocalypse: the identification of "Babylon," the harlot of chapters seventeen and eighteen.² While discussion of this topic

will of necessity involve the implementation of perspectives that have been embraced on quite separate grounds, this issue has been chosen for study precisely because it is my conviction at this point that a harmonization of the evidence for Babylon's identity can potentially go a long way in contributing to the ever tapering "spiral" of one's hermeneutical approach. If the conclusions of this thesis are correct, proper identification of the harlot may quickly shed light on such issues as general themes of the book, its dating, and interpretations of other problem passages.

In order to fairly acknowledge personal leanings, warranted or otherwise, that influence my interpretation of the text, it will be helpful as we begin to first examine the overall grid from which I am proceeding and the most relevant presuppositions I bring to the discussion. The three most pertinent perspectives to consider for the topic at hand are my understanding of promise/fulfillment issues (i.e., the covenant-dispensational spectrum), my view on interpretation of apocalyptic material, and my take on the book of Revelation as a whole (i.e., futurist, preterist, historicist, or idealist).

Regarding the biblical covenants: to state the matter briefly, while I do not consider myself a dispensationalist by most definitions, I find traditional covenant theology unconvincing as well. I prefer a mediating position along the lines of what some are calling "new covenant theology." This term is actually claimed primarily by authors at the pastoral level,³ but the views involved are basically similar to those of such scholars as D. A. Carson,⁴ Douglas Moo,⁵ Gordon Fee,⁶ and others, who see primary fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises as a whole in the present-day new covenant people of God, composed of the remnant of the nation of Israel and Gentile believers who have been grafted into the tree of God's people. While this

¹ E.g., Luther and Calvin, neither of whom, despite their otherwise voluminous literary legacies, produced a commentary on the Apocalypse.

² That is, sufficiently narrow in the sense that we will hopefully not be biting off a larger portion than can adequately be addressed in a work of this size. The scope of this study will also be limited in that the research will be restricted to English sources only.

³ E. g., John Reisinger, *Abraham's Four Seeds* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 1998); Fred Zaspel and Tom Wells, *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2001).

⁴ Cf. D. A. Carson, *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10* (Grand Rapids: Global Christian, 1999), 296–99.

⁵ Cf. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Gordon Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 175, 697–710.

⁶ Cf. Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 870–76.

does not preclude a future soteriological restoration of the rest of ethnic Israel, I am not persuaded that this will involve a Jewish kingdom or a necessary restoration of the land of Israel for the Jewish people. On the whole, I take these views largely on the basis of Pauline passages such as Rom 2:26–29, Gal 3:6–29, and Eph 2:11–22, which I take to describe the full Abrahamic heirship of believers in Christ, be they Jew or Gentile.

For my handling of apocalyptic material, I derive much of my understanding from the work of N. T. Wright and G. B. Caird.⁷ While a thoroughgoing discussion of the complex debate over apocalyptic literature is outside the scope of this thesis,⁸ I would summarize the gist of this perspective as the view that in the genre of second-temple Jewish apocalyptic, exalted, cosmic, metaphorical language is used to communicate the theological significance of this-worldly events in history. Unlike the idealist view, which takes the language simply as abstract metaphor, this position regards apocalyptic symbolism as having a focus on actual historical events, *but with the full investiture of their salvation-historical significance*, which is portrayed by the strikingly colorful rhetoric of the Jewish imagination. In other words, I see in apocalyptic writing the application of stock images from the Jewish worldview (which includes the Creation, the sovereign, universal kingship of Yahweh, the Exodus, the enemy empires of Israel's past, and the rest of the narrative of her entire history) to major events that manifest the salvation-historical working of God for His people.

This then leaves open the question of whether prophecies can be fulfilled in multiple ways and instances. This question arises from the surprising manner in which the New Testament often uses the Old. For instance in the Olivet Discourse (Matt 24; Mark 13; Luke 21) we see Christ applying Danielic language to coming eschatological events even though it would seem that some of this material from Daniel originally found its focus in the events surrounding Antiochus Epiphanes' dealings with the Jewish people in the intertestamental period.⁹ This seems to indicate that God's dealings with history are such that certain events may recapitulate key happenings of the past, perhaps filling out their theological significance in a greater way and a new context. The prophetic imagery of the former events may then be properly recalled with reference to the new situation, especially if historical experience or further revelation apparently indicate that the previous scenario did not exhaust the full range of God's eschatological intention.

Such a perspective leaves open the possibility that some of the interpretations we propose as we consider Revelation may not be the final say in the matter. It may always be that God's historical plan will work itself out in such a way that certain prophecies will again find significant realization in a future scenario. However, for the purposes of this study, my intention is to focus on whether or not the human author of the Apocalypse had in mind a specific referent for the Babylon/harlot imagery within the context of his own day of writing, and if so, to whom was this devastating polemic directed?

Related to this hermeneutical approach to apocalyptic literature is my take on the Book of Revelation as a whole, which is largely preteristic. There are basically four major angles on the interpretation of the book, namely, historicism, futurism, idealism, and preterism.¹⁰ Historicism looks to the events of the entire Christian era for fulfillment, futurism looks primarily to the future (from our perspective), and idealism

⁷ See especially N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), chap. 10; G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980).

⁸ For more comprehensive study, see D. E. Aune, T. J. Geddert, and C. A. Evans, "Apocalypticism," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000); John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2d ed., The Biblical Resource Series, ed. Astrid B. Beck and David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Leon Morris, *Apocalyptic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972); D. S. Russell, *Divine Disclosure: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

⁹ Cf. Matt 24:15; Mark 13:14.

¹⁰ For a helpful, concise discussion of these positions, see Steve Gregg, ed., *Revelation: Four Views, A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1997), 2–3.

regards the images of Revelation as symbolic portrayals of the eternal cosmic conflict between good and evil.

As one who prefers a preteristic emphasis, I understand much of the book to be primarily dealing with the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 as a judgment from God for covenant apostasy. This dovetails with the topic in question, the identity of the harlot, in

that ultimately it will be the aim of this thesis to present the evidence (which I find to be persuasive) that this image is intended by the author of Revelation as a veiled reference to Jerusalem itself. All of this is very much in keeping with my own “spiral” pilgrimage of interpretation, since my primary reason for taking seriously a preteristic interpretation of Revelation is what I consider to be the weight of the internal literary evidence for recognizing Jerusalem in the passage presently under discussion.

Thus, we will proceed to consider the issues surrounding the interpretation of this text. While this solitary issue might seem peripheral, the implications of the view for which we opt on this matter may be of more significance than one might suppose. If the conclusions of this thesis stand up to scrutiny, and Jerusalem is being warned of the coming of judgment through Rome, then the major themes and dating of the book warrant thoughtful reconsideration among scholars.

CHAPTER 2: PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

In order to get our bearings, we will begin by surveying the primary interpretive options for the identity of the harlot. Some of these are considered more viable than others at the modern table of academic discussion (and such will be noted when appropriate), but this step should help us to form a well-rounded perspective on how the issue has been handled historically. It should be noted that, to a great extent, one's choice of referent is tied inherently to one's approach to the book as a whole (i.e., historicist, futurist, idealist, or preterist); this will become clearer as we proceed.

Furthermore, to get a grasp on the issues at stake in each case this survey will also include a basic introduction to notable difficulties for each position, i.e., weaknesses that should caution us from embracing these options hastily (and some positions, of course, will inherently have fewer apparent weaknesses than others). However, it is not the object of this chapter to accomplish a thoroughgoing critique of all of the views contrary to this thesis. The reason for this is that the very enigmatic nature of apocalyptic writing inevitably creates a situation in which several different interpretations may be made to plausibly fit the evidence. Therefore, much of the argument for the particular position represented by this thesis, rather than being focused on deficiencies in opposing views, will be contingent upon what I perceive to be the balance of the relative weight of evidence in favor of the Jerusalem view vis-à-vis the other options. In other words, I will try to show that the traditional preterist view makes the most sense of the most facts and on this basis is to be preferred.

The Roman Catholic Church

The first view we will look at is the idea that the harlot represents Roman Catholicism, a belief that became popular in the days following the Reformation, for obvious reasons. This view is tied closely to the historicist view in general, which sees the Book of Revelation as describing the whole of church history. With the continuing demise of historicism, however, proponents of this interpretation have become few and far between.¹ It should nevertheless be recognized that this identification was once quite dominant, and has been held by Jonathan Edwards,² Adam Clarke,³ E. B. Elliott,⁴ and a host of others.⁵ Having said that, we should take note that this position is probably best understood as a natural Protestant outgrowth of the Reformation controversies.

Support for this view has been found in several areas. A key argument would be the nature of the adultery motif, which may imply that the harlot is a character that has at one time been allied with God and has since apostatized, rather than a merely pagan figure.⁶ In other words, the Apocalypse would be portraying Catholicism as an institution that at one time in history constituted the very people of God, but at

¹ “Although widely held by Protestant interpreters after the Reformation and into the twentieth century, *no critical New Testament scholar today advocates this view*” (M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation, Interpretation*, ed. James Luther Mays [Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1989], 49, [italics mine]).

² Edward Hickman, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (London: Billing & Sons, 1834), 807.

³ Adam Clarke, *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 6 (New York: Abraham Paul, 1823), 617–23.

⁴ E. B. Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticae*, 4th ed., vol. 4 (London: Seeleys, 1851), 24–46.

⁵ Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli were all also historicists (cf. Steve Gregg, ed. *Revelation: Four Views, A Parallel Commentary* [Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1997], 34), though I have been unable to find their precise interpretation of this passage.

⁶ This issue will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter four, as it is heavily pertinent to the argument for this thesis.

some point forsook her God, presumably by corruption and abandonment of the gospel (the primary contentions of the Protestant Reformers).

Moreover, the adornment of the adulterous woman (17:4) has been seen to exemplify pompous worship in Catholicism, or perhaps even the actual colors of the robes of the popes and cardinals.⁷ Also, the woman's drunkenness from the saints' blood (17:6) could be read to align with the Catholic persecution of Protestants throughout history.⁸

However, despite its strong historical following, there are significant problems with this option. First of all, it is worth noting that the proponents of this view also regard the beast figure of Revelation as a Papal/Catholic symbol. This creates a conundrum for the historicist that will plague some of the other views as well, namely, the relationship between the beast and the harlot. As we will observe below, these two figures are often treated by some as having the same referent, but such a standpoint is difficult to reconcile with Revelation's portrayal of the two as *distinct* characters—characters that, moreover, actually war against one another by the end of chapter 17.⁹

But perhaps the key difficulty for such a position is that it feels suspiciously like a reaction to many commentators' own contexts. This should give us pause as to whether such interpreters have been more influenced by sound exegesis or historical and theological agendas. Granted, this is not specifically an interpretive problem associated with the text itself on this approach, but it does raise some incriminating "red flags." All of us, no doubt, read Scripture through the lens of our own struggles and cultural parameters, and it is quite understandable that we should find such polemically loaded interpretation arising in such trying times of religious crisis. Still, even if some alleged evidences can be found in the text itself for this position, it is probably a healthy caution to keep in mind that any of us in any period of history can find apparent prophetic parallels from Scripture relating to our own experiences if we look hard enough. If anything, it may be best to see this view as a possible *application* of the text via analogy, rather than its strict interpretation. If there are greater strengths to consider in competing views, we can probably feel confident in leaving this one in its own time and moving forward.

Related to this issue is the question of how such a meaning would have had relevance to its original audience. This question must continue to be active in our mind as we survey the major viewpoints. Granted, we cannot always put our full confidence of interpretation in what may or may not have been the understanding of the intended audience, but since the Book of Revelation presents itself as a source of encouragement and blessing to those who were to receive it, it seems unlikely that its contents would be focused on the fall of an ecclesiastical institution centuries away.¹⁰ Does it not appear that this interpretation is curiously more comforting to persecuted Protestants of the sixteenth century than to first-century Christians?

⁷ So Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticae*, 30.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁹ For more on this, see "Rome" below.

¹⁰ No doubt biblical prophecy can sometimes focus on far future events, but if even the themes seem unusually disconnected with the homiletical/applicational ends of the work, perhaps the lack of coherence is cause for skepticism of such an interpretation. That is, a prophecy of the future arrival of the Messiah, for example, would still be relevant to an OT saint hoping for the eventual restoration of Israel. But how will it "bless" first century Christians to know that someday God will judge Roman Catholicism? Maybe a connection could be produced, but it certainly seems much more reasonable that this interpretation reflects the historical interests of those who conceived it, rather than the original message the churches were supposed to hear.

On the other hand, it is admittedly possible that room could be made for this issue in a "multiple fulfillment" approach, in which an earlier fulfillment might meet the criteria for audience relevance, while the Catholic Church would remain as a more distant prophetic object. However, I know of no author that has proposed such a scheme, and moreover, this question would by definition step beyond the bounds of the present investigation, which, as stated in chapter one, aims at the referent intended by the human author for his immediate audience, if such exists.

Thus, F. F. Bruce sternly comments, “No important contribution to exegesis of Revelation was made by [historicists], whether J. A. Bengel in Germany or Joseph Mede, Sir Isaac Newton, and William Whiston in England—eminent as these exegetes were in other fields of study. The book itself has suffered in its reputation from the extravagances of some of its interpreters, who have treated it as if it were a table of mathematical conundrums or a divinely inspired *Old Moore’s Almanack*.”¹¹

Perhaps even more devastating is Tenney’s observation: “The historicist view which attempts to interpret the Apocalypse by the development of the church in the last nineteen centuries, *seldom if ever takes cognizance of the church outside Europe*. It is concerned mainly with the period of the Middle Ages and the Reformation and *has relatively little to say of developments after AD 1500*.”¹²

For these reasons, the view that regards Babylon as a symbol for the Roman Catholic Church is largely regarded today, and rightly so, as the least defensible.

Rebuilt Babylon

Some strict futurists see in Revelation the expectation of a renewed Babylonian empire in the eschaton that will dominate the world and persecute the followers of Christ. While a view like this could merely expect a generic future empire in the vein of historic Babylon’s tyranny,¹³ some writers prefer the simplicity of letting the name stand, and expect an actual revival of Babylon itself on the river Euphrates (most prominently, Robert L. Thomas and Charles Dyer).¹⁴ This is, of course, due to adherence to a strict literalism in interpreting prophecy that is not generally regarded very highly among scholars.

Granted, such a view holds the advantage of being the *easiest* method of deciphering the text, but it is far from a foregone conclusion that Scripture consistently yields itself (especially in prophetic contexts) to the *easiest* interpretation.¹⁵ Moreover, there is obviously little to critique regarding whether this view can fit the details of the description of Babylon, given the fact that it considers Babylon the referent; the

¹¹ F. F. Bruce, *Revelation*, The International Bible Commentary, ed. F. F. Bruce, H. L. Ellison, and G. C. D. Howley (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 1595.

¹² Merrill C. Tenney, “Revelation, Book of the,” in *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1975), 96 (italics mine).

¹³ It is worth noting that one such variation of this view is that the empire will be linked with some sort of Roman empire revival, perhaps in the form of some great last-days European alliance epitomized in the beast figure. The evidence for such a view would be concordant with that of the “Rome” view, discussed below, but would then be recast in a futuristic context. Thus, Babylon itself becomes either the capital of Antichrist’s empire or a symbol for the worldwide religio-economic power of his rule. This position most often shows up in popular eschatology (e.g., Hal Lindsey, *There’s a New World Coming* [New York: Bantam, 1975], 189–90; John MacArthur, ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible* [Nashville, TN: Word, 1997], 2015–17). However, see also John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 240–41.

¹⁴ E.g., Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 307; Charles H. Dyer, “The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17–18,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144 (1987): 305–16, 433–49; also, J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse: A Series of Special Lectures on the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 10th ed. (New York, NY: Cook, 1909), 397–400; G. H. Lang, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (London: Oliphants, 1945), 299–305.

¹⁵ Cf. 2 Pet 3:16, which explicitly claims that Paul’s letters are “hard to understand” (δυσνόητά). The point here is simply that, contrary to some popular notions that interpretation should be done from a plain, surface-reading perspective because God would not make his word hard to understand, the scriptures *themselves* express that some portions *are* in fact hard to understand, and we cannot therefore assume that the “easy” path is the *correct* one; see also Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 227–32; Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1993), chaps. 2–3; Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, chap. 10.

consistency is somewhat tautological. Nevertheless, there are serious problems with this position when we consider how this imagery is presented in its context.

First of all, the harlot's name (or at least the presentation of the character¹⁶) is a "mystery" (*mysthvrion*), which should already give us pause regarding a literalistic interpretation. Beale regards the term as describing "a hidden meaning of 'Babylon the

Great' that needs further revelatory interpretation."¹⁷ Similarly, Morris remarks, "*Mystery* will indicate that the significance of the harlot's name is not open and obvious to all."¹⁸ This is not determinative for a non-literal assessment of the name, but this approach is strengthened when we consider an earlier passage. Interestingly, in 11:8, we see that "the great city" being discussed in that context can be "spiritually called Sodom and Egypt" (*kalei'tai pneumatikw' " Sovdoma kai É Ai[gupto*).¹⁹ This gives a key precedent to symbolically naming a city with the name of an enemy empire of Israel's past in this book. Moreover, it should be noted that even Robert Thomas is unable to consistently apply a strictly literal hermeneutic in this passage. Amazingly, after arguing that the term "mystery" should not lead us away from a face-value handling of Babylon, he proceeds to claim that, "the 'seven hills' can and probably does have a nonliteral meaning..."²⁰

Dyer runs into problems as well by attempting to press the notion that the Old Testament prophecies declaring that Babylon's destruction will be permanent (without the possibility of rising again)²¹ have yet to be realized.²² This requires him to push the limits of technical literalism in addressing texts like Jer 51:26, which warns that Babylon's stones will not be used again for building. Commenting on this passage he cites evidence that some nearby villagers actually used stones from the city in their homes, thus apparently proving that to some extent Babylon still stands.²³ Such hermeneutical maneuvers create more problems than they solve.²⁴

Thus, the major problem with this position is that it fails to adequately address the way the image of the harlot is presented in the passage with regard to apocalyptic style and the general thrust of the rhetoric in terms of audience relevance. This is perhaps most clear from the fact that such a view requires the reader to presuppose the future rebuilding of the empire of Babylon on the Euphrates without any textual indication of such an event, purely on the *assumption* that the referent is in the distant future—a time when this empire, as history has now shown, would otherwise be a distant memory. In other words, seeing the harlot as a representation of this literal kingdom in the future *requires* one to posit a future rebuilding, without any warrant from the text (that is, there is no description of a rebuilding or secondary rise anywhere in Revelation itself).²⁵

¹⁶ See G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 858.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 859.

¹⁸ Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 200.

¹⁹ The rendering of the term *pneumatikw' "* as "spiritually" is intentionally literal in translation for the sake of interpretive neutrality. Other translations, however, make the point more sharply, e.g., the NET Bible, which actually opts for "symbolically."

²⁰ Thomas, *Revelation*, 289.

²¹ These include Jer 28:39; 50:39–40; 51:24–6, 62–4; Isa 13:19–22.

²² Dyer, "Identity of Babylon," 444–46.

²³ *Ibid.*, 446–49.

²⁴ For further discussion of the hermeneutical difficulties of this view, see Beale, *Revelation*, 829–30.

²⁵ The future Rome view only fares worse: in this case, this rebuilding idea would be even more of a stretch for the original hearers than for those of us who have the benefit of the subsequent

All in all, this view is attractive if we are seeking easily accessible answers, but it is ultimately unsatisfying in light of the greater complexities of the apocalyptic genre that are now so widely recognized. And, as we have noted, the real issue for our study is not whether or not a case *can* be made for a given view, but rather whether one particular interpretation seems to have the most evidence that it is the *best* answer.

Apostate Christianity

The theory that the harlot represents an end-time apostasy of the church (a believing remnant notwithstanding) is similar to the Roman Catholicism view described above, but with less ties to specific historical contexts. William Milligan is probably the most notable representative of this view,²⁶ although Beale and Hamstra have sympathies with it as well.²⁷ Like the Catholicism view, this position relies heavily on the implications of the adultery motif.²⁸ Basically, it accepts the theory that adultery in prophetic terms implies former alliance with God and then casts this theme in a futuristic context. Christianity en masse is thus taken as the group that has defected from its Lord.

The obvious strength of this hypothesis is that it seems to fit well with the themes of the context and yet avoids the arbitrary imposition of a commentator's own historical setting back onto the text. Still, even this interpretation feels a bit distant from the original audience, and it may not do justice to the detail of imagery John employs in order to hint at the proper solution. Otherwise, there is admittedly little to object to when considering this position exegetically, and it is therefore in my estimation one of the stronger options. My reason for being unpersuaded by this view, as in the case of several others, is not that there is an insurmountably high volume of counter-evidence against it, but rather that the evidence in favor of another position is strong enough so as to displace the other views, rendering them unconvincing by default.

Rome

By far, the majority view among modern scholars is that the Babylonian whore represents first-century Rome. This view is held by prominent commentators Aune²⁹ and Mounce,³⁰ and Beale incorporates elements of it as well.³¹ Probably the strongest evidence for this interpretation is the well-attested fact that

historical record; since Rome was still standing and dominant, they would have to assume (again, without any word from John) *both* the idea that the empire was going to fall, *and* the idea that it would rise again, only to fall again!

It might be objected that we have a similar phenomenon in the gap between the advents of Christ, unforeseen before the New Testament. But this is precisely the issue. The New Testament actually *reveals* a future coming of Christ—it is not merely assumed. There is no rebuilding of “Babylon” revealed at any point in the Apocalypse. It is certainly not *impossible*, but it *is* absent from the text, though central to such an interpretation. This argument from silence cannot disprove the theory, but it should raise suspicions against it.

²⁶ However, while he sees this as the ultimate reality of the image (William Milligan, *The Book of Revelation* [New York: Armstrong, 1903], 904), he considers the archetype present in John's mind to specifically be Jerusalem (ibid., 289–315), for which see below, chapter four.

²⁷ Beale, *Revelation*, 884; Sam Hamstra Jr., “An Idealist View of Revelation,” in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 117–18.

²⁸ Beale, *Revelation*, 884–85.

²⁹ David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Bruce M. Metzger et al., vol. 52c (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1998), 959.

³⁰ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 308.

³¹ Beale, *Revelation*, 886. Other works that take this view include R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, vol. 2, International Critical Commentary, ed. S. R. Driver, A. Plummer, and C. A. Briggs (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 75; Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 3d ed.

after A.D. 70 Jewish literature often used Babylon as a metaphor for Rome.³² Peter himself could even be identified as one who uses this device (1 Pet 5:13), assuming he is writing from the traditional location of Rome.³³ Rome's world dominance, paganism, and persecution of the saints (all traits of the harlot³⁴) in the first century are a matter of historical infamy. Who else so perfectly fits the title "the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth" (17:18)? Furthermore, who held such great economic sway as that described in chapter 18? The connection is obvious. Especially with the assumption of a late date of the book, Rome, the "city on seven hills,"³⁵ is a prime candidate for Babylon.³⁶

However, there are several problems with this view. First, if the book is more properly dated before A.D. 70 (see below, chap 3), the political and social background for the scene changes, and Rome is no longer the only obvious enemy of the saints.³⁷ We cannot therefore simply assume Rome as the church's antagonist if the date of the book remains in question. The bigger problem, however, is the relationship between the harlot and the "beast" on which she rides.³⁸ As Gregg remarks, "That the beast from the sea is closely identified with Rome will scarcely be disputed by members of most interpretive schools."³⁹ This is due largely to the dependence of the image upon Daniel 7 in which the fourth beast/empire that persecutes God's people⁴⁰ has, like this beast, ten horns and is noted for its blasphemies.⁴¹ The identification of both of these creatures with the Roman Empire seems clearly to be intended.

What then of the harlot? This is a highly underrated difficulty for those who follow the Babylon = Rome interpretation. John seems to be at great pains to distinguish Babylon and the beast as *two distinct characters*. In 17:3, the woman is depicted as *sitting* on the beast.⁴² Verses 11 and 18 specifically interpret

(London: Macmillan, 1911), 226; G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black's New Testament Commentaries, ed. Henry Chadwick (London: Black, 1966), 213; Moses Stuart, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, vol. 2 (New York: Newman, 1845), 322.

³² Cf. 4 Ezra 3:1–2, 28–31; 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 10:1–3; 11:1; 67:7; *Sib. Or.* 5.143.159–60.

³³ See discussion in Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 794.

³⁴ Cf. 17:18, 17:4, and 17:6, respectively for these characteristics.

³⁵ This was well-known nomenclature for Rome (cf. Caird, *Revelation*, 216; cf. Rev 17:9).

³⁶ Some commentators, so confident that this position has long been established as correct, simply assume it with little or no argumentation: e.g., Mounce: "The prostitute is Rome" (*Revelation*, 308); also, Aune: "While 'the great city' is applied to *Jerusalem* in 11:8, in Rev 17–18 the phrase 'the great city' refers *clearly* to Rome" (*Revelation*, 959, italics mine).

³⁷ The other primary option, the Jewish leadership, will of course become the focus of this thesis in chapter four.

³⁸ Cf. Rev 13; 17:3.

³⁹ Gregg, *Revelation*, 276.

⁴⁰ The first three are usually understood as historical Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece.

⁴¹ Cf. Dan 7:7, 25.

⁴² Which accounts for why she is sitting on the seven hills/mountains. These are associated with the seven heads, which fits perfectly with the idea that the adulteress is riding on the back of the beast, not identifiable with it (so J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, Anchor Bible, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, vol. 38 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975], 280 [proposing that the relationship involves mutual favors between local rulers and foreign powers]; David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* [Tyler, TX: Dominion, 1987], 436, n. 14). However, note Beale's caution that it may be better to take ο[ρο] here in its normal sense in the Apocalypse, i.e., that of a mountain, not a hill. From this view, the mountain imagery represents strength, specifically that of kings/kingdoms (this being common symbolism in the OT as well as other Jewish writings), and therefore we are simply revisiting the "seven heads" idea (Beale, *Revelation*, 868). Either way, it is far from necessary to conclude with Swete that, "No reasonable doubt can be entertained as to the meaning of these words [considering that] the Seven hills of Rome were a commonplace with the Latin poets" (Swete,

the two images as different entities. Moreover, *and this is key*: in verse 16 the beast, with its ten horns, “will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will devour her flesh and will burn her up with fire.” Thus, the idea that the harlot is merely a recapitulation of the image of the beast is fraught with difficulty, precisely because *the two interact*. Worse yet, *the beast hates and destroys the harlot*.

Furthermore, this option, while hitting the mark with regard to relevance for the original audience, makes little connection to the theme of adultery (that is, if this theme is, in fact, related to being at one time allied with God). Rome had always been the enemy of God.

However, this interpretation certainly has its merits, and has convinced most of the academic community. In fact, despite its problems, I tend to think I would personally lean toward this view myself if I were not persuaded of another perspective. Again, the argument of this thesis is not that all other views beside the Jerusalem interpretation are necessarily burdened with overwhelming difficulties, but simply that the reasons to adopt this option sufficiently outweigh those offered for other alternatives.

The Evil World System

One plausible interpretation that carries a lot of weight within the camp of idealism is that Babylon in Revelation simply represents pagan society or forces as a whole, regardless of the age. This allows the idealist to include portions of previous options under the more generic umbrella of “the world.” Representative of this position are Beale⁴³ and Hendriksen,⁴⁴ as well as a more cautious Hamstra.⁴⁵ The obvious advantage with this position is its inherent inclusiveness. By its very nature, it can make room for most interpretive requirements, gladly incorporating apparently correct observations from any of the other camps.

While this position is no doubt theologically sound and meaningful, and is certainly attractive in light of its intrinsic “non-falsifiability” (i.e., with this position, one cannot technically be “wrong,” right?), the problem this raises is whether this in and of itself represents a satisfactory understanding of the nature of apocalyptic literature, especially within the canon of Scripture. Of course, we must be cautious of grouping all such literature together, as if second-temple Judaism was less than diverse. But general patterns, most notably in the biblical prophetic tradition, are probably better understood as showing a concern with history, not *merely* theology.⁴⁶ Wright has gone to great lengths to contend “[Jews of the period] knew a good metaphor when they saw one, and used cosmic imagery to bring out the full theological significance of cataclysmic socio-political events.”⁴⁷ Or, as he asserts elsewhere, “It will not do to dismiss ... ‘apocalyptic’ [language] as ‘merely metaphorical.’ *Metaphors have teeth*; the complex metaphors available to first-century Jews had particularly sharp ones, and they could be, and apparently were, reapplied to a variety of scenarios, all within *this-worldly history*.”⁴⁸ Various and sundry applications can be drawn from the idealist

Apocalypse, 220). Moreover, Jewish parallels to this sort of “seven mountains” language may clarify the matter further (see below, chapter four, under “The city on seven hills”).

⁴³ Beale, *Revelation*, 885–86; it should be noted, however, that Beale does want to recognize some connection of the book of Revelation with historical events, at least in so far as they are related to the ultimate establishing of Christ’s kingdom with the last judgment. For this reason he prefers to describe his position as a “redemptive-historical form of modified idealism,” or “eclecticism” (a far more manageable term) rather than simple “idealism” (p. 48).

⁴⁴ William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1944), 200–202.

⁴⁵ Hamstra, “An Idealist View of Revelation,” 117.

⁴⁶ While a satisfactory evaluation of the debate surrounding apocalyptic literature would presently take us too far afield, it should be understood that the perspective on apocalypticism discussed in chapter 1 (see chap. 1, n. 8 for sources providing further discussion) informs this point of the argument.

⁴⁷ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 333.

⁴⁸ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, vol. 2, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 321–22, italics mine.

position, but if the evidence points to a more specific referent in the mind of the author, we should be willing to recognize what may be the more primary emphasis of the images in question.

Jerusalem

Although many students of the Book of Revelation are perhaps not even aware of this position,⁴⁹ I am persuaded thus far that the many lines of evidence that illuminate our understanding of this mysterious metaphor are best synthesized in the view that the harlot Babylon is intended first and foremost to represent the city of Jerusalem in the first century, being judged by God in her desolation by Rome. Others who share this view include Ford,⁵⁰ Russell,⁵¹ Terry,⁵² Chilton,⁵³ Gentry,⁵⁴ and apparently, N. T. Wright.⁵⁵ I believe this solution can answer the most questions surrounding the text, and that it fits most naturally with the themes of the book and in the ears of the original audience. Moreover, I believe there are several direct hints and clues given by the writer to help the reader properly identify the promiscuous character. We will therefore devote the remainder of this study to examining the evidence regarding this view, beginning with an assessment of its chief objection: the date of Revelation.

⁴⁹ And many commentators do not adequately address it, even if they are aware of it; cf. Mounce, *Revelation*, 308, who gives it only a passing reference in a single footnote: “Ford tries to build a case for Jerusalem rather than Rome as the harlot of Rev 17, but without much success.”

⁵⁰ Ford, *Revelation*, 54–59, 93, 259–307.

⁵¹ J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: A Critical Inquiry into the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming* (London: Unwin, 1887), 482–98.

⁵² Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics: A Study of the Most Notable Revelations of God and of Christ* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1898), 426–39.

⁵³ Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 421–66.

⁵⁴ Kenneth L. Gentry, “A Preterist View of Revelation,” in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 73–79.

⁵⁵ Who makes an interesting comment in a footnote in *Jesus and the Victory of God* (regarding what he perceives to be an underlying theme of the Olivet Discourse): “This conclusion [that Babylon’s ultimate fall as predicted by the prophets occurs in A.D. 70] may be held by some to carry implications for the reading of Rev 17–19, where some recent commentators have suggested that the great and wicked city is not Rome but Jerusalem. I have discovered that this suggestion arouses anger in some circles, which is not explained simply as annoyance at an exegetical peculiarity... . What is at stake here, and for whom?” (Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 358, n. 141). This, of course, may be a point of great importance: anti-Semitism is a charge quite frequently leveled in modern theological debate. It may in fact be that we have not yet begun to discern the extent to which New Testament studies have been impacted by nobly motivated biases left over from the aftermath of Auschwitz’ terrors. Could it be that some modern scholars are hesitant to advocate a view such as the one presented in this thesis because it inherently sounds disturbingly anti-Semitic?

Also, other representatives of the Babylon = Jerusalem view include A. J. Beagley, *The ‘Sitz im Leben’ of the Apocalypse with Particular Reference to the Role of the Church’s Enemies* (New York: de Gruyter, 1987), 93–102; Eugenio Corsini, *The Apocalypse: The Perennial Revelation of Jesus Christ*, trans. & ed. Francis J. Moloney (Wilmington, DE: Gazier, 1983), 313–30; Cornelius Vanderwaal, *Search the Scriptures: Hebrews—Revelation*, vol. 10 (St. Catherines, ON: Paideia, 1979), 79–111; Keith Mathison, *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1999), 152–54; Iain Provan, “Foul Spirits, Fornication and Finance: Revelation 18 From an Old Testament Perspective,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 64 (1996), 81–100; Philip Carrington, *The Meaning of the Revelation* (New York: Macmillan, 1931), book 6.

CHAPTER 3: DATING THE APOCALYPSE

The Significance of the Date

One of the biggest difficulties for our interpretation of the material in Revelation 17–18 has always been the date of the writing of the book. While other aspects of the Jerusalem view will be considered below, a more thorough investigation must be made regarding the date issue before any defense of this interpretation is set forth, primarily because many of the scholars who reject preteristic interpretation of the book do so quite often *a priori* on the basis of the currently dominant view that the Apocalypse was written in the 90s, which of course quickly rules out the stance that much of the book is a prediction of Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70.¹ This objection, therefore, must be overcome at the outset if any serious consideration to preteristic interpretation is to be given.

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

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

One related issue is worth noting at this point. Some difficulty arises in this question from the fact that the Book of Revelation differs so greatly in style from the Gospel of John. It seems unlikely that if the two

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

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

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

⁴ Similarly, Gregg (compelled by Gentry's arguments): "At the very least, the *possibility* of the early date keeps the *preterist* approach legitimately in the debate" (Steve Gregg, ed., *Revelation: Four Views, A Parallel Commentary* [Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1997], 18).

were both written by John the Apostle they could have been written in the same decade. This obviously creates a conundrum for anyone who places both either in the 60s or the 90s. However, when we consider the fact that the authorship of both books as well as the date of both books remain unresolved questions for many scholars, there are enough variables to allow for several plausible scenarios. For instance: some recent scholars, such as Wallace, have gone against the flow of the consensus and argued strongly for a pre-70 date for John.⁵ However, the Gospel of John itself never claims to have been written by the Apostle, and it is common knowledge that many commentators prefer to ascribe it to someone else.⁶ Thus, if we were to accept the early date of the Gospel, it could still be that John wrote Revelation pre-70 and another author penned the Gospel. On the other hand, skepticism of the identity of the “John” who wrote Revelation emerged as early as Eusebius⁷ and is certainly a common view to this day. Therefore it could just as easily be claimed that John wrote the Gospel pre-70 just as some other unknown author was crafting the Apocalypse. Regardless, the overwhelming majority of scholars take a late date of John anyway, and this, if correct, would only fit better with an early date of Revelation. In other words, the authorship question is not crucial here.

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

New Testament scholars such as C. F. D. Moule⁸, Joseph Fitzmyer⁹, F. F. Bruce¹⁰, E. Earle Ellis¹¹, and J. A. T. Robinson¹² have all recently supported the early date position.¹³ Moreover, this is far from novel. In reality, these writers are merely returning to what was once the foregone conclusion of nearly the entire New Testament studies world. As Wilson notes, “Throughout the nineteenth century the majority of New Testament scholars favored a pre-70 dating of the Book of Revelation.”¹⁴ Robinson echoes, “It is indeed a little known fact that this [a pre-70 date] was what Hort calls ‘the general tendency of criticism’ for most of the nineteenth century... .”¹⁵ Indeed Lightfoot, Westcott, Hort, and a host of others held strongly to an

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

early dating of the book,¹⁶ so much so that one author in Lightfoot's day agreed this date to be "*universally accepted by all competent critics.*"¹⁷

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

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

The Testimony of the Church

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

The Evidence of Irenaeus

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

The quotation from Irenaeus that has become so important in the debate is generally translated as follows: "We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been

¹⁶ Ibid., 224.

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

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

¹⁹ Swete, *Apocalypse*, xcix.

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

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

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

announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision. For that was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign."²³

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

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

The logic of the sentences seems to me to require this interpretation. The statement that the vision was seen at the close of Domitian's reign supplies no reason why the mysterious numbers should have been expounded "by him who saw the apocalypse," had he judged such an exposition needful. If, on the other hand, we refer *eJwrvavqh* to St. John, the meaning is plain and simple. We may expand the sentences thus: "Had it been needful that the explanation of the name should be proclaimed to the men of our own day, that explanation would have been given by the author of the Book. For the author was seen on earth, he lived and held converse with his disciples, not so very long ago, but almost in our own generation. Thus, on the one hand, he lived years after he wrote the Book, and there was abundant opportunity for him to expound the riddle, had he wished to do so; and, on the other hand, since he lived on almost into our generation, the explanation, had he given it, must have been preserved to us."²⁸

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

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

²⁴ Eusebius *The Ecclesiastical History* 3.18.3.

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

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

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

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

²⁹ Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 2.22.5 and 3.3.4, although there may be some question as to whether John's death and the time of his being "seen" in this context (i.e., available to the audience/Irenaeus to preach on the matter) would have been the same thing; in other words, these passages may not be contradictory on this interpretation at all anyway. It should also be added that there is perhaps another curious piece of evidence in his statements elsewhere worth noting. Eusebius records Irenaeus' words regarding the number of the beast: "As these things are so, and this number is found in all the approved and

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

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

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

Now it should first be noted that the "unanimity" is nothing of the sort. As we shall see, there is much more diversity among the witnesses than is often admitted. But for now, suffice it to say that the allegedly numerous "testimonies" to the Domitianic date are in reality merely a chorus of voices echoing *one* testimony. Bell highlights the little-known fact that "all later witnesses to this date seem to derive directly

ancient copies" (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. C. F. Cruse [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998], 5:8:5–6). Gentry argues that this implies that to Irenaeus, the writing of the Apocalypse was more than "ancient," in that many of the *copies* were to him "ancient," even though he considers the end of Domitian's reign "almost in our day." "Ancient copies" suggests for Gentry at least two, if not more generations of scribal reproduction—i.e., some copies are earlier copies and some are more recent. If we allow time, then, for the Apocalypse to be written, circulated, and copied through multiple scribal cycles so that the earlier ones can be called "ancient," we might well ask whether Irenaeus would write this way of a work composed less than a hundred years earlier. While far from conclusive, the question is certainly intriguing (see Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 58–59).

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

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

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

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

³³ Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 2.22.5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.12.14.

³⁵ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 24.

³⁶ James Moffatt, "The Revelation of St. John the Divine," in *The Englishman's Greek Testament*, vol. 5, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910), 319.

from Irenaeus.”³⁷ Milton Terry concurs: “[W]hen we scrutinize the character and extent of this evidence [i.e., the external witnesses], it seems ... clear that no very great stress can safely be laid upon it. For it all turns upon the single testimony of Irenaeus.”³⁸ And as Randell adds, “Eusebius and Jerome, in the fourth century, *do not strengthen what they merely repeat.*”³⁹ Even Collins, who elsewhere uses Victorinus, Eusebius, and “other writers” as support for the Domitianic date, goes on to concede the likelihood that the writers after Irenaeus are simply parroting him.⁴⁰ How many late-date advocates would accept this sort of evidence in defense of the so-called “Majority Text” when dealing with textual criticism?⁴¹

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

Other Major Witnesses

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

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

On the other hand, Apollonius of Tyana (b. 4 B.C.) says Nero was “commonly called a Tyrant.”⁴⁵ Similarly, Lactantius (ca. A.D. 260–330) describes the persecutor whose reign led to the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul, recording that afterwards, “... the *tyrant*, bereaved of authority, and precipitated from the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴⁴ Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 16.6.

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

height of empire, suddenly disappeared.”⁴⁶ The assumption that the “tyrant” in Clement and Origen must clearly be Domitian is unwarranted.

Also pertinent to the question of whether Clement believed in a Domitianic composition of the Apocalypse is the following quote from his *Miscellanies*: “For the teaching of our Lord at His advent, beginning with Augustus and Tiberius, was completed in the middle of the times of Tiberius. And that of the apostles, embracing the ministry of Paul, ends with Nero.”⁴⁷ Unless Clement considers John’s Apocalypse to be outside of the teaching of the apostles, he seems to imply he believes the Scriptures were completed by the end of Nero’s reign.⁴⁸

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

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

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

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

Eusebius and Jerome. Another two witnesses that are claimed for the Domitianic position are Eusebius (ca. A.D. 260–340) and Jerome (A.D. 340–420), both of which are cited by Charles and Swete.⁵³ However,

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

⁴⁷ Clement of Alexandria *Miscellanies* 7.17 (translation given is that of William Wilson in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2 [italics mine]). The Greek of the last sentence reads ἡ δὲ τῶν ἀποστόλων αὐτοῦ μέγιστος ἐστὶν Παύλου λειτουργία ἐπιτελεῖται.

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

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

⁴⁹ Clement of Alexandria *Stromata* 1.21.146. Cf. Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 46.

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

⁵¹ Hort, *Apocalypse*, xv.

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

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

again, being later, they both reflect Irenaean tradition, explicitly so in Eusebius' case.⁵⁴ Moreover, both witnesses seem to reflect *conflicting* tradition, elsewhere either implying that John was banished under Nero or approvingly reusing testimonies to such and then recasting them in another light.⁵⁵ This at least reveals competing traditions in their times.

The Shepherd of Hermas. One interesting, if somewhat inconclusive, source that might give light to Revelation's date is *The Shepherd of Hermas*. The date of this work is difficult to establish. The external evidence (specifically the Muratorian Canon) certainly points toward a date of about A.D. 140–155, but the internal evidence may push the book much earlier,⁵⁶ and some scholars, such as Edmunson and Robinson, have argued for a date between 85–90.⁵⁷

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

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

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

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

Tertullian. Tertullian's (ca. A.D. 160–220) relevance to the matter comes from his account of the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul and the banishment of John. In discussing their fates, he ties the three together as a unit, implying they happened together, amidst the same persecution. He declares that Rome is “where Peter had a like Passion with the Lord; where Paul hath for his crown the same death with John;

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

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

⁵⁶ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 703.

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

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

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

where the Apostle John was plunged into boiling oil, and suffered nothing, and was afterwards banished to an island.”⁶⁰ Jerome certainly understood Tertullian to mean John was banished under Nero,⁶¹ and Schaff states, “Tertullian’s legend of the Roman oil-martyrdom of John seems to point to Nero rather than to any other emperor.”⁶² One obvious problem with this testimony is the questionable historicity of the oil-boiling event. And there is, to be sure, an element of ambiguity in the statement (it seems to me that Tertullian’s words *could* merely be emphasizing similarity between the apostles’ fates, rather than temporal proximity between them), but it is probably a somewhat safe conclusion that Tertullian thought John’s banishment took place under Nero.

Victorinus. The fourth-century bishop Victorinus (d. ca. A.D. 304) clearly held to a Domitianic date for Revelation. There is an interesting difficulty with his testimony, however, in the fact that he also tells us that while on Patmos, John was working the labor mines as part of his sentence. The idea of a man in his nineties working the mines under the lash ought to give us pause, though anything is possible. Nevertheless, we should again remember, “[T]he whole concatenation of witnesses in favor of [the Domitianic date] hangs upon the testimony of Irenaeus, and their evidence is little more than a mere repetition of what he has said.”⁶³

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

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

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

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

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

⁶¹ Jerome *Against Jovinianum* 1.26.

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

⁶³ Stuart, *Apocalypse*, vol. 1, 269.

⁶⁴ Epiphanius *Heresies* 51.12, 33.

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

⁶⁶ *Index discipulorum* 125.

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

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

⁶⁹ Summarizing the same sentiment, Wilson poignantly asks, “Why should we prefer the date of Irenaeus to that in the prefaces of both the Old Syriac versions and also in Theophylact, all three of which

Domitian's Reign

The second major proof for most who hold to a Domitianic date for the Apocalypse is the apparent theme of imperial persecution and the assumption that this portrayal fits better against the backdrop of Domitianic persecution of the church. This line of evidence is pivotal to the discussion for two reasons: first, it is most likely the case that this particular issue was the catalyst for the scholarly revolution regarding the date after the nineteenth century, and second, it is being recognized more and more that as far as Domitian being the second great persecutor of the Church, "There is extremely little evidence that such was actually the case."⁷⁰ In fact, "Most modern commentators no longer accept a Domitianic persecution of Christians."⁷¹

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

The Influence of Lightfoot

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

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

ascribe the banishment of John to the reign of Nero?" (J. Christian Wilson, "The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation," *New Testament Studies* 39 [October 1993]: 599). Still, Wilson's confidence in Theophylact is probably misplaced. His citation here is in reference to the fact that Theophylact states that John was banished thirty-two years after Christ's ascension, which of course would lead to a date in the 60s. However, Theophylact's late date (d. 1107) and contradictory statements elsewhere that Revelation was written under *Trajan* (certainly an anomalous claim!) make him of little use (see Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 108).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Domitianic Persecution Reconsidered

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

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

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

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

⁷⁷ Dio Cassius *Roman History* 67.14

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

⁷⁹ Suetonius *Domitian* 15.

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

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

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

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

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

The Neronic persecution of the 60s, on the other hand, is no matter of debate. It is a matter of historical infamy, and should surely, in Wilson's words, "be given at least as much attention in dating Revelation as the *possibility* of a *perceived* crisis [under Domitian] is given."⁸⁹ This is not to say that the earlier setting solves all the problems either. It is generally recognized that we lack any solid evidence for

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

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

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

⁸⁴ Ibid., pt. 1, 1.104–15.

⁸⁵ Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.26.7.

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

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

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

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

Neronic persecution beyond Rome itself.⁹⁰ This silence in the provinces is undoubtedly a difficulty for an early-date view. But placing the Apocalypse in the 90s only heightens the hurdle, since under Domitian, as we have seen, we do not even have firm evidence for persecution in Rome itself! The critique cuts both ways. If a late date is to be established for the Book of Revelation, it cannot be done on the grounds of the backdrop of persecution.

Rise of the Imperial Cult

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

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

Important Internal Considerations

Looking at the internal evidence concerning the date of the Book of Revelation, we find several key factors that seem to point to a pre-70 setting. These were in fact the primary reasons that nineteenth-century scholarship advocated an early date. However, there is some internal evidence that has been advanced on behalf of a late date, and this is worth examining as well. We will consider the latter first, especially regarding the condition of the seven churches addressed in the letters. Perhaps more helpful, however, are the issues that follow, namely the identity of the "sixth king" in chapter 17 and the presence of the temple in chapter 11.

The Condition of the Churches

Some have argued that the descriptions of the churches to which John writes do not fit a setting in the 60s and necessarily call for a much later context. There are basically three evidences that are cited in this vein. The first is that not enough time has elapsed since the churches' establishment for such complacency

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

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

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

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

and sin to have set in.⁹⁴ This, of course, is a very subjective argument. How long does backsliding take? On this basis, do we need to reconsider the date of Galatians? What about Corinth?

A more manageable point is raised by some concerning the establishment of the church at Smyrna, which is alleged not to have been set up until after Paul's death.⁹⁵ The evidence for this is supposed to be from Polycarp, the second century bishop of that church, who writes, "But I have not observed or heard of any such thing among you, in whose midst the blessed Paul labored, and who were his letters of recommendation in the beginning. For he boasts about you in all the churches—those alone, that is, which at that time had come to know the Lord, for we had not yet come to know him."⁹⁶ However, Robinson is quick to note, "[A]s Lightfoot observed long ago, all that Polycarp actually says is that 'the Philippians were converted to the Gospel before the Smyrneans ...' It is astonishing that so much has continued to be built on so little."⁹⁷ In other words, Polycarp adds virtually nothing to the debate.

One final argument that has been advanced from the letters is that the Laodicean church is addressed as a location of affluence, which may be difficult to harmonize with the fact that Laodicea was almost completely decimated by a well-known earthquake around 60–61.⁹⁸ However, we know from Tacitus that the city took great pride in the fact that it rebuilt itself quite promptly, without even requiring outside funds from the empire.⁹⁹ Thus, this argument does not carry very much weight either, and even late-date advocates such as Collins can concede, "This bit of evidence is of no help in dating the book."¹⁰⁰

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

The Sixth King

In chapter seventeen of Revelation, we are told there are "seven kings" (basilei' " eJptav), and while "five have fallen" (oiJ pevnte e[pevan), "one is" (oJ ei|" e[stin).¹⁰¹ This passage has been the subject of much debate. The kings are generally agreed to be Roman emperors, but which seven are in view is a more difficult question. Some writers, struggling to come up with a list that fits their scheme, have preferred to simply consider the list symbolic of pagan world power, not linking the individual kings with any specific emperors.¹⁰² This could possibly correct; like the idealist view of the book overall there is nothing to absolutely rule out such a non-specific handling of the text, but many feel this view does not go far enough for the level of detail and style of description given by John.¹⁰³ This difficulty is highlighted by the Jewish parallels of the period such as *Sib. Or.* 5:1–50 and 2 *Esdras* 11–12, which use similar head/king imagery in contexts which are plainly intending specific emperor lists.¹⁰⁴

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

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

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

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

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

⁹⁹ Tacitus *Annals* 14.27.

¹⁰⁰ Collins, "Myth and History," 402.

¹⁰¹ Rev 17:9–10.

¹⁰² E.g., Beale, *Revelation*, 870.

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

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

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

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

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

Starting, however, with either Julius or Augustus, the sixth king who “is” at the time of writing is naturally either Nero or Galba, respectively. Either of these cases would imply a setting in the 60s. Even Beckwith concedes, “It requires then a certain degree of arbitrariness to avoid making the sixth king either Nero or Galba.”¹¹² It may be that how one handles the infamous *Nero redivivus* myth¹¹³ at this point with reference to the mortally wounded head in the passage decides which of these two is more likely, but for now we may simply say that this most plausible reading of the text has led many to consider this section to bear clear marks of pre-70 composition.¹¹⁴ Even many late-date advocates concede this, even to the point of taking a source-critical approach to explain it as the inclusion of early material by a Domitian-era

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

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

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

¹⁰⁸ Swete, *Revelation*, 220.

¹⁰⁹ See defense in Collins, “Myth and History,” 389.

¹¹⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 873.

¹¹¹ See Bell, “The Date of John’s Apocalypse,” 99.

¹¹² Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 705. In fact, the difficulty of reconciling this phenomenon with a Domitianic date has actually been the catalyst for many scholars to give up on counting “heads” and to simply go instead with the symbolic interpretation; see, e.g., Caird, *Revelation*, 217–19, who finds it too complicated to harmonize the list with the statement of Irenaeus and proceeds to move to the symbolic solution as the safest alternative. In response to this approach, note the indictment of Robinson, *Redating*, 247–48: “The contortions to which the commentators have been driven in the interpretation of ch. 17 are I am convinced self-imposed by the ‘discrepancy’, as Beckwith calls it, between the clear statement that the sixth king is now living and what Torrey called their ‘stubborn conviction’ that the book cannot be earlier than the time of Domitian. *Drop this conviction and the evidence falls into place*” (italics mine).

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

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

editor.¹¹⁵ The employment of such a technique in the debate hints at the fact that we have here a very difficult piece of evidence, one which may point quite strongly to an early date for Revelation.

The Presence of the Temple

An issue that has for some been determinative of the date is the presence of the temple in 11:1–2. In fact, this argument was the most persuasive issue to most early-date scholars of the nineteenth century.¹¹⁶ For them, it seemed unthinkable that such a passage could be written after the leveling of the temple in A.D. 70 without any mention of the event. It certainly does seem that at the time of writing the Herodian temple is still standing. In fact, most *late-date* scholars even admit these verses must have been written before 70.¹¹⁷

How then do these scholars continue to hold to Domitianic composition of the book? There are basically two answers here. The primary response has been, once again, to resort to source criticism. Collins goes so far as to attribute the downfall of the early date to the rise of source-critical methods, which gave many scholars a way out, so to speak, of this compelling argument.¹¹⁸ The retort therefore has been to concede the pre-70 writing of 11:1–2, but to then speculate that these verses are simply being incorporated by the Domitian-era author from earlier material. It seems difficult, however, to account for the inclusion of such obsolete material without any updating. This is what Robinson chides as the “resort of commentators to treating anything that will not fit a Domitianic date as the incorporation of earlier material, though (for reasons they do not explain) without subsequent modification.”¹¹⁹ Seams from such use of a source are not visible, and of course if one holds to the unity of the book as a whole, the pull of this evidence is especially difficult to escape.

Another way to respond to this argument has been to treat these verses as merely symbolic, depicting an ideal temple, not the actual Herodian building.¹²⁰ This seems unlikely however for a couple of reasons. First of all the seer is quite explicit in the book when dealing with heavenly versus earthly realities involving Jerusalem and the temple. In chapter 21 of course we vividly have the *New Jerusalem* descending from heaven itself to earth, and John is careful to note that within it *there is no temple*. Similarly, in the very passage in question, chapter 11, we are later given a vision of the heavenly temple, in which the ark of the covenant appears.¹²¹

Second, all of this seems to be in contrast with the temple described in 11:1–2, which is to be trampled by Gentiles, and is clearly located in the city of Jerusalem, where the witnesses will prophesy.¹²² It would seem John is at great pains to identify for the reader the literal, earthly temple in historic Jerusalem.¹²³

One could possibly relate the whole passage to a future, rebuilt temple, but in the context its presence is merely presupposed. Without any informing of a future rebuilding in the text, the author, writing so soon after the Jewish War in a late date paradigm, would have surely confounded his readers. In Gentry’s words, “Where is there any reference to the rebuilding of the Temple in Revelation so that it could be again

¹¹⁵ E.g., Charles, *Revelation*, 2:69–70; Arthur S. Peake, *The Revelation of John* (London: Johnson, 1919), 348. One serious problem with this view is the question of why the later writer would not have updated his source; obviously he would have known which king “now is” in his day.

¹¹⁶ Collins, “Dating the Apocalypse of John,” 36.

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

¹¹⁸ Collins, “Dating the Apocalypse of John,” 37.

¹¹⁹ Robinson, *Redating*, 242.

¹²⁰ E.g., Caird, *Revelation*, 130–32.

¹²¹ Rev 11:19.

¹²² Rev 11:2–8.

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

destroyed? ... If there is no reference to a rebuilding of the Temple and the book was written about A.D. 95, how could the readers make sense of its prophecies?"¹²⁴

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

Summary of the Evidence

In light of all the evidence, it seems incredible that so many consider the issue so decisively weighted in favor of Domitianic timing. The two key arguments for this view that are consistently noted by its advocates are the testimony of the church fathers and the grim background of Domitian's reign. The first of the two, as we have seen, is not the "unanimity" that it is often purported to be, but rather a façade. In reality, it all boils down to the testimony of Irenaeus, which is grammatically ambiguous, and even if translated in the traditional manner remains the word of one writer, and a historically questionable writer at that. Would we really turn the whole matter on the witness of a single voice, let alone a voice that tells us that Jesus lived into his forties? Moreover, as we have also observed, there are many more historical sources that attest to an early date than are usually admitted.

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

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

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

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

¹²⁴ Ibid., 173–74.

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

CHAPTER 4: THE EVIDENCE FOR JERUSALEM AS THE HARLOT

The case for identifying Jerusalem as the intended referent for the harlot image in Revelation proceeds on several fronts. Some are related to internal evidence throughout the Apocalypse, others involve the background of the rest of Scripture and general thematic emphases of biblical prophecy. But when taken together, I am persuaded that these lines of argument point in one primary direction, as we will see in the following evaluation of the evidence.

Common Objections

The first step in examining the Jerusalem case, if we are to have a fair hearing of the evidence, is to consider the main objections that are offered by opponents to the this view. Of course, the most common is the contention that the Apocalypse was written after A.D. 70 and could therefore not be concerned with a prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem. This objection has been thoroughly analyzed in chapter three above, and the arguments related to such need not be repeated here. There are however a few others that warrant deliberation.

Babylon Imagery in Jewish Sources

One of the chief reasons many have contended that Babylon represents Rome in the Apocalypse is the widely recognized fact that a number of Jewish sources use this device to critique Rome.¹ Certainly this is not uncommon, and it is understandable that many commentators find this compelling. Moreover, this argument presupposes the understanding that these Jewish writers used such imagery in light of the destruction of the temple, an act first executed by historical Babylon, and later recapitulated by the Romans.² Of course, tied to this approach is the assumption that the book was written after the second destruction, which is also when all of the aforementioned Jewish instances of this representation for Rome occur.³

Beale takes the argument a step further, noting that there is no example in Jewish literature of the use of the name Babylon for Jerusalem.⁴ But this particular silence argument seems weak. It is to be *expected* that the Jews would not apply the name “Babylon” to *themselves*. Who would?⁵ It is, in fact, the very unexpected dramatic irony of such imagery that makes John’s use of the label from a Christian perspective so striking and meaningful if Jerusalem is in view.

¹ Cf. 4 Ezra 3:1–2, 28–31; 2 *Apoc Bar* 10:1–3; 11:1; 67:7; *Sib. Or.* 5:143159–60.

² See Adela Yarbro Collins, “Myth and History in the Book of Revelation: The Problem of Its Date,” in *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith*, ed. Baruch Halpern and Jon D. Levenson (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 388; also, G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 19.

³ Although, see E. Earle Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament Documents*, Biblical Interpretation Series, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and Rolf Rendtorff, vol. 39 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 211, who argues for first-century B.C. examples of this association from *Pss. Sol.* 8.15 and 1QpHab 2.

⁴ Beale, *Revelation*, 25.

⁵ Perhaps the Qumran community, as a counter-temple movement, could be the exception and a possible candidate to use such language against Jerusalem, but of course their not doing so proves nothing for us. It is interesting to note, however, that they do frequently treat Jerusalem in *harlotry* language. The consistent application of this terminology in line with OT usage was in fact one of the decisive arguments for Ford, who makes much of the Qumran evidence for her Babylon = Jerusalem case (J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, Anchor Bible, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, vol. 38 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975], 276–307).

Beale also points out that Sodom has precedent for being used as a metaphor for Israel,⁶ but not Babylon.⁷ But this argument, too, carries little weight. Most of the prophets were written before Babylon had fallen (many before she existed!), the few exceptions being written shortly thereafter.⁸ Therefore, she naturally would not be used as an ancient fallen enemy of God, the way Sodom or Egypt would. This would have carried about as much thrust of clarity and style as calling Jerusalem “Rome” in the Apocalypse while Rome was still standing. It would have been confusing, and would not follow the precedent of previous prophets.

On the other hand, now that Babylon’s horrific rule had become a distant memory, application of her name to apostate Jerusalem, like the names of Sodom and Egypt, which of course have been used for Jerusalem in this very book,⁹ would be absolutely appropriate. It would mean Christians were living in exile in the center of heathenism (not even Rome, but God’s adulterous wife!), but they would soon be rescued and vindicated as she was judged by God, just as had happened with Sodom and Egypt before.

There is a further point to be made here regarding the purpose of the Babylon metaphor. As has been said, most scholars understand the connotations of the image to relate to the destroyer of the temple, which would of course not fit Jerusalem. However, Wilson has argued that, while these connotations with Babylon became the major thrust post-70, the focus in earlier writings was on Babylon as the place of exile, the pagan place where God’s people sojourned.¹⁰ In this vein, Revelation does not at any point connect Babylon to the temple’s destroyer. The image is only employed in terms of a pagan city that persecutes the saints, out of which God’s true people are to flee. Wilson, in fact, considers this usage more consistent with other pre-70 sources, and thus considers it to be suggestive of an early date for the book.

Whether or not these ideas may be decisively established, it does seem fair to say in light of these issues that the Jewish usage of the name Babylon for Rome, while perhaps worth considering as a useful piece of evidence in *favor* of the *Rome* view, does not preclude usage by John with reference to Jerusalem; the task remains for us to consider the corroborating evidence as to which referent is more likely in *this* context.

Language of Exaltation

A second difficulty with the Jerusalem view for some is the lofty language used by the author of Revelation to describe the city of Babylon, especially in 17:18 which reveals the identity of the harlot as “the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth” (hJ povli" hJ megavlh hJ e[cousa basileivan ejpiÉ tw'n basilevwn th'" gh'"). Most commentators make a

⁶ Isa 1:10; 3:9; Jer 23:14; Ezek 16:44–58.

⁷ Beale, *Revelation*, 25. Interestingly, Beale also speaks of precedent for Israel being referred to as Egypt (*ibid.*), but all of the passages he cites (all of which are listed in n. 6, above) are examples of the Sodom language. In fact, I know of no passage in the OT that uses Egypt in this way (cf. Ford, *Revelation*, 172; David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* [Tyler, TX: Dominion, 1987], 281). Beale’s apparent oversight here is interesting because of the fact that Rev 11:8 uses both Sodom *and* Egypt with reference to Jerusalem. If John can use Egypt for Jerusalem without precedent, why not Babylon? This seems to more or less cancel out Beale’s argument.

⁸ Even if Daniel is taken to be late, it is written from the perspective of the Babylonian era.

⁹ Cf. Rev 11:8.

¹⁰ J. Christian Wilson, “Babylon as a Cipher for Rome and the Dating of Early Jewish and Early Christian Documents,” unpublished paper read at the 1994 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, cited in Beale, *Revelation*, 19. Apparently, Wilson has surveyed OT, LXX, DSS, and Pseudepigraphal sources. Beale questions the strength of Wilson’s handling of the background sources, but no explicit counter-evaluation is given (*ibid.*).

very natural move in jumping to Rome as the most obvious candidate, considering the dominance of the empire in John's day.¹¹ From a sheer political standpoint, this seems very persuasive.

In order to deal with this objection, we must look at the two composite parts of this phrase individually in the light of their literary background within the context of Revelation. The first part, the title "the great city" seems at first glance an odd name to apply to Jerusalem, especially if considered in contrast to the glory of Rome. However, there is much to be said not only in defense, but also in favor of the Jerusalem view at this point from the perspective of historical sources as well a literary-contextual perspective within the bounds of the Apocalypse itself. There is strong precedent, and perhaps even direct indication that this phrase is synonymous with Jerusalem in the book, and such will become a major piece of evidence for our view based on the more elaborate discussion of this specific question below under "'The Great City'." If the argument given there about this point stands, we need not discard the Jerusalem view as a reaction to the use of this phrase.¹²

The second part of the title, "which has dominion over the kings of the earth," appears to be more difficult. Again, from a sheer political standpoint, this seems to be fairly straightforward. Rome would be an easy choice. Who else "has dominion over the kings of the earth"? Can this be said of Jerusalem in any sense?

Certainly, this is one of the more problematic issues for the Jerusalem view, but a case can be made that this sort of language is not out of line in a context such as this. There is in fact a fairly substantial precedent for similar hyperbolic language of exaltation for the city of Jerusalem in the Old Testament as well other early Jewish sources.¹³ For instance, in Ps 48:2, Jerusalem is said to be the "exultation of all the earth" (יְרוּשָׁלַיִם יְשׁוּעָתָא דְכָל אֲרֶזְרָא) because it is the "city of the great king" (יְרוּשָׁלַיִם עִיר דְמַלְכָא דְגָדְלָא). The NET Bible, commenting on this verse, summarizes well: "The language is hyperbolic. Zion, as the dwelling place of the universal king, is pictured as the world's capital."¹⁴ Ford proposes that Rev 17:18 "is probably a similar hyperbole; cf. 4QLam which describes [Jerusalem] as 'princess of all nations'."¹⁵ The paradigm undergirding such descriptions is the preunderstanding that as God's covenantal mediators, it is Israel through whom God exercises His kingly rule. The very fact that Jerusalem is called "the great city"¹⁶ at all during a time of pagan occupation shows that the author may be viewing it theologically, not with a political literalism, which would perhaps be out of place in the context of this work.¹⁷

¹¹ So Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 3d ed. (London: Macmillan, 1911), 226; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 221; G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black's New Testament Commentaries, ed. Henry Chadwick (London: Black, 1966), 216-17; et al.

¹² In preview, I would simply note there are very telling uses of this phrase, as well as the similar, shortened title "the city," in three other locations in Revelation, specifically 11:8, 14:20, and 16:19, all of which imply, if not require a Jerusalem association.

¹³ E.g., Ps 48:2; Isa 2:2-3; Lam 1:1; 2:15; Mic 4:1-2; Gen R. 23:10; Exod R. 23:10; also, Matt 5:35; so Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 443; Kenneth L. Gentry, "A Preterist View of Revelation," in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 74.

¹⁴ *The NET Bible* (Biblical Studies Press, 2001), 956, n. 11.

¹⁵ Ford, *Revelation*, 285. See also the thorough discussion of this tendency in Jewish thought by Hans Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 127-28. Kraus argues heavily that ancient Jews saw the world, even in times of oppression, as under the rulership of the Davidic dynasty, because God had chosen Israel and established Jerusalem as His world's capital.

¹⁶ As it is in Rev 11:8.

¹⁷ It could also be pointed out that there is strong precedent for the use of the title "the great city" for Jerusalem in several ancient Jewish sources, especially Jer 22:8; *Sib. Or.* 5.154, 226, 413; cf. Josephus

In fact, we may have a good indicator within the text of the Apocalypse itself that this type of thinking lies behind the phraseology of 17:18. Specifically, there may be a literary connection with previous usage of this kind of language within Revelation. In 1:5, Christ himself is described as “the ruler of the kings of the earth” (οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς). The term for ruling authority here is of course βασιλεῖς rather than βασιλεῖαν, but the meaning certainly overlaps with 17:18, and it seems likely that an allusion to the same concept or background is intended. In 1:5, the Old Testament text in the background is Ps 89:27,¹⁸ which is taken from a thoroughly messianic context. The overtones of the Psalm are overtly related to the implications of the Davidic Covenant, and being placed in the position of authority over the kings of the earth is construed as the messianic role. It seems probable, given the near identical phrasing, that 17:18 hearkens back to 1:5 and its allusion to Christ’s messianic rule. This then puts us at a crossroads. It is possible that this type of language is used at this point in the Apocalypse merely as a dark parody of the rule of Christ as manifest in Roman sovereignty (or whichever referent other than Jerusalem one might prefer). On the other hand, the messianic connotations of this language may narrow the options of what city should be in view here. It is quite plausible that the choice of this messianic terminology is most rightly associated with the messianic city, the place of the Davidic rule.¹⁹ It seems to me that this literary link should at least be given due consideration alongside the common reading based on the political atmosphere of the day.²⁰

Once again, there seem to be valid arguments on either side. The point to be made here is simply that there is enough credible evidence for the Jerusalem interpretation even in an apparent problem area such as this that we need not disregard this theory from the outset. The case for the Jerusalem view must still be considered on the merits of the evidence in its favor.

The City on Seven Hills

Advocates of the Rome view have regularly argued that strong, if not conclusive support for their interpretation can be found in Rev 17:9 which describes the “seven hills/mountains” (ἐπτὰ ὄρη) on which the woman sits. It is beyond dispute that Rome was very commonly called the “city on seven hills” because of its topography.²¹ A number of references to this in ancient literature could be cited, including, for example, Virgil,²² Horace,²³ and Cicero.²⁴ Understandably then, many commentators see this verse as a clear indicator that John is speaking of Rome and doing so in the common language of the day.²⁵ Certainly,

Against Apion 1.197, 209. This is certainly not conclusive, but rather corroborative, especially considering the fact that Rome also receives the title in some writers (e.g., *b. Pesahim* 118b; *Pesikta Rabbati* 14).

¹⁸ This is clear from the connection between the “kings of the earth” and “firstborn” language.

¹⁹ In support of this possibility we may note that the language here employed is only applied in Revelation to Christ and the great city.

²⁰ It might be objected that it would be contradictory for Jerusalem to be simultaneously portrayed as both glorious and adulterous. But this is where the brutal irony of the rhetoric lies. Though God has declared her His world capital and wife, she has played the harlot. She has been established as the queen, but her sins have caught up with her, and she will reap the consequences (For more on this, see below, “Harlotry in the Prophets”). Similarly, Lamentations paradoxically calls her “princess of the provinces” (מלכות בנות ארצות) in a passage indicting her for fornication (Lam 1:1–2), and Jeremiah calls her “great city” (גדולה) in a passage about her judgment (Jer 22:8).

²¹ See Caird, *Revelation*, 216; Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), 395.

²² Virgil *Georgics* 2.535.

²³ Horace *Carmen Saecularae* 7.

²⁴ Cicero *ad Atticum* 6.5.

²⁵ E.g., Mounce, *Revelation*, 315; Moses Stuart, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, vol. 2 (New York: Newman, 1845), 325; Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, Tyndale New Testament

it cannot be denied that this is a very significant argument for the Rome view. However, this line of reasoning is not without its problems, and I believe there may be a more suitable understanding of this verse, one that seems to have been largely overlooked by most writers.

One hindrance to an assured link here is the question of how widespread this terminology for Rome really was. Few actually raise this issue, but the truth is that the evidence to which we have access only places this “seven hills” language in the Western Mediterranean regions. As far as whether this usage was familiar in the East, we simply do not know. There just is not any record to indicate this for us.²⁶ It may be hasty therefore to automatically presume that this Roman reference would be the shared understanding in Asia Minor.

It could be added, as Beale observes, that every other occurrence of ο[ρα in Revelation refers to a mountain, not a “hill,” and this may caution us further against viewing 17:9 as a reference to the “hills” of Rome.²⁷ Certainly, the term can go either way lexically, but within the context of this book, a departure from the “mountain” image evoked elsewhere would be unexpected, and should probably be avoided in our translation if possible. A more likely connection is the association of mountains with the symbolism of power and kings/kingdoms that is to be found in the Old Testament and other Jewish works.²⁸ “Seven,” of course, is often symbolic of completion or perfection, and thus it may be that the seven mountains are best understood from a Jewish mindset as a symbol of completeness of authority, or fullness of royal power.²⁹ Still, in harmony with this imagery there is background material to be considered here that may very well give us insight into *which* royal power we are dealing with.

As a number of scholars have recognized, the pseudepigraphal book of *1 Enoch* bears numerous striking affinities with the Apocalypse of John; several are even persuaded of literary dependence of portions of the Apocalypse upon *Enoch*.³⁰ Others are more cautious; Bauckham for instance feels we may not have enough evidence to conclusively identify literary dependence on such a work, though the parallels that must be acknowledged at least give clear testimony to traditional imagery that was already prevalent in Jewish culture prior to Revelation.³¹

The significance of *1 Enoch* for our study is that certain passages paint images that are intriguingly similar to Rev 17:9. In *1 Enoch* 24–25,³² the writer describes his journey to a certain place on earth where he encounters a great mountain. This great mountain, as the angel Michael explains, is the location of “the throne of God ... on which the Holy and Great Lord of Glory, the Eternal King, will sit when he descends to visit the earth with goodness.”³³ Furthermore, this place is associated with God’s end-time city-paradise where the elect will find the “fragrant tree” (v. 4) that will give them “fruit for life” (v. 5) in the eschaton,

Commentaries, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 203; Caird, *Revelation*, 216; Bauckham, *Climax*, 395.

²⁶ See A. J. Beagley, *The ‘Sitz im Leben’ of the Apocalypse with Particular Reference to the Role of the Church’s Enemies* (New York: de Gruyter, 1987), 103.

²⁷ Beale, *Revelation*, 868.

²⁸ E.g. Isa 2:2; Jer 51:25; Dan 2:35, 45; *Targ.* Isa 41.15; et al.

²⁹ So Beale, *Revelation*, 868–9; Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics: A Study of the Most Notable Revelations of God and of Christ* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1898), 431; J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: A Critical Inquiry into the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord’s Second Coming* (London: Unwin, 1887), 491–2.

³⁰ E.g., R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, vol. 1, International Critical Commentary, ed. S. R. Driver, A. Plummer, and C. A. Briggs (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), lxxv, lxxxii–iii; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 967.

³¹ Bauckham, *Climax*, 39.

³² I owe this reference to Eric B. Sowell, who graciously pointed it out to me, having rightly recognized its great relevance to this thesis.

³³ *1 Enoch* 25.3 (translation given is that of E. Isaac in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983], 26).

and this tree will be planted “upon the holy place” (v. 5). Clearly, in some sense Jerusalem (albeit in its eschatologically idealized form), or at least the future mountain-throne of Yahweh, is the site being painted with such gloriously vivid language. This passage is in fact regularly cited by commentators for background imagery underlying John’s depiction of the New Jerusalem with its great mountain, throne, and tree of life in Rev 21–22.³⁴

What is not mentioned in these discussions is that the passage also says this great mountain is seated among “seven dignified mountains” (24:2). These “seven mountains” (v. 3) are elaborately described as to their appearance and formation in 24:2–3, and the central, taller mountain of the seven is then revealed as the place of God’s earthly rule (25:3–6).³⁵

In surveying the major commentaries, I have been surprised to find *no* mention of this passage in connection with Rev 17:9, though it is repeatedly cited as background for the New Jerusalem.³⁶ If this passage of *Enoch* bears such close resemblance to the Apocalypse, how is it that an apparent reference to Jerusalem sitting on “seven mountains” is ignored? Is this not easily as significant as the typically cited idiom for Rome? Interestingly, Beale references 4 Ezra for more imagery of the restored Jerusalem, and even notes that work’s amplification of “great mountain” imagery to “seven great mountains,”³⁷ yet he makes no connection with the “seven mountains” of Revelation.³⁸ This seems an unfortunate oversight. Nonetheless, this gives a second example in the apocalyptic tradition for portraying the place of God’s future earthly rule (no doubt the idealized Jerusalem) as located among seven mountains.³⁹

Based on this evidence, I do not find the “city on seven hills” argument for Rome to be as persuasive as I once did. It would seem that a very compelling case can be made that the stream of Jewish apocalyptic tradition energizing Revelation more naturally evokes the image of Jerusalem as the city seated on seven mountains in 17:9 than Rome. The view that Babylon is a cipher for Jerusalem in the Apocalypse cannot then be dismissed on the basis of this common objection; not only can it be defended that the evidence of 17:9 *can* fit Jerusalem, there are strong reasons to believe that it in fact *does* most properly fit Jerusalem.⁴⁰

Idolatry after the Exile

It has been argued by some that the element of idolatry in Rev 17–18 strongly militates against the possibility that Jerusalem is being described because Judaism was, in the first century, strictly monotheistic,

³⁴ E.g. Caird, *Revelation*, 270; Ford, *Revelation*, 345; Beale, *Revelation*, 1065.

³⁵ Cf. also 18.6; 32; 77.5.

³⁶ Mounce actually *does* mention the seven mountains of 1 Enoch, but only in the context of the New Jerusalem. He makes no connection to 17:9 at all (Mounce, *Revelation*, 389).

³⁷ 4 Ezra 2.19.

³⁸ Beale, *Revelation*, 1108; 4 Ezra of course is a later work, but this gives more attestation to the stock image of “seven mountains” in Jewish thought which may be influencing Rev 17:9.

³⁹ Of course, the parallel is not perfect, since these other works are concerned primarily with Jerusalem in the eschaton. This may make the link less strong than it could be, but the correspondence of language cannot be dismissed. Furthermore, the preceding discussion of the Jewish tendency to speak of the holy city in the present through the eye of proleptic idealism mitigates this tension. Describing Jerusalem upon “seven mountains” (like *Enoch* and 4 Ezra) in the author’s own day would be consonant with the aforementioned portrayals as “princess of all nations” and “exultation of all the earth,” in which that which is ideal and theologically true is depicted as present reality.

⁴⁰ These issues of course spill over into the fact that the seven mountains are also the seven heads of the beast. This can however be dealt with fairly naturally in that the imagery of the seven mountains represents the power base of the city, which, given the fact that the harlot is riding upon the beast, relates to the Roman authority that is empowering the city’s sin and persecution of the saints (see below, “False Jews and Idolatry”). The shared imagery of completeness of power behind both the seven mountains and the seven heads allows the two to be interchangeable for John. They represent the same thing, though viewed from different perspectives.

and never compromised with the idolatry of their pagan neighbors.⁴¹ This would seem to make it difficult to maintain that the Jewish leadership is being portrayed as idolatrous at the time of the writing of the Apocalypse, especially when Rome's rampant idolatry is so historically notorious.

However, we may be missing John's point if we assume that only literal idols can be the issue in a book full of symbolic polemic. There is in fact very good reason to suppose otherwise when we consider the connotations of idolatry in the book, especially in the letters. There is much to be said here, but for now I would simply note that certain parallels set forth in earlier sections of Revelation strongly imply that the idolatry with which John is concerned is related to the "paganism" of Jewish rejection of Christ and aggravation and persecution of the saints in collaboration with Roman authority. This will be elaborated at some length below under "False Jews and Idolatry," and if the connection is defensible, the idolatry question should not be seen as an obstacle to the Jerusalem = Babylon position.

Extent of Sea Trade

One final objection commonly leveled against the Jerusalem interpretation of the harlot is the great wealth and extensive sea trade described in chapter 18. This imagery is seen by many to be clearly indicative of Rome (or at least some ideal or future world dominating power) in its sheer vastness.⁴² Much ink has been spilt over the economic elements of this passage, yet while such discussions are understandable when we consider the extravagant language of the chapter, they may be misguided. Old Testament scholar Iain Provan has recently argued that the form of the passage recalls familiar lament song patterns from the Old Testament tradition, and that the function of the use of this form is to echo God's past judgment of pagan peoples, rather than highlighting the economic details, which, according to Provan, are likely simply the carry-over of the language of the original songs that are being reused.⁴³ The point of the rhetoric would not be to actually focus on financial abuses, but rather to compare the fall of the city in the present context to the fall of other pagan peoples in the Old Testament. To this end Provan asks poignantly (regarding Rev 18's list of cargoes), "[D]oes this list signify economic critique of Rome as such, or is it there *simply because it is the sort of thing that one finds in biblical laments and dirges?*"⁴⁴

Moreover, the especially striking thing about Provan's article is that in considering the actual contents of the text from this perspective, he finds certain details to have been altered from the original Old Testament source material that is being reapplied. These alterations, he argues, all amend the lament song for Babylon with embellishments that redirect the critique to another city, namely, *Jerusalem*.⁴⁵ In fact, whereas many New Testament scholars have found the language of chapter eighteen to be fatal to a Jerusalem reading, Provan (rather than being persuaded to a Jerusalem interpretation on the basis of the literary features of chapter *seventeen* that compel most advocates of this view), as an Old Testament scholar, is primarily persuaded that Jerusalem is in view precisely *because* of what he sees at work in John's crafting of Rev 18, and he argues the case from this evidence.⁴⁶

If Provan is accurately grasping John's use of the Old Testament here, then something that has been seen as an obstacle to the Jerusalem view may actually turn out to be a supporting argument *for* it. Some of the key elements of this proposition will be examined in more detail under the section entitled "Economic

⁴¹ So Beale, *Revelation*, 887.

⁴² See especially Bauckham, *Climax*, chap. 10.

⁴³ Iain Provan, "Foul Spirits, Fornication and Finance: Revelation 18 From an Old Testament Perspective," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 64 (1996), 81–100.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 86 (italics mine).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ It should be noted that Provan does feel that the nature of the rhetoric of the passage points to greater trans-temporal powers behind Babylon that can rightly be applied in other contexts than historical Jerusalem; nevertheless, having surveyed all of the major emendations John has made, he summarizes what he considers to be the primary focus by stating, "The case for Babylon as Jerusalem, then, is in my view a compelling one" (Provan, "Foul Spirits, Fornication and Finance," 96).

critique and Revelation 18,” but the point to be made for this stage of the argument is that it seems fair to say that all of the major objections to seeing Jerusalem in this passage are manageable, at least to varying degrees. Moreover, as we have noted, in several cases a deeper investigation of the issues behind the objections may in fact reveal that these too hint at Jerusalem.

The Case for Jerusalem

It is hoped at this point that at the least a fair case has been made that these more difficult elements of the discussion can be made to fit with the view being proposed by this thesis with a reasonable amount of exegetical credibility. Given thoughtful investigation, none of the objections raised decisively precludes Jerusalem as the harlot of the Apocalypse. The burden of proof still lies on the cumulative evidence that can be used to support this interpretation. Therefore, having surveyed the major solutions that have been proposed for this passage, and having now taken into account the primary objections to the solution proposed by this thesis, the case for Jerusalem will be set forth.

“The Great City”

One of the simplest, yet strongest clues that Jerusalem is to be understood as the harlot of Babylon is that John seems to give the answer away directly to the observant reader in a couple of key places in Revelation. At the end of chapter 17, the interpreting angel tells John the identity of the adulterous woman explicitly: “The woman whom you saw is *the great city* which has dominion over the kings of the earth” (hJ gunhÉ h}n ei\de" e[stin hJ povli" hJ megavlh hJ e[cosa basileivan ejpiÉ tw'n basilevwn th'" gh'"). This phrase “the great city” seems to be set forth with the assumption that the reader knows what city that would be, and the phrase is tossed around several more times in this passage.⁴⁷ Moreover, the phrase appears to be used quite exclusively in the book of Revelation. Outside of this passage, in which it occurs many times, all of which clearly refer to Babylon, the phrase only appears *twice* in the rest of this twenty-two-chapter book. The first, and most important occurrence of the designation “the great city” is in 11:8, which reads, “And [the two witnesses’] bodies will lie in the street of *the great city which is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified*” (toÉ ptw'ma aujtw'n ejpiÉ th'" plateiva" th'" povlew" th'" megavlh" h{ti" kalei'tai pneumatikw'" Sovdoma kaiÉ Aigupto" o{pou kaiÉ oJ kuvrio" aujtw'n ejstaurwvqh).⁴⁸ This verse is extremely significant. In it, we have two *major* pieces of information relevant to our study.

First, it is all but indisputable that “the great city” as identified here is Jerusalem, “where also their Lord was crucified.”⁴⁹ This alone sets a powerful precedent for the term before we come to chapters 17 and

⁴⁷ Cf. 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21.

⁴⁸ The term *pneumatikw'* has been translated quite literally here for the sake of interpretive neutrality. The RSV prefers “allegorically,” and the NET Bible reads “symbolically.” Bauer’s *Greek-English Lexicon* elaborates that the usage of the term denotes “in keeping with the spirit with reference to the divine *pneu'ma*,” remarking specifically of this verse, “[I]f one follows the spiritual ... understanding of scripture ... , Jerusalem lies concealed beneath the name Sodom. Something more is involved here than mere allegory of figurative usage” (Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker, 3d ed. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 837). The meaning may be *more* than “symbolically” or “allegorically;” it is certainly not *less*.

⁴⁹ As with most “indisputable” issues, there has been the occasional voice of exception, most notably Mounce: “The majority of commentators take ‘the great city’ to be Jerusalem in spite of the fact that in the seven other references in Revelation it consistently refers to Rome ... In view of the consistent use of the term elsewhere in the book as a reference to Rome ... it is best to conclude that the witnesses meet their death at the hands of the Antichrist, whose universal dominion was in John’s day epitomized by the power of Rome ... The inclusion of a reference to the crucifixion is not to identify a geographical location but to illustrate the response of paganism to righteousness” (Mounce, *Revelation*, 220–21). In other words,

18. This term is not used carelessly for many cities in the book, but rather only twice without *explicit* reference to Babylon. It is hard to imagine this reference not ringing in the ears of the original audience when they would arrive at 17:18. It would easily be the most natural step, if a somewhat shocking one.

Secondly, the writer also sets a precedent for using metaphorical names for Jerusalem, specifically names of Israel's ancient enemies. This tells us two things: we should not be surprised if he does it again, and Jerusalem is being painted in a *very* negative light in Revelation.

A similar occurrence of the phrase “the great city” is found in 16:19, where again we have a vital clue to the identity of the harlot who appears later. The verse reads, “And the great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell” (kai^É ejgevneto hJ povli" hJ megavlh eij" triva mevrh kai^É aiJ povlei" tw'n ejqñw'n e[*p*esan). The key point to be made here is that “the great city” is apparently contrasted with “the cities of the nations.” It could be that the great city is merely one of the cities of the nations, but it seems more likely that the two are to be distinguished; we are not told that the *other* cities of the nations fell, just that the cities of the nations fell, as distinct from the great city. As Ford comments, “The juxtaposition of this phrase with the ‘cities of the nations’ suggests that it is not a Gentile location, such as Rome.”⁵⁰ This also becomes more probable in light of the lexical ambiguity of the Greek. For neutrality's sake, the translation given above has simply rendered tw'n ejqñw'n “of the nations.” In Greek, of course, the term may be translated either in this manner or more specifically as “of the Gentiles.” The NET Bible notes this as an alternative translation, and if we take this option, the text is even more telling. In this case “the great city” would be juxtaposed against “the cities of the Gentiles.” In light of the last use of “the great city,” in which it was identified as the place “where also their Lord was crucified,” this does not seem unlikely. What makes this especially significant for our present study is that this verse may bridge the gap between 11:8 and 17:18 in that the remaining portion of 16:19 fills out the image of this “great city” by identifying it explicitly as Babylon.

In addition, this interpretation can be further validated by the Old Testament background of the city's fate in this passage. As several commentators have recognized, the splitting of the city into three parts seems to echo Ezek 5:1–5 in which God has the prophet divide his hair into three parts as a depiction of coming judgment upon a city, specifically, *the desolation of Jerusalem*, which will occur in thirds.⁵¹ Taking together the precedent of Rev 11:8, the contrast with the cities of the nations/Gentiles, and the background of Ezek 5, we have very compelling reasons to think 16:9, like 11:8, may be referring to Jerusalem as “the great city.” Not only that, “the great city” is here also clearly connected to the name “Babylon.” Again, these are the only two references to “the great city” in the book before we get to chapter 17. There is no other “great city” to be found in the Apocalypse, no other precedent to follow. If Jerusalem is not the harlot, it is worth asking at this point why John, who uses the phrase “the great city” so colorfully in

Mounce's conviction that the harlot in Rev 17–18 is Rome leads him to claim that the phrase “where also their Lord was crucified” refers not to Jerusalem, but to Rome, even though the original reader of the book would come across this passage first. How could this verse, as the first reference to “the great city,” *not* conjure up the image of Jerusalem for the audience? Are they expected to proleptically read Rome into it from a certain interpretation of chapters 17–18 (before reading them) against the connotations of the imagery? As Thomas remarks, “[I]f language has any meaning at all, it is hard to identify ‘the great city’ as anywhere else but Jerusalem” (Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* [Chicago: Moody, 1995], 94; so Swete, *Apocalypse*, 138; Ford, *Revelation*, 292; et al.). This is especially true in light of the reference to “the holy city” (th^Én povlin th^Én aJgivan) just six verses earlier (11:2).

⁵⁰ Ford, *Revelation*, 264.

⁵¹ So Russell, *Parousia*, 488; Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics*, 425; Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 415. Moreover, v. 5 of this passage of Ezekiel is especially relevant for its strong statement against Jerusalem and its contrast of the city with other “nations,” the very sort of thing that may be happening here. I would note that I have found no other suggestion by any commentator for the background of the threefold splitting of the city. Often this detail is simply passed by without interpretation (cf. Beale, *Revelation*, 843–44; Swete, *Apocalypse*, 211; Caird, *Revelation*, 209); by some, it is merely set aside as “symbolical” (cf. Stuart, *Apocalypse*, vol. 2, 317, who employs this term with no further explanation).

chapters 17 and 18 has been so uncaredful as to let it slip at two other places in the book, both of which would likely lead one to see Jerusalem as God's enemy, if not Babylon itself.⁵²

One other similar phenomenon occurs in chapter 14, in which “the winepress was trodden outside the city” (ejpathvqh hJ lhnoÉ" e[wxqen th' " povlew" [14:20]). Almost all interpreters identify this city as Jerusalem⁵³ (due to the grapes/vine imagery that is so commonly associated with Israel in the Old Testament⁵⁴), yet the only “city” mentioned thus far in the chapter is “Babylon the great” (BabulwÉn hJ megavlh) in verse 8. The identification seems to be taken for granted. If this is the case, then all three passages in the book that anticipate the revealing of “the great city” in chapters 17 and 18 can be said to be evocative of, if not indicative of Jerusalem, and this necessarily sets a powerfully consistent motif in the mind of the reader by the time these later chapters are encountered.

Her Adornment

When we examine chapters 17–18, one striking feature of the image of the harlot we see emphasized is her adornment. She is arrayed in “purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls” (porfurou'n kaiÉ kovkkinon kaiÉ kecruswmevnh crusivw/ kaiÉ livqw/ timivw/ kaiÉ margarivtai" [17:4; 18:16]). As Beale observes, this combination of words in the Greek is *identical* to the LXX description of the high priest's garments.⁵⁵ In other words, the city is being represented as having the role of high priest, or at least an association with the Jewish priestly system. Certainly Jerusalem is the most natural referent.⁵⁶ It is also interesting to note a comment by Josephus that the veil covering the temple gate (which was over 80 feet high and 24 feet wide) was “a *Babylonian* curtain, embroidered with blue, and fine linen [cf. Rev 18:16], and scarlet, and purple.”⁵⁷ There may be no connection—the LXX reference is a stronger link—but it is not unreasonable to wonder if this could possibly have been in the mind of John at the time of the writing of Revelation. Regardless, the high priestly nature of Jerusalem seems to be the point of this attire.

Harlotry in the Prophets

One of the most important issues in this discussion is the meaning of harlotry in prophetic literature. The woman in Rev 17 and 18 is depicted as “the great harlot ... with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication” (th' " povrnh" th' " megavlh" ..meq j h| " ejpovrneusan oiJ basilei' " th' " gh' " [17:1–2]), “the mother of harlots” (hJ mhvthr tw'n pornw'n [17:5]), and related images. Her fornications are the reason for her judgment (ch. 18). This theme cannot be overemphasized. In the Old Testament prophets, the imagery of a people or city committing adultery, or

⁵² One final note on 16:19: obviously, the “cities of the Gentiles” did not literally “fall” in A.D. 70, and this could be perceived as an obstacle to seeing Jerusalem here (though see Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 416). However, we are not arguing that a larger collapsing of apocalyptic/prophetic images is not at play in Revelation; it is certainly likely that the fall of Jerusalem, the fall of the Roman empire, the judgment, and the parousia are being telescoped as conflated events from the seer's perspective. The present contention is merely that the underlying features of the text point to the idea that John is viewing Jerusalem as “the great city” here.

⁵³ Cf. Steve Gregg, ed., *Revelation: Four Views, A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1997), 404.

⁵⁴ See Russell, *Parousia*, 487.

⁵⁵ Beale, *Revelation*, 886, citing Exod 25:3–7; 28:5–9, 28:15–20, 35:6; 36:9–12; 36:15–21 LXX.

⁵⁶ So Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 429; Gentry, “A Preterist View of Revelation,” 76.

⁵⁷ Josephus *The Jewish War* 5.5.4 (translation given is that of Whiston in *The Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987]).

being labeled a harlot, is *consistently* a reference to covenant unfaithfulness.⁵⁸ A multitude of passages in various prophetic books use the harlotry theme to condemn Israel for her sin.⁵⁹ In fact, of the many passages that illustrate this constant theme, the only two exceptions to Israel being the referent are two prophecies against Tyre⁶⁰ and Nineveh⁶¹, *both of which had formerly been in covenant with Yahweh*.⁶²

The point here is too consistent to be overlooked: one cannot commit adultery against God if one is not married to God. It is difficult to conceive of any city other than Jerusalem that would be described as the covenant-breaking harlot in Revelation, especially in light of the dozens of times she has been given this appellation already throughout the Old Testament.⁶³ It would be highly unprecedented to expect another referent. Over and over again in biblical prophecy, *Israel is the harlot*.⁶⁴ This issue becomes all the more striking when we recognize that a great deal of the substance of Revelation comes from John's reapplication of the contents of Ezekiel,⁶⁵ a work which is consumed largely with the prediction of Jerusalem's approaching destruction because of her great adultery, which is followed by a vision of the New Jerusalem. The connection is not insignificant.

Lastly, on this point, it is worth noting that the call for the harlot to be repaid "double according to her deeds" (תָּעַבְתְּ דִּפְלָא' כַּתָּעַבְתְּ תֵּעַבְתְּ e[rga aujth' " [18:6]) is used in the Old Testament *only*

⁵⁸ So Terry, *Biblical Apocalypstics*, 427; Russell, *Parousia*, 491; Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 424–428; et al. In Ford's concise words, "It is the covenant which makes the bride, the breaking of it which makes the adulteress" (Ford, *Revelation*, 285).

⁵⁹ Cf. Ezek 16:15, 17, 28, 35, 41; 23:1–21, 44; Isa 1:21; 57:3; Jer 2:20; 3:1; 13:27; Hos 2:2–5; 4:12, 15, 18; 5:4; 9:1; Mic 1:7.

⁶⁰ Isa 23:15–18.

⁶¹ Nah 3:4–5; notably, in 4QpNah the Qumran community reapplies this passage to indict *Jerusalem!*

⁶² Chilton elaborates: "It is noteworthy that Tyre and Nineveh—the only two cities outside of Israel that are accused of harlotry—had both been in covenant with God. The kingdom of Tyre in David and Solomon's time was converted to the worship of the true God, and her king contracted a covenant with Solomon and assisted in the building of the Temple (1 Kings 5:1–12; 9:13; Amos 1:9); Nineveh was converted under the ministry of Jonah (Jon 3:5–10). The later apostasy of these two cities could rightly be considered harlotry" (Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 424, n. 2). Even Beale recognizes this to be the likely explanation for these two exceptions: "Perhaps part of the reason that Tyre and Nineveh are the only two cities outside Israel referred to as harlots in the OT is that at one time they were in a covenant relationship with God and subsequently became faithless toward God by returning to idol worship ..." (Beale, *Revelation*, 850).

⁶³ So Russell, *Parousia*, 489–90; Keith Mathison, *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1999), 153; Gentry, "A Preterist View of Revelation," 74–75, who argues strongly that the imagery is being primarily taken from parallels in Jer 3, in which the subject is explicitly Yahweh sending the northern kingdom, Israel, away in *divorce* because of her harlotries, a theme which Gentry argues is also being picked up by John. Ford too sees the divorce theme at work in the book (Ford, *Revelation*, 93–94). Considering the contrasting of the judgment of the adulterous woman with the bringing in of the new bride for Christ, there might actually be some support for this.

⁶⁴ See the comprehensive discussion in Ford, who also notes the persistent presence of the Jerusalem = harlot message in the Qumran scrolls, thoroughly examining the occurrences of this phenomenon and arguing heavily from the consistency of this evidence (Ford, *Revelation*, 283–85).

⁶⁵ See Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 20–25; also, Beagley, "The 'Sitz im Leben' of the Apocalypse," 93; Beale notes widespread "agreement" that Ezekiel is the greatest influence on the book (though he himself prefers to emphasize Daniel) (Beale, *Revelation*, 77); Carrington is even willing to say (with some degree of hyperbole), "The Revelation is a Christian rewriting of Ezekiel" (Philip Carrington, *The Meaning of the Revelation* [New York: Macmillan, 1931], 65).

“unclean things” and “abominations” in Rev 17 and 18 as well.⁷³ As we discussed before, some have therefore objected to the Jerusalem view on the basis that first-century Judaism was not given to idolatry, and did not compromise with Rome.⁷⁴ This, however, overlooks certain factors.

For several reasons, “idolatry” as a concept should perhaps not be too concretely limited in this context. Chapters 2–3 in fact may give us something of a hint of the kind of “idolatry” that is plaguing many of the churches of John’s day. The letters to the seven churches are often noted for their literary crafting, which probably reflects quite a bit of subtle theological design, rather than merely epistolary form and content.

For instance, it is likely that the letters serve to introduce many of the themes of the book, and they also clearly form a chiasmic pattern.⁷⁵ Moreover, it has been argued that the individual letters follow the so-called “covenant” form of ancient Near Eastern treaties, much like the Book of Deuteronomy.⁷⁶ These features are mentioned here simply to highlight the point that we ought not be surprised to find theological motifs being hinted at in these passages, both structurally and symbolically. There is, in other words, legitimate reason to not view these letters as *mere* letters.

The significance of this observation for the present discussion is that the theme of idolatry is certainly very important in the seven letters,⁷⁷ and we may find subtle hints in this section of John’s connotations for the concept. Specifically, there are parallels between the heresies condemned in the letters that have been regularly recognized by commentators, parallels, in fact, that are so close that these heresies are generally considered to be the same idolatrous teaching under different names, at least in the cases of the Nicolaitans, the Balaamites, and Jezebel.⁷⁸ Moreover, it is instantly recognizable that the latter two echo names of Old Testament figures, and should therefore automatically strike a chord with us that there is perhaps some form of intentional symbolism being implied. As far as the Nicolaitans, few commentators have been able to find a satisfactory connection as to the identity of these aggravators.⁷⁹ However it is often noted that part of the reason the Nicolaitans and the Balaamites should be so closely identified is the similar etymology of their names, which is related to one who “overcomes/consumes the people.”⁸⁰ It may be that the name of the Nicolaitans is based on a Greek translation of Balaam’s name. Regardless of whether that oversimplifies the matter, the semantic connection here that parallels with the heretical connection gives further justification for supposing we may be dealing with the same problematic teaching, which is then recapitulated in Jezebel.

Moreover, the two Old Testament characters utilized here happen to be a false prophet and a harlot, two roles that will be played by villainous figures in later chapters of the Apocalypse.⁸¹ If valid, this connection seems fairly significant, in that it may mean the letters are subtly introducing the themes that will

⁷³ Beale, *Revelation*, 885.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 886; however, Gentry notes the following passage from Josephus, who writes, “It seems to me to be necessary here to give an account of all the honors that the Romans and their emperors paid to our nation, and of the leagues of mutual assistance they have made with it” (Josephus *Antiquities* 14.10.1–2 [translation given is that of Whiston in *Works of Josephus* (italics added)]); cf. discussion in Gentry, “A Preterist View of Revelation,” 78.

⁷⁵ Beale, *Revelation*, 223–28.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 227–28.

⁷⁷ Cf. especially 2:14, 20.

⁷⁸ So Caird, *Revelation*, 38–45; Mounce, *Revelation*, 81, 87; Beale, *Revelation*, 261.

⁷⁹ Cf. Caird, *Revelation*, 38.

⁸⁰ See Beale’s discussion, *Revelation*, 251.

⁸¹ In fact, there are several clear literary parallels that tighten the link between Jezebel in Rev 2 and the subsequent harlot, Babylon. For this, see Beale, *Revelation*, 262.

later be developed in the rest of the book, and this type of structuring and theological insinuation would certainly not be out of character with the multi-layered literary sophistication we find pervading the book.⁸²

There is, however, one other key worker of evil in the Apocalypse, the driving force behind the entire iniquitous drama—the Serpent, Satan himself. In perfect harmony with the pattern above, Satan too is revealed in the letters, especially in the letter to Pergamum. This city is depicted as the place where Satan has his throne, and there too, the people are plagued by the teachings of the Balaamites and Nicolaitans. The idolatry into which these teachers are leading the people is tied to the hidden forces of the Dragon, who is working the whole wicked scheme from behind the curtains. In fact, he is not only working in these contexts that appear to be what we would consider *blatant* idolatry, he is also rearing his scaly head in two other places in the letters. In the letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia, we are told of a sinister “synagogue of Satan” (sunagwghÉ tou' satana'), composed of “those who call themselves Jews and are not” (tw'n legovntwn jIoudaivou" ei\nai eJautou" kaiÉ oujk eijsiVn).⁸³ The language of being a “synagogue of Satan” quickly declares one thing: the Judaism in view is considered paganism. While purporting to be the worship of Israel, it has become idolatry; these are not “true” Jews. This then gives us a remarkable precedent for the meaning of idolatry and pagan worship in Revelation. Especially when we consider the fact that the Satanic teaching in all of the other church contexts was essentially synonymous, it is quite possible that apostate Judaism is here being given the connotations of idolatry, in keeping with the parallels in the other letters, and this sets the stage for later stark portrayals of non-Christian Judaism such as Rev 11:8.

Naturally, the “paganism” of which these false Jews are guilty cannot be separated from interaction with Rome. If the basic contention of this thesis is correct and the Babylon of chapters 17–18 represents apostate Jerusalem, then chapter 18 certainly links much of her sin to compromise with other nations. Similarly, chapter 17 focuses on the harlot’s riding of the beast, using its authority to persecute the saints and commit sin. This depiction, while quite disturbing, would be very appropriate from John’s perspective for those who are working with Roman power to persecute the followers of Christ.

Furthermore, the Jerusalem leadership was certainly guilty of the ultimate pagan compromise with Rome, the rejection and crucifixion of Christ Himself. This would more than qualify as sufficient basis for seeing Jerusalem as having committed adultery with Rome’s paganism, and as having rejected the true God. No doubt this event would have left a permanent impact on John’s view of Jerusalem as one who makes illicit ties with an idolatrous nation for her own rebellious gain.⁸⁴

Economic Critique and Revelation 18.

As we have discussed above, certain elements of chapter 18 are often seen as troublesome for a Jerusalem connection to Babylon, especially the vast nature of the sea trade described and the overall economic power and influence. In fact, in the beginning stages of compiling the research for this thesis, I must admit that I found this problem quite difficult to handle as well, and wondered if there was a reasonable response to this objection at all. While other evidences seemed quite persuasive for the Jerusalem view, this questioned appeared at least as of yet unanswered, if not unanswerable.

For this reason I am quite indebted at this point to the work of Old Testament scholar Iain Provan, whose article mentioned above, “Foul Spirits, Fornication and Finance: Revelation 18 From an Old Testament Perspective,” has been a welcome source of insights. For Provan, the complex language of Rev 18 is not only not a hindrance to a Jerusalem perspective, it is one of the strongest arguments for it.

⁸² Of course the sophistication referred to here is that of form, structure, and imagery, not grammar or syntax, two areas in which Revelation is certainly notoriously less than refined.

⁸³ 2:9; 3:9.

⁸⁴ In addition, this rejection of the arrival of her husband, the Messiah, fits perfectly with the idea of her destruction making way for Christ’s true bride, the “New” Jerusalem (chap. 21). They reject Him in idolatry/adultery, so He takes a new bride. For more development of this theme, see “New Jerusalem/Old Jerusalem (or The Bride Versus the Harlot)” below.

Provan's contention throughout is that it is a false assumption that the detail of imagery present in a passage such as this must be taken at face value in all its particulars as a literal description of the situation of the day when the language being employed is clearly a reapplication of a major portion of an Old Testament text. His reason for believing this is related to his own study in the area of traditional "lament songs," which informs his understanding of the use of such language in this passage.⁸⁵ Clearly the "lament" form is at work in Rev 18, as is plain from the fact that much of the content is taken from a previous lament for Tyre found in Ezek 26–28 (combined of course with OT oracle language against Babylon, the namesake of Revelation's "great city"). The use of such a traditional form is significant to Provan, who notes, "[I]t is not simply Old Testament language and imagery which has shaped Revelation 18, but also the very form and structure of Old Testament texts—the very manner in which they have been composed."⁸⁶

The general point that is relevant here is whether we should look for historical reference for each detail of such a reapplication of imagery, or whether the function of the imagery is more properly to provide an echo of the form traditionally used when a city such as Tyre falls from a great height. For instance, regarding the vivid list of cargoes given by John (18:12-13), Provan asks, "[D]oes this list signify economic critique of Rome as such, or is it there simply because it is the sort of thing that one finds in biblical laments and dirges?"⁸⁷ In other words, if the author is employing Old Testament language to express the fall of a city or people in familiar prophetic terms, can we be sure we have warrant to read the language as (for the author) contemporarily literally applicable? Again, "How can one say [as Bauckham does] that the presence of wheat on John's list [of cargoes] shows how the general population of Rome survived only at the expense of the rest of the empire, when wheat appears on the very list in Ezek 27 that provides the basis for John's list?"⁸⁸ No doubt the details *could* correspond, but the fact that they are employed rhetorically for their connotations with the fall of arrogant enemies of God in the Old Testament calls us to consider hermeneutical questions of whether the language demands historical correspondence, or is rather subservient to the driving point of the severity of the fall of a people judged by God. The point may simply be, "You, 'Babylon,' are tragically fallen just as Tyre and historical Babylon before you."⁸⁹ This is certainly the great thrust of the passage; whether or not there is reason to seek application for all of the details is an area that must be admitted to involve some degree of ambiguity. Caution seems quite justified, however, when we recognize the fact that the details cannot even be made to comfortably fit Rome (for most, the necessary referent of the passage) with consistent literalism either, considering *it was not a major seaport or trading city*.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Ibid., 82–84.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 84.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 86.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 88.

⁸⁹ From this perspective, there is structural justification for use of the Tyre allusions (the Tyre lament from Ezekiel is an adaptable, prime example of a lament dirge) and thematic justification for the Babylon allusions (the entire context being the depiction of the great city as "Babylon"), but the constant interweaving of Israel/Jerusalem allusions (cf. Provan, "Fouls Spirits, Fornication and Finance," 87–95) must be accounted for—if John is portraying Jerusalem as the lamented Babylon, there is an excellent coherence to such a maneuver.

⁹⁰ Beagley, *The 'Sitz im Leben' of the Apocalypse*, 108; Also, Jürgen Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, trans. J. E. Alsup, Continental Commentaries (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 206, who writes, "Rome was neither a port city nor a shipping center. But here John hardly intended to copy precisely the real situation; rather he wanted to round off the scene of lament by means of a third group, and for that purpose he used the material that Ezek 27:29–33 provided him."

Moreover, Provan argues that the economic problem should probably not be seen as the ultimate cause for the critique anyway, but rather as a manifestation (even in the original OT context) of the problem of idolatry. This he sees as the real sin under critique: "One could certainly not deduce from [the contents of the cargo list] in Revelation 18 that we are dealing here with specific criticism of Rome's economics, rather than with the sort of general criticism that world-powers receive in the Bible as a whole. That general criticism is much more about religion than it is about economics; or to put it another way, economic

However, the argument of Provan's article is not merely that we ought not get caught up in the details of material that is being structurally appropriated for a rhetorical point. The issue that catches his eye is the fact that at many points, the author of Revelation *does not* leave the reapplied language in its original form, but instead subtly alters it. It is these fresh literary features, not the details imported from a previous context, that may be of most use to us for tracking with John's thought. It is these areas in which he has not merely compared the present villain to previous ones, but has added original critique to the message, and has perhaps hinted at the identity of his antagonist.⁹¹

Examples of this phenomenon noted by Provan include the addition of chariots to Ezekiel's cargo list (quite likely an import from the list of goods in 1 Kgs 4, which subtly reminds the Old Testament audience of Solomon's disregarding of the former command not to widely accrue horses and chariots in Deut 17:16),⁹² the language of the "clinging" of the harlot's sins (the term *κollavw*, having LXX covenant language connotations, being added to a Babylon oracle [v. 5]),⁹³ the use of an Old Testament oracle against Judah and Jerusalem in verses 23–24 in the middle of borrowed Tyre lament language,⁹⁴ the double recompense (in the Old Testament, only ever used against Israel) warning of verse 2 in the middle of Babylon allusions, and a number of echoes of passages from Lamentations reflecting on Jerusalem's fall.⁹⁵

The point of this sampling is simply to show that it is quite plausible that what the author is doing here is adapting an Old Testament lament song for his own purposes by invoking Jerusalem judgment language at various points, thereby redirecting the reader to the true identity of this harlot. Whether this evidence on its own is as noteworthy as the precedent of Rev 11:8, the attire of the woman, or the charge of adultery is up for discussion. But the cumulative evidence of the use of the Old Testament in chapter 18 was at least enough to get one Old Testament scholar's attention.

The Origin of This Image

As we have said before, we do not necessarily have to find any previous instance of Jerusalem being called Babylon outside of Revelation in order to take this possibility seriously here—it could simply have originated with John's vision. But there is perhaps more that can be said on this issue. Is John truly without precedent in this application of imagery? If this proposal had already existed in early Christianity, we would certainly have a much stronger case that this is John's intention. And, in fact, I think a case can be made that such a precedent can be found for equating Babylon with Jerusalem; moreover, the precedent is drawn from one of John's most substantial influences, the teaching of our Lord Jesus Himself.

In the Olivet Discourse, Christ prophetically warns of Jerusalem's impending doom. Even among those who prefer to keep preterism at a distance it is generally a universal recognition that at least some of Jesus' words apply to A.D. 70. The point worth noting here is that while it is obvious that much of Jesus' language alludes to the Old Testament, it may not be as obvious what many of the allusions have in common. Specifically, N. T. Wright has extensively argued that much of the discourse is heavily dependent upon prophecies of the destruction of one particular enemy of the people of God: Babylon.⁹⁶ This is

sins are only ever a function of idolatry, so far as the Old Testament is concerned, and it is on the idolatry that the emphasis falls, rather than upon the economics" (Provan, "Foul Spirits, Fornication and Finance," 88). Regarding idolatry, see above, "False Jews and Idolatry."

⁹¹ Provan, "Fouls Spirits, Fornication and Finance," 87–95; so Beagley, *The 'Sitz im Leben of the Apocalypse*, 95–96; Ford, *Revelation*, 300–307.

⁹² Provan, "Fouls Spirits, Fornication and Finance," 88.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 95. Provan suggests at least six such allusions; cf. Beagley, *The 'Sitz im Leben' of the Apocalypse*, 95–100 for a number of other examples of alterations in this lament passage that may point to Jerusalem.

⁹⁶ Wright suggests a number of OT texts that are apparently influential here, including Isa 13:6, 9–11, 19; Isa 14:4, 12–15; Isa 48:20; 52:11–12; Jer 50:6, 8, 28; 51:6–10, 45–6, 50–51, 57 (N. T. Wright,

especially true of the warnings for the people of God to flee the city when her judgment has come, which eerily echo the “Come out from her!” passages of Jeremiah.⁹⁷

Beagley likewise sees this motif underlying the discourse, and approvingly notes van der Waal’s suggestion that Christ is specifically applying Jer 51:45 (concerning Babylon) to Jerusalem.⁹⁸ The scenario we may have on the Mount of Olives, then, is this: Christ warning of impending judgment, warning the people of God to escape when they can, and pronouncing Old Testament prophecies directly against Jerusalem, when these prophecies were known to originally apply to Babylon. In Wright’s words, “Luke’s reading of Mark is quite clear: all this language refers to the fall of Jerusalem, which is to be understood against the background of the predicted destruction of Babylon.”⁹⁹ If this is correct, the paradox must have been truly shocking. One can imagine the disciples’ absolute astonishment as they began to realize the horrifically ironic implications of Jesus applying *these* words to *their* great city. “He’s calling Jerusalem Babylon!” perhaps quickly became an uncomfortable whisper among the men. Again, Wright remarks, “Here ... is the all-important change of roles. *Jerusalem has become Babylon*; Jesus and His disciples have become Jerusalem,” and, “The *new Babylon* was to be destroyed in an instant, and flight was the only appropriate action, the only way of salvation for Jesus’ renewed Israel.”¹⁰⁰

If such a reconstruction is valid, we must take seriously the impact this event would have had on John’s thinking.¹⁰¹ If this interpretation is correct, then John would not be inventing the “Jerusalem has become Babylon” theme. Rather, it would have originated with Jesus. In composing the Apocalypse, John’s use of this imagery would be a natural retelling of Jesus’ own teaching. And, of course, many have noted the point that much of Revelation seems to simply be a reworking of the Olivet Discourse.¹⁰² It would be of no surprise, then, if this metaphor reappeared with more vivid narration. Not to mention the fact that if much of Revelation truly is, to whatever extent, a rehashing of Olivet themes, then Jerusalem’s impending judgment, an important emphasis of the discourse, has a high probability of being a primary theme in the Apocalypse as well. Indeed, it would perhaps be somewhat surprising if this were not so.

It seems, then, that a very plausible scenario can be constructed out of which John would have likely produced the depiction of Jerusalem as the enemy Babylon. This certainly does not prove that such must be the case, but it does give some roots of credibility to the hypothesis.

Jesus and the Victory of God, vol. 2, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996], 354–60). Certainly, other texts are recalled in the passage including famine warnings (Isa 5:13–14), earthquake predictions (Hag 2:6–7), and descriptions of cosmic disturbances (Isa 13:9–10; 24:18–20; Joel 2:1, 30–31). The claim here is not that *only* Babylon language is used by Jesus, but simply that such is a key image in the discourse. If we have here an instance of Christ applying anti-Babylon texts to Jerusalem, then an important precedent is established for such a rhetorical device before Revelation, even if other stock images reflected in the Olivet Discourse are at John’s disposal as well.

⁹⁷ Most notably Jer 50:8; 51:6, 9, 45; cf. Rev 18:14.

⁹⁸ Beagley, *The ‘Sitz im Leben’ of the Apocalypse*, 97.

⁹⁹ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 359.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 356, n. 137; 360 (italics mine); cf. the references to “those who say they are Jews and are not” in Rev 2:9; 3:9.

¹⁰¹ This presupposes apostolic authorship, but such a presupposition does not make or break the argument. Regardless of who wrote Revelation, the Olivet Discourse tradition would certainly have been well known to whomever it was, and other parallels between the two make clear that such was the case (see n. 102, below).

¹⁰² E. g., Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary*, ed. Kenneth Barker (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1992), 53; C. Marvin Pate and Calvin B. Haines Jr., *Doomsday Delusions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 37–44; and Gentry, “A Preterist View of Revelation,” 52–53.

The Blood of the Saints and Prophets

One of the most important themes in Revelation that seems to have been drawn from Jesus' prophetic warnings in the gospels is that "in her [Babylon] was found the blood of the prophets and saints and all who have been slain upon the earth" (18:24).¹⁰³ This is almost unmistakably a reference to Jesus' words found in Matthew 23:34–35: "... I am sending to you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, so that upon you might fall *all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah* son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar."¹⁰⁴ Likewise, Luke 11:50–51: "... in order that *the blood of all the prophets shed since the foundation of the world may be required from this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary; yes, I say to you, it will be required of this generation.*"¹⁰⁵

While Rome certainly had her hands stained with Christian blood, as Gentry points out they could not be charged with the death of the Old Testament prophets,¹⁰⁶ especially in light of Jesus' direct charge to Jerusalem that she will be held responsible. Again, if we can suppose John's dependence upon Christ's prophetic teachings, then Jerusalem must be most appropriately understood as the guilty party indicted in Rev 18:24.

Her Desolation by the Beast

Another point that should not be overlooked is how well Jerusalem fits into the picture of Babylon's fate at the hands of the beast. Here the Rome view runs into great difficulty because of the fact that *the beast* is viewed by just about everyone as having some link to Rome.¹⁰⁷ But in chapter 17, the beast and the harlot not only interact, the beast even hates and destroys the harlot. This prompts Beagley to ask, "[I]n what sense can it be said that the Empire or one specific Emperor turns against the capital city and destroys it? *How can Rome destroy Rome?*"¹⁰⁸ On the one hand, this probably overstates the issue, in that Nero's apparent role in the fire at Rome (A.D. 64) could fit this image quite reasonably.¹⁰⁹ But while this approach cannot be dismissed outright, it may not do sufficient justice to the distinction between the two characters.

¹⁰³ Also, 16:6; 17:6; again, we are not necessarily claiming literary dependence on the gospels, merely dependence on Jesus' teaching tradition, which clearly seems to be reflected in the Apocalypse at a number of points (see above, n.102).

¹⁰⁴ Italics mine; so Swete, *Apocalypse*, 241; Morris, *Revelation*, 217; Eugenio Corsini, *The Apocalypse: The Perennial Revelation of Jesus Christ*, trans. and ed. Francis J. Moloney (Wilmington, DE: Gazier, 1983), 338; Beale, *Revelation*, 923.

¹⁰⁵ Italics mine; so Caird, *Revelation*, 231; Gentry, "A Preterist View of Revelation," 76.

¹⁰⁶ Gentry, "A Preterist View of Revelation," 75; So Ford, *Revelation*, 300; Beagley, *The 'Sitz im Leben' of the Apocalypse*, 94–95; Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 466. The identification here of the prophets as *Old Testament* prophets is of course specifically related to the warnings of Christ rather than the Revelation text—the Apocalypse does not technically declare *which* prophets are in view, but this may be hairsplitting; if we do have tradition dependence, a corresponding inference seems justified.

¹⁰⁷ See above, "Rome." This near-universal understanding in fact leads proponents of the Rome = Babylon to statements such as, "The two figures of monster and woman are really alternative representations of a single entity" (G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, New Century Bible Commentary [London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1974], 249). Theologically this might work, but the events of this passage make a double Roman referent more than a little precarious. This problem is heightened by the fact that the beast is reserved for separate punishment in chapter 19, long after the harlot has already been destroyed. It seems quite clear that John is intending us to understand a distinction between the two characters.

¹⁰⁸ Beagley, *The 'Sitz im Leben' of the Apocalypse*, 92 (italics mine).

¹⁰⁹ Kenneth L. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, rev. ed. (Atlanta, GA: American Vision, 1998), 71.

If, however, Jerusalem is the harlot attacked by beastly Rome, the imagery in 17:16 makes obvious sense: "... the beast ... will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will devour her flesh and will burn her up with fire." This certainly fits perfectly against the backdrop of the Olivet Discourse,¹¹⁰ and sounds very much like a reference to the events of A.D. 70. Interestingly, Beale gives lengthy treatment to the dependence of the imagery in this verse upon Old Testament descriptions of Jerusalem's impending destruction, yet stops short of granting what might seem to be the natural implications of this phenomenon:

The portrayal of the harlot's desolation is sketched according to the outlines of the prophecy of apostate Jerusalem's judgment by God in Ezek. 23:25-29, 47: "your survivors will *be devoured by the fire* ... they will *also strip you of your clothes* ... and they will deal with you in *hatred* ... and leave you *naked and bare*. And the nakedness of your harlotries will be uncovered ... they will *burn* their houses *with fire*." Likewise, Ezek. 16:37-41 prophesies against faithless Israel: "I will gather together all your lovers with whom you have consorted ... they will *break down* your house of harlotry...and they will leave you *naked* ... they will *burn* your houses *with fire*." ... The Ezekiel picture is supplemented by similar OT descriptions of Israel's coming judgment, which prophesy that God "will strip her naked and ... make her desolate" (Hosea 2:3; cf. also Jeremiah 10:25; 41:22 LXX; Micah 3:3 ...).¹¹¹

Note the consistency of the application of this language to apostate Israel. It seems difficult to imagine the weight of this background not giving the original readers the sense that Jerusalem is the city being made desolate in 17:16, especially if the aggressor is understood to be Rome.¹¹²

Milligan solemnly elaborates:

[I]t is difficult not to think that there was one great drama present to the mind of the Seer and suggestive of the picture of the harlot's ruin, that of the life and death of Jesus. The degenerate Jewish Church had then called in the assistance of the world-power of Rome, had stirred it up, and had persuaded it to do its bidding against its true Bridegroom and King. An alliance had been formed between them; and, as a result of it, they crucified the Lord of glory. But the alliance was soon broken; and, in the fall of Jerusalem by the hands of her guilty paramour, the harlot was left desolate and naked, her flesh was eaten, and she was burned utterly with fire.¹¹³

New Jerusalem/Old Jerusalem (or The Bride Versus the Harlot)

Finally, a consideration of a general theme of the Apocalypse may serve to bookend the evidence on this matter quite neatly, particularly that of the contrast between Babylon and the New Jerusalem of chapter 21. Revelation is full of "yin/yang" style contrasts, including the Lamb versus the Dragon, the Father's name versus the beast's name on people's foreheads, and, here, the image of the bride versus the harlot, or, New Jerusalem versus Babylon.¹¹⁴ As was mentioned before, it is not a great leap from the apparent background of Jeremiah 3 (which includes Yahweh's "divorcing" of Israel for harlotry) in our Babylon passage to the estimation that the harlot in Revelation is being dismissed by God as an unfit wife for Christ. There is clearly a deliberate literary contrast present between the bride of chapter 21 and the harlot of

¹¹⁰ As well as Christ's warning to the Jewish leadership, "Behold, your house is left to you *desolate!*" (Matt 23:38; italics added)

¹¹¹ Beale, *Revelation*, 883.

¹¹² Another possible indication of this connection is the fact, as noted by Ford, that the normal OT sentence for adultery was stoning—only the daughter of a priest was to be burned (Ford, *Revelation*, 292; also Carrington, *Meaning of the Revelation*, 287).

¹¹³ William Milligan, *The Book of Revelation* (New York: Armstrong, 1903), 68.

¹¹⁴ So Gregg, *Revelation*, 404.

chapters 17–18 in the language of their respective (and closely parallel) introductions, characterizations, and environments.¹¹⁵

As we have already noted, Jerusalem’s rejection of her Messiah, who had come as her husband, sets the stage for the Messiah to take another bride. And if this new bride is called the “New” Jerusalem, a likely corollary is that the former, unfaithful woman was the *Old* Jerusalem.¹¹⁶ This ties the two sections together perfectly and logically, and suddenly creates a very natural harmony of purpose and flow of thought for the Apocalypse in broad strokes. Simply stated, it makes much sense of the book.

This, then, is the bulk of the evidence for the Jerusalem view, evidence which I think is highly significant. Certain points may be stronger than others, but overall I think their cumulative weight warrants careful consideration.

¹¹⁵ This is clearly shown by Gentry’s chart on page 78 in “A Preterist View of Revelation;” so Beale, *Revelation*, 1063–65; Swete, *Apocalypse*, 283–84; Mounce, *Revelation*, 388–89; et al.

¹¹⁶ So Russell, *Parousia*, 485–86; Carrington, *Meaning of the Revelation*, 276; Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics*, 460; Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 422; Gentry, “A Preterist View of Revelation,” 87. It should be noted that this is not necessarily to claim a complete “replacement” of “Israel,” but certainly to claim a replacement of *Jerusalem*.

Incidentally, this contrast of “Old Jerusalem” and “New Jerusalem” obviously carries striking echoes of Paul’s “present Jerusalem” / “Jerusalem above” language in Gal 4—certainly not an insignificant parallel.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Having now examined the particulars of the evidence for Jerusalem as the harlot, we are in a position to take a step back and consider the overarching synthesis of these issues. We have surveyed the major proposals that have been offered for the identity of the woman of Rev 17–18, and we have weighed the evidence regarding the date of the book and its relevance to our investigation. We can now review the discussion integratively.

As we have seen, there are a number of competing theories as to the identification of Babylon in the Apocalypse, the most dominant being ancient Rome. Each of the theories has its own strengths and weaknesses, and none perhaps can be dismissed outright as baseless. The respective cases for each must therefore be evaluated on their own merits. The question is not whether any given view can be made to fit the requirements of the passage, but rather which, if any, view seems to best fit the most evidence to such an extent that it is to be preferred over other options.

The thesis of this study is that the proposal that Jerusalem stands behind the Babylon image does in fact adequately satisfy these criteria so as to be regarded as the most plausible solution. While there is much to commend in other views, the points of contact with Jerusalem in the passage are remarkably prevalent and consistent, and seem to cumulatively reveal that John does have the holy city in mind.

Objections have been raised to this interpretation, the chief of which is the date of Revelation. However, as we have seen, the arguments for the late date of

Revelation from the church fathers and Domitianic persecution are open to serious critique, and the argument from the late usage of the “Babylon” metaphor rests on the Rome interpretation of the harlot, which cannot simply be assumed. Moreover, we have observed that there are several strong arguments favoring a pre-70 date, which was the dominant position in the nineteenth century and is presently seeing a resurgence among certain critical scholars.

The secondary objections such as the difficulties of the exalted language given to Babylon and the imagery of the “seven hills/mountains” can be reasonably answered and do not preclude the identification of Jerusalem with the harlot. The crucial question remains whether or not there is sufficient warrant to decide in *favor* of this interpretation.

In response to this question, we must consider the paradigm that emerges from the evidence as an amalgamated whole. In this regard, the scenario we have constructed looks something like this: John, perhaps influenced by Jesus’ reuse of Old Testament anti-Babylon prophecies in the Olivet Discourse against Jerusalem, fleshes out the same metaphor in Revelation. He does so by describing his “Babylon” with Old Testament “harlotry” imagery that almost *always* speaks of Israel. He arrays her in the colors and jewels of the high priesthood, identifying her position in the world, and condemns her not only for her covenant unfaithfulness, but also for her blood-guilt in the deaths of all the martyrs and prophets in history, all but quoting what Christ had pronounced with explicit reference to the wicked generation of unbelieving Jews that eventually killed Him.

John then portrays her as being violently desolated by Rome (again, using destruction of *Jerusalem* language from the Old Testament) as a vindication of the faith of the “true Jews” (cf. 2:9; 3:9). From there a lament song ensues, taken largely from a prophetic dirge for Tyre, but realigned to more aptly apply to Jerusalem. Thus, fallen is “the great city,” the special title used repeatedly for Babylon in chapters 17–18, but which is explicitly identified in 11:8 as Israel’s capital. And, finally, the despicable harlot is done away with in order to make way for Christ’s true bride, which John calls the *New Jerusalem*.

When examined in its totality, the evidence seems quite compelling. Other options may be *possible* or *applicable*, but it appears to me that Jerusalem is the primary subject in the passage. John seems to be quite methodical in letting the reader in on his disturbing secret. The vision was not meant to confound, but to indict, and I think that the evidence above does exactly that.

Moreover, this conclusion carries notable implications for several issues. First and foremost is the issue of the date. If this identification of the harlot is accurate, we must take very seriously what seems to be a strong piece of internal evidence that the events of A.D. 70 are being prophesied, and thus are yet to come from John's perspective. Would Irenaeus' controversial quote really be weightier than this? Also, the general themes and theology of the book may be worthy of reexamination. If the destruction of Jerusalem is truly a climactic theme in the Apocalypse, then perhaps many passages deserve a rereading from this perspective.

Certainly, a number of areas remain that merit further study. The reapplication of forms such as lament songs and the Babylonian connotations of the Olivet Discourse come to mind. And of course the date question awaits definitive resolution. Also, the phenomenon of recapitulation in prophetic fulfillment affects our conception of the scope of this passage, and is worth pursuing in more detail as part of the larger ongoing discussion over apocalyptic. Hopefully forthcoming contributions by more capable students of the book will elucidate some of these matters in the future.

Overall, I think the case for Jerusalem as the harlot of the Apocalypse is a strong one. The reader may judge for him/herself whether the arguments that have been offered are enough to convince. Moreover, perhaps further evidence may yet come to light undermining this view. But at this point, my strong inclination is that it is in fact John's intention to convey to the reader of Revelation the apostasy of the unbelief of the Jewish leadership, and that we should therefore recognize that the primary referent of the adulterous woman in Rev 17 and 18 is the city of Jerusalem, "which is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt" ... *and Babylon*.