

THE APOCALYPSE A BACKGROUND STUDY

DATING THE REVELATION

THE IDENTITY OF BABYLON

JOSEPH BANTA



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COVER

Greek Text of Apocalypse 14:7-15:2, Plate LXIV (Sinai 267), from *The Greek Manuscripts of the New Testament at Mount Sinai*, Facsimiles and Descriptions by William Henry Paine Hatch, 1932.

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*“Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and
glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for
all nations shall come and worship before
thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.”*
Rev. 15:4

JOSEPH BANTA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to express our appreciation for significant assistance received in the production of this study. Bro. Don Styles has served as editor and publisher, and without his support this booklet would not have appeared in its present form. Sis. Ellen Styles has offered helpful suggestions which have enhanced the work. Sis. Marie Banta has assisted with the research, a labor that has required many hours. And Sis. Dianna Haltom must be thanked for days of work on the keyboard and for her patience through several revisions of the text.

FOREWORD

One look at the Bibliography of this booklet reveals a work that is different from most of those which have been produced in our community. Bro. and Sis. Banta have done copious research in the writings of the first through third centuries A.D. in order to examine the primary source material for the issues they consider.

They were not satisfied with quotes from 19th century authors though this would have been a much easier course to follow. In matters of historical research, the primary material is often more ambiguous than the stated conclusions set forth by later commentators such as Elliott or Westcott and Hort. For that reason, the reader of this treatise may feel uncomfortable at times as he is exposed to the raw material which later historians used as the basis of their conclusions.

Things are not quite as tidy as we may wish. However, it is felt the importance of a right view of the Revelation fully justifies the research involved.

The believer in the Bible finds himself at odds with the established church. There is no doubt of the great doctrinal errors of orthodox Christendom. But the believer needs to know how God views the false church and its offspring. Does

He abhor their doctrines as paganism in a different guise or does He reckon their wrong ideas as mistakes of scholarship akin to errors of conduct?

A view that the Apocalypse was written before A.D. 70 against errant Judaism virtually nullifies its impact on this issue. The primary purpose of this booklet is to show that an early date and Jewish application is wholly against the facts.

Hopefully such a demonstration will render the continuous historical approach all the more acceptable. It is that approach which permits the believer to rightly divide the Word and follow the application of the symbols of Revelation first to paganism and then to the apostate Christian system that has existed over the centuries to the present. Both are seen as the great enemy of God and His people.

It is upon such an understanding that the believer of today realizes he can have no part in a system which is anti-Christ, a system which has waged war over the centuries with the Lamb and will do so when Christ appears to triumphantly overthrow those who defame his name and kill his servants.

As members of a community called to be holy unto God, as living elements of the body of Christ, we can be, we must be, a people who remain separate showing forth the praises of our Lord and the word he has sanctified.

Don Styles, June, 1985

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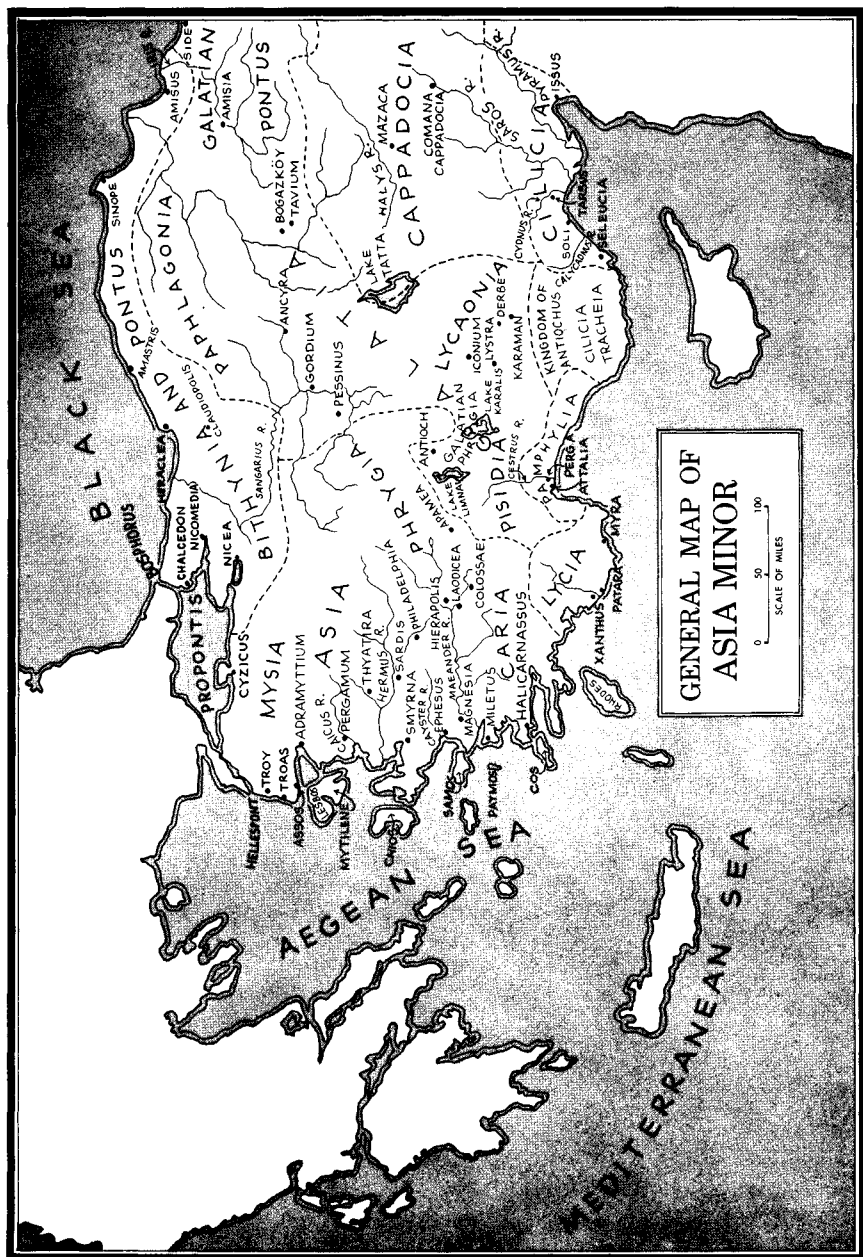
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The Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands

PART I DATING THE REVELATION

INTRODUCTION

“If I will that he tarry till I come ...” Jesus had made a statement about his beloved disciple which led others to believe that the apostle John would survive until the Master’s return from heaven. The apostle did live a long time, longer apparently than any of the other close disciples of Christ. He lived to receive late in life the wondrous visions from the Lord Jesus Christ himself which are recorded in the Apocalypse.

John had left his home in Jerusalem some years before and had settled at Ephesus, a city of Lydia on the west coast of Asia Minor.¹ Here in the Lycus valley there were a number of ecclesias, those to whom letters are addressed in the first chapters of the Revelation as well as several others. The great apostle must have ministered to the brethren and sisters of these ecclesias diligently for many years. He must also have become well known in the area as a preacher of the gospel, for he came to the attention of the authorities. His persecution at the hand of Caesar became legend, and he was ultimately banished for a time to Patmos, a rocky, barren island off the coast of Asia Minor.² There he received the remarkable visions described in the Revelation.³ It was to be the last message of the Deity to His people — a final word of prophecy and instruction as the age of the apostles came to a close. The aged apostle lived to return to Ephesus where he is said to have remained for a few years more.⁴ When he fell asleep, the last witness of the Lord’s apostles was silenced and the first century came to a close. The witness remains, by God’s grace, in the written word.

There has been a persistent tradition since very early times that the banishment of the apostle John to Patmos occurred during the reign of the emperor Domitian in about A.D. 95.⁵ The date is not important in itself: Dr. John Thomas in *EUREKA* gives evidence for both an early date (A.D. 66) and this later date of writing. He accepts the la-

ter date while making the point that his interpretation is not affected either way. The subject only becomes essential if a particular exposition *requires* one date or the other.

It is generally agreed by all parties that the Apocalypse could only have been written during the reign of either Nero or Domitian (ca. A.D. 95). References in the book clearly require a time of persecution, and only under those two Caesars was there any significant harassment of the followers of Christ in the first century. Nero is perhaps the better known persecutor, but this is because popular history is more concerned with what was going on in the city of Rome itself. In viewing the history of any period it is necessary to look carefully at the whole picture. Nero's persecution flared up as a result of his own caprice and affected Christians primarily in the city of Rome and its environs, without being severely felt in the Asian provinces. The later persecution under Domitian, on the other hand, directly and oppressively affected the Brethren in Asia Minor; in fact, his persecution affected the very ecclesias to whom the Apocalypse was addressed. The Asiarchs (local rulers in Asia Minor) under Domitian enforced Caesar worship and carried out the imperial edict against Christians of this area with some zeal.⁶

All references to the dating of the Revelation from the first three centuries support the Domitian period. The first mention of the Nero dating appears to be in the sixth century and is found in some later writings. "It has no foundation in the evidence of Christian antiquity and originated in a desire to interpret part of the prophecy (as referring to) the reign and fate of the Emperor Nero."⁷

The Apocalypse itself supports the later date. It describes an advanced state of ecclesial deterioration: *the deeds of the Nicolaitans, "which I hate", the doctrine of Balaam, and the immoral teachings of that woman Jezebel.*

Compare:

Revelation 2:4 (John's Letter to Ephesus)
"THOU HAST LEFT THY FIRST LOVE."

with

Ephesians 1:15 (Paul's Letter to Ephesus)
"I HEARD OF YOUR FAITH ... AND LOVE."

Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians was written from Rome during his first imprisonment in A.D. 61-62. The passing of some years would have been required to explain the great decline which had taken place in the Ephesian ecclesia — and all the ecclesias in Asia Minor.

The best evidence available confirms the usually accepted date (A.D. 95) for the Revelation. Some of that evidence is included in this study. We have carefully considered the opposite view, as put forward by Bro. H. A. Whittaker in his book, *Revelation, a Biblical Approach*, and we include responses to some of his comments on the subject.

It is our hope and prayer that our effort will lead others to return to the Apocalypse as a rewarding study and source of help for these last days. It has always had a prominent place in our community, and as the final utterance of the Spirit Word it should continue to hold the position it deserves.

“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand” (Rev. 1:3).

¹ This is assumed from the apostle's evident familiarity with the Asian ecclesias in his seven letters to them (Rev. 1-3) and from statements of early writers to the effect that John returned to Ephesus after his exile (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book III, ch. 20).

² *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, “Patmos”, Vol. 4, p. 2263.

³ Revelation 1:9.

⁴ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, II, 22.5 and III, 3.4.

⁵ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “Revelation”, Vol. 19, p. 246 (1971 edition).

⁶ Chadwick, *The Early Church*, pp. 26-27:

“The Neronian persecution was confined to Rome and was not due to any sense of deep ideological conflict between Church and State; it was simply that the emperor had to blame somebody for the fire. Nevertheless, it was a precedent that magistrates had condemned Christians to death because they were Christians and on no other charge.

“Under Domitian (A.D. 81-96) the situation seems again to have become grave ... Domitian styling himself ‘Master and God’, was inclined to suspect of treachery those who looked askance at his cult. The customary oath ‘by the genius of the emperor’ became officially obligatory.”

⁷ Alford, *How to Study the New Testament*, p. 285.

IRENÆUS

The earliest known witness for the date of the Apocalypse is Irenaeus, who wrote about A.D. 170. He was born and educated in Asia Minor where he was acquainted with those who had been contemporary with the apostle John. Irenaeus went in later years as a missionary to Gaul where he became bishop of Lyon and where he was eventually martyred. He was adamant in upholding the apostolic teachings insofar as he understood them. He insisted upon retaining the millennial teaching of the Revelation, while others were apparently wavering in their acceptance of this truth.

Two major works by Irenaeus survive: *Against Heresies* (five books written to counteract the Gnostic ideas of his day) and *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, an effort to relate Christian teaching with the Old Testament.¹

“Irenaeus was himself a native of Asia Minor; he was a hearer of Polycarp of Smyrna, who was a personal disciple of John; and he used the treatise of Papias of Hierapolis, another personal disciple of John. *Thus he had a peculiarly good means of knowing the truth.*”²

The books of Irenaeus entitled *Against Heresies* include several references to John and the Apocalypse, one of which places the apocalyptic visions on Patmos toward the end of the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81-96). Taken in its context, the statement of Irenaeus appears in a discussion regarding the identity of the Antichrist. He writes:

“We, you see, do not venture anything as concerning the name of the Antichrist, in the way of positive affirmation. For if it were meet that at this time his name should be expressly proclaimed, it would have been spoken by him who saw the Apocalypse. *For at no long time ago was it seen, but almost in our own generation, at the end of Domitian's reign.*”³

Thus Irenaeus states the early tradition that the Apocalypse itself was seen by the apostle on Patmos during the last years of the reign of Domitian, thereby dating it to approximately A.D. 95.

It was suggested by a nineteenth century theologian that Irenaeus meant that John himself, rather than the Apocalypse, *was seen* during the reign of Domitian¹. But Dr. Hitchcock, in his book, *Irenaeus of Lugdunam*, says that this gives a strained meaning to the words of Irenaeus.² Henry Alford, commenting on the expression, which he quotes in the Greek, confirms that the Apocalypse is the subject of *was seen*. "For such is the only legitimate understanding of the construction." ³

¹ Eerdman's Handbook to the History of Christianity, "Irenaeus", p. 76.

² Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, Intro. pp. xiv-xv.

³ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book V, Ch. 30.3.

⁴ The suggestion was quoted by the Bishop of Ely in the *Journal of Theological Studies* for April 1907. It originated with a French theologian, M. J. Bevan, Lausanne, 1887. (Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, p. cvi).

⁵ Hitchcock, *Irenaeus of Lugdunam*, Ch. XII, pp. 232-233.

⁶ Alford, *The Greek Testament*, "Revelation, Place and Time of Writing", p. 230.

WHO WAS "*THE TYRANT*?"

Another early witness for the dating of the Revelation is Clement of Alexandria, who flourished about A.D. 192-220. He related a story which he had received respecting the apostle John. "For after *the tyrant* was dead, coming from the isle of Patmos to Ephesus, he (John) went to the regions of the Gentiles."¹

To establish when John left the isle of Patmos it is important to identify *the tyrant*. He was either Nero or he was Domitian. Clement's reference to Caesar as *the tyrant* indicates that one of the emperors was particularly known by this appellation. In reviewing the literature of that day, it is significant to note that Domitian is commonly referred to as *the tyrant*. The following account from the first century describes the reputation this cruel Caesar had earned for himself.

Apollonius of Tyana lived during the reign of Domitian and suffered persecution under that emperor. He was born at the beginning of the Christian era and died during the reign of Nerva (A.D. 96-98). Although not a follower of Christ (he was a neo-Pythagorean philosopher), he went about speaking against the excesses of the pagan system. He was arrested by Domitian but was later acquitted. In *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, by Philostratus (written in the second century), we read, "Domitian had already written to the governor of Asia directing the man of Tyana (Apollonius) to be arrested and brought to Rome ... Apollonius set sail for Achaëa and having landed in Corinth ... met Demetrius ... the boldest of the philosophers, knowing that he had moved from Rome to get out of the way of *the tyrant* ...".²

Then Demetrius speaks: "Domitian intends to implicate you (Apollonius) in the charges for which Nerva and his associates were *banished*."³ Apollonius ponders his situation: "It behooves a philosopher to die in the attempt to protect his parents and children ... and friends ... but to be put to death, not for true reasons ... and to furnish *the tyrant* with a pretext for being wise is much worse and more grievous than to be bowed and bent high in the sky on a wheel as they say Ixion was".⁴ Further on we find that "there came to Rome from Arcadia a youth remarkable for his beauty and found there many admirers, and above all Domitian". The young man spurned the advances of

Domitian, and was thrown into prison and there had a conversation with Apollonius. "Moreover Apollonius mentions this youth in one of his letters ... and adds that he was not put to death by *the tyrant*." ⁵

Pliny the Younger was contemporary with Domitian as a young lawyer in Rome. He later wrote that several of his friends were executed by that Caesar and that he himself had feared at times for his life. Recalling one of the emperor's inhumane deeds, he writes of Domitian as assuming "the character of high-priest, or rather indeed of a *cruel tyrant*." ⁶

Another writer who titles Domitian "the tyrant" is Lactantius, a Christian apologist of the third century known for a major work entitled *The Christian Institutions*. In his treatise, *De mortibus persecutorum* (Of the Death of the Persecutors), he writes of Domitian, "who, although his government was exceedingly odious, for a very long time oppressed his subjects, and reigned in security, until at length he stretched forth his impious hands against the Lord. Having been instigated by evil demons to persecute the righteous people, he was then delivered into the power of his enemies, and suffered due punishment. To be murdered in his own palace was not vengeance ample enough: the very memory of his name was erased. For although he had erected many admirable edifices, and rebuilt the Capitol, and left other distinguished marks of his magnificence, yet the senate did so persecute his name, as to leave no remains of his statues, or traces of the inscriptions put up in honour of him; and by most solemn and severe decrees it branded him, even after death, with perpetual infamy. Thus, the commands of *the tyrant* having been rescinded, the Church was not only restored to her former state, but she shone forth with additional splendour, and became more and more flourishing." ⁷

John was *exiled* to Patmos and it is to be noted that Domitian had a penchant for *exiling* his antagonists. A case in point: the emperor's niece Domatilla and her husband Flavius Clemens had been given honors by Domitian, but they converted either to Judaism or Christianity. This was considered by the emperor as "atheism" (*i.e.* not acknowledging the divinity of the emperor or of the Roman deities). Caesar then *banished* his niece and executed her husband. ⁸

It is evident from the testimony of these witnesses that Domitian was known to those who opposed his will as *the tyrant*, that the emperor's persecution extended particularly to Asia, and that *banishment* was a form of persecution associated with his name. The liberation at Domitian's death of those he exiled is substantiated by Dio Cassius,⁹ the Roman historian.

¹ *Clement of Alexandria* (Translation by G. W. Butterworth), p. 357.

² Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, Vol. I, Book VII, Ch. 10.

³ *Ibid.*, Ch. 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Ch. 12.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Ch. 42.

⁶ Pliny, *Letters*, Book IV.xi.

⁷ Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, ch. III (pp. 166-167).

⁸ Domatilla and Clemens were charged with Jewish manners and sacrilege. These were expressions which were used of both converts to Judaism and Christianity.

Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, Vol. I, "The First Five Centuries", p. 140 (Dio Cassius, *Domitian*, xiv). Suetonius, xvii.1 (pp. 371-2).

⁹ *Dio Cassius*, Book lxxviii.1.

OTHER WITNESSES

The earliest Latin commentator on the Apocalypse, Victorinus of Pettan (A.D. 305) states that John was exiled by Domitian to Patmos. In his commentary, *On the Apocalypse of John*, Victorinus writes as a comment on Rev. 10:11, "When John said these things he was in the island of Patmos, condemned to the labour of the mines by Caesar Domitian. There, therefore he saw the Apocalypse ... and John being dismissed from the mines, thus subsequently delivered the same Apocalypse which he had received from God."¹

Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea in Palestine (born A.D. 262) in his *Ecclesiastical History* affirms that the Revelation was written during Domitian's reign. "In this persecution, it was handed down by tradition, that the apostle and evangelist John, who was yet living, in consequence of his testimony to the divine word, was condemned to dwell on the island of Patmos ... Even historians that are very far from befriending our religion, have not hesitated to record this persecution (*i.e.* Domitian's) and its martyrdoms in their histories. These have accurately noted the time, for it happened, according to them, in the fifteenth year of Domitian."²

The statement of Eusebius is unequivocal, and he had sources other than Irenaeus. Eusebius "not only discovered annotated history but also preserved for posterity great masses of prime sources."³ Neither Eusebius nor Irenaeus give any indication that the tradition, dating the Revelation to A.D. 95, was disputed. And no evidence of an alternative dating has come to us from that period. From the information available to him, therefore, Eusebius relates the historical background of the Apocalypse.

"... But after Domitian had reigned fifteen years, and Nerva succeeded to the government, the Roman Senate decreed, that the honours of Domitian should be revoked, and that those who had been unjustly expelled, should return to their homes, and have their goods restored. This is the statement of the historians of the day. *It was then also, that the apostle John returned from the banish-*

ment in Patmos, and took up his abode at Ephesus, according to an ancient tradition.”⁴

The historian Mosheim (1694-1755) sums up the impact of the emperor Domitian upon the early church. “In the year 93 or 94 a new assault was made upon the Christians by Domitian, an emperor little inferior to Nero in baseness of character and conduct ... The persecution was undoubtedly severe: but it was of short continuance, as the emperor was soon after murdered. In the midst of this persecution, John the apostle was banished to the isle of Patmos.”⁵ It was there that John received the Revelation (Rev. 1:9).

¹ Victorinus of Petau (Pettan), *On the Apocalypse of John*, Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol. XVIII, p. 416.

² Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book III, ch. xviii.

³ *Great Events from History* (Ancient and Medieval Series), ed. F. N. Magill, Vol. II (A.D. 1-950), p. 841.

⁴ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book III, ch. xx.

⁵ Mosheim, *Institutes of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. I, pp. 55-59.

ASIA MINOR A.D. 81-96

Excavations at the site of the first century Ephesus have revealed much about the city and the province of Asia Minor. These discoveries, substantiated by first century writers (Dio Cassius, Pliny, Tacitus and others) provide a considerable body of information about conditions in that part of the world during the reign of Domitian. A German historian, Ethelbert Stauffer, has effectively brought together these findings in a background study of the period. The book is entitled *Christ and the Caesars*. We have drawn from this source in forming our picture of life in Asia Minor during these last years of the apostolic age. We have also consulted *Roman Rule in Asia Minor* by David Magie, professor of Classical Antiquity, Princeton.

“The rule of Domitian”, Prof. Magie writes, “marked a great advance in the process of centralization, bringing with it a despotism greater than that exercised by any of the Emperor’s predecessors.”¹ Though he was a “merciless tyrant” to those who opposed him, Domitian was able to make himself popular with the masses. Except for the Jews and the followers of Christ, most of the people in Asia Minor approved of this Caesar and his rule.

A great statue of the emperor Domitian has been uncovered by archeologists. It stood during the supremacy of that Caesar in the sports stadium of Ephesus. Along with that statue there were discovered images of the imperial priests bearing likenesses of their god-emperor Domitian. Ephesus had become the center of the cult of Caesar worship in Asia, and the rites of this imperial religion were associated with festivals, sporting events and government functions. Ephesus, famous for its temple of the goddess Diana, was called on inscriptions “the city loyal to the emperor”. Records from Domitian’s time speak of imperial letters of grace, imperial mysteries and sacrificial festivals. Domitian thus imposed upon these provincial people not only the rule of Rome but a system of worship proclaiming himself an incarnate Deity. The high priest of this cult was the religious head of all the priests in Asia Minor and also served in a political capacity. The new Temple of Domitian where the high priest officiated was also the seat of government.²

The rituals of emperor worship were impressive, and it seems that the populace was very much caught up in its

pomp and ceremony. The people of Asia Minor enjoyed being a part of the great Roman Empire, and they embraced the worship of Caesar with some enthusiasm, at least for a time.

“After the sacrifice to the emperor there followed a grand procession through the decorated and crowded streets to the place where the festival games were held. Now the ritual became a truly public affair. For those who joined in it had streamed together not only from the city, but from all Asia and the whole world. As the waves thunder on the shore, writes an author of that time, so do the assembled masses thunder and toss expectantly in the sports ground.”³

The Asiarchs (local priest-rulers of the Imperial cult) performed their functions well, and the cult of Caesar prospered in all the cities of Asia Minor. Evidences are to be found everywhere. In Pergamos, Smyrna, Thyatira, Sardis and Philadelphia coins have been found depicting Domitian as a god. An inscription from Laodicea glorifies Domitian as the incarnation of the Roman god Jupiter.⁴

Roman authority and the worship of Caesar were very much a part of life in Asia Minor, and those who refused to participate in the popular religious exercises often found themselves a persecuted minority. This would have been all the more true of those who actively witnessed against these practices. The enthusiasm of the provincial people, writes Stauffer, became at times a raging fury against the followers of Christ. This was particularly true in A.D. 95, a year in which several dissidents who refused to worship the emperor or his image were executed for treason. “In Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos and elsewhere there were severe anti-Christian riots and executions.”⁵

Against this tide of paganism the ecclesias in Asia had to maintain their particular way of life. The popularity of Caesar worship, associated as it was with sports and entertainment, was most inviting probably to the young, and the brethren must have witnessed vigorously against it. In Ephesus the apostle John would have been the chief elder and spokesman for the ecclesia. As the cult of Domitian was introduced and gained prominence, the son of thunder must have opposed it as he had formerly resisted the

errors of the Judaizers and was now opposing the teachings of the Gnostics. Credibility is thus given to those ancient traditions which tell us that the venerable apostle was arrested for his witness, taken to Rome to appear before Caesar, and then sent back, not to Ephesus, but to exile on Patmos. The witness refused to keep silence however, nor would the Spirit allow him to do so. His letters to seven ecclesias in Asia Minor and a powerful, if mysterious Apocalypse became the fruit of his isolation. That Domitian was fearful of men like John is verified by his interview with the grandsons of Jude, the brother of Christ.

The story of Jude's grandsons is recounted by Hegesippus, a Jewish convert to Christianity, who wrote in Palestine about A.D. 150. In his history of the apostolic Ecclesia he discussed the impact of Christianity upon the emperor Domitian. He writes: "At that time there was yet remaining of the kindred of Christ the grandsons of Jude, who was called his brother according to the flesh. These some accused as being of the race of David, and Evocatus brought them before Domitian Caesar. For he too was afraid of the coming of Christ, as well as Herod." These grandsons of Jude were interrogated by the emperor Domitian, and they assured him that they were poor laboring men. Hegesippus continues: "Being asked of Christ and his kingdom, of what kind it was and when it should appear, they answered that it was not worldly and would be in the end of the world; when he coming in glory should judge the quick and the dead, and render to every man according to his works." "Domitian was concerned about any rumor of a threat to his position from any section of his empire.

Domitian's persecution of those who opposed his cult continued until his death in A.D. 96. Apollonius of Tyana, with whom we have made an earlier acquaintance, turns up in Ephesus at the end of the period. He was delivering a lecture there when he learned of the emperor's assassination. "Take heart, gentlemen," he announced to those assembled, "for *the tyrant* has been slain this day".⁷

The apostle John was released from his Patmos exile and allowed to return to Ephesus, and for a few years the ecclesias enjoyed a period of relative peace. Nerva, who succeeded Domitian, released many prisoners and exiles and followed a course of restraint.⁸ Dio Cassius wrote that this emperor "forbade the making of gold or silver statues in

his honour", that he restored the property of those who had been unjustly deprived by Domitian and abolished many of the sacrifices and spectacles.⁹ The first century Roman historian, Tacitus, wrote that Nerva reversed the tyrannical policies of Domitian and "restored liberty" to the empire.¹⁰ Unfortunately, Nerva's reign lasted just two years.

Caesar worship continued under Trajan and succeeding emperors, but it was not enforced with quite the same zeal as it had been under Domitian, nor was the Asian populace so caught up in it. Pliny, the military governor of Asia Minor under Trajan (98-117 A.D.) describes conditions of his day as compared with the earlier excesses. To him Domitian had been a *cruel tyrant*, whereas Trajan was an enlightened despot who sought to "reclaim" his subjects as loyal adherents of Roman paganism.¹¹ It was still "illegal" to follow Christ, however, and persecutions were resumed. The way of the Truth was never an easy path in the days of the Caesars.

¹ Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor*, pp. 576-577.

² Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars*, pp. 150-191.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁶ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book III, ch. 20.

⁷ Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, Book III, ch. 20.

⁸ Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, Book lxxviii.2.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Tacitus, *Agricola*, 3.

¹¹ Pliny, *Letters*, Book X.xcvi.

ANALYSIS OF THE EARLY DATE

In his book, *Revelation, a Biblical Approach*, Bro. H.A. Whittaker presents a *preterist* view of the Apocalypse, suggesting that the primary fulfillment of its prophecies occurred in A.D. 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. This interpretation requires the early, Neronian date for the writing of the Revelation. A summary on page 54 of his book, which is supposed to give credence to this theory, appears below (in bold type) followed by our responses to each of the statements.

“THE EARLY DATE

The fairly copious evidence usually cited for Revelation being written about A.D. 66 is now summarized:

- (a) Various early Christian fathers, especially Tertullian (A.D. 200 approx.), mention the early date, i.e. the time of Nero’s persecution.”**

Tertullian *mentions* both Nero and Domitian; he does not date the Apocalypse. Bro. Whittaker’s statement is thus misleading. In Tertullian’s treatise, *Apologeticus*, he wrote that Christians suffered banishment during the reign of Domitian. Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* says that Tertullian was alluding to John’s banishment to Patmos during the reign of Domitian.¹ In *Apologeticus*, Tertullian writes thus: “Consult your histories. There you will find that Nero was the first to rage with the imperial sword against this school (Christians) in the very hour of its rise in Rome ... Domitian too, who was a great deal of a Nero in cruelty, attempted it (i.e. persecution)”.²

- “(b) The heading of the very ancient Syriac Version ... This item of evidence is especially strong.”**

The earliest Syriac version did not include the Revelation. There was some question in the eastern church as to whether the Apocalypse should be included in the canon. The Syriac version which dates the Revelation to the time of Nero is itself dated to the sixth century A.D.

“Nevertheless, Revelation was not universally accepted. The Pishito, the *oldest* Syriac version of the New Testament, dated in the second century, contained neither Revelation nor II Peter, II John, III John, Jude.”³

“The earliest traces of the influence of Re-

velation upon Christian literature are found in the letter of Ignatius (A.D. 110-115), in Papias, Hermas and Justin, that is well before the middle of the second century. *Although omitted from the canon of the Syrian church, it was accepted elsewhere ...*⁴

“Thus, in the later Syriac version, the title-page declares that it was written in Patmos, whither John was sent by Nero Caesar. This version, however, was made in the beginning of the *sixth century* and can have little authority in determining the question. It is not known by whom the version was made, or on what authority the author relied, when he said that John was banished to Patmos in the time of Nero.”⁵

- “(c) ... Clement of Alexandria ... related that the apostle John, after returning from Patmos, journeyed into the hills to reclaim a wayward disciple. This achievement would have been a physical impossibility for the aged John, if it happened after A.D. 95.”**

Clement relates an account of a dedicated apostle who, if the story is correct, still finds it possible at an advanced age to expend himself in the service of his Lord. Clement refers to the apostle in this account as “aged”,⁶ a term that would have been inappropriate at the time of Nero, for John lived some 34 years beyond that date. He was truly aged at the time of his release from Patmos in A.D. 96.

Clement’s testimony agrees with that of Irenaeus, who had written that the apostle John lived in Ephesus for several years after his return from exile.

“And all the presbyters of Asia, that had conferred with John, the disciple of our Lord, testify that John had delivered it (the Apocalypse) to them; for he continued with them until the times of Trajan.”⁷ (Trajan ruled A.D. 98-117).

Early tradition relates that the apostle died as the century ended, when he was almost 100 years old.

- “(d) The frequent references in Revelation to persecution harmonize admirably with the Nero date, when Christians truly had to face a fiery trial; so far as**

is known Domitian's persecution was by no means so fierce."

The persecution under Domitian accords much more satisfactorily with the circumstances indicated in the Revelation. The persecution of Christians by Nero was mostly limited to the city of Rome and did not extend to the provinces with the same intensity. The persecution of Domitian, on the other hand, was acutely felt in Asia Minor. The emperor Domitian insisted upon the universality of emperor worship, and the harassment of Christians by the authorities at this time is a matter of record.

Gaius Suetonius (born A.D. 69) was a biographer of the early Caesars. Of Domitian he wrote: "He exercised all the *tyranny* of his high position so lawlessly that it was apparent what sort of man he was going to be." Domitian was serious about emperor worship and, Suetonius tells us, toward the end of his life the emperor accepted divine homage under the title, "*Dominus, et deus noster*" (our Lord and our God).⁸

The Abingdon Bible Commentary has this background information in support of the Domitian date.

"That the book (*the Revelation*) belongs to a later than the Pauline era is evident from the condition of the churches, the presence of Nicolaitanism and widespread persecution. Ancient tradition was almost unanimous in assigning the book to the later years of Domitian's reign, when the emperor's demand for divine honours, his widespread use of informers, and his special enmity against the Christian church established a reign of terror from which there was no relief till his death in A. D. 96. With this most modern scholars agree. It was not till Domitian's edict that Asia became the scene of persecution against Christians.'" ⁹

"(e) The extremely Hebraistic style of the Greek text of Revelation ... argues a date of writing fairly soon after John came to Ephesus out of Judaea ..."

The Hebraistic style of the Apocalypse does not indicate the *time* in which it was written. The prophetic character of the book and its close relationship with the Hebrew

prophecies, that of Daniel in particular, would naturally suggest this style of writing.

“One circumstance to be taken into account is, that the nature of the Gospel (*of John*) is widely different from that of the Apocalypse. The latter is a prophetic book — a poetical composition; while the former is a simple record in prose, of the discourses of Jesus in the days of his flesh. John in the Apocalypse imitates the manner of Ezekiel and Daniel. The New Testament prophet conforms to the diction and symbolic features of the former seers ... He was *inspired*. It is, therefore, needless to inquire into his education in the Hebrew language, or his mental culture while residing in Asia Minor, or the smoothness of the Greek language as current in the place where he lived, before and after he wrote the Apocalypse. The Holy Spirit qualified him beyond and irrespective of ordinary means for the work of writing. However elevated the theme he undertook, he was assisted in employing diction as elevated as the nature of the subject demanded. We place, therefore, little reliance upon the argument derived for *the time of life* at which the Apocalypse was composed ... The strong Hebraized diction of the book we account for on the ground that the writer was a Jew; and, as such, expressed his Jewish conceptions in Greek; that he imitated the later Old Testament prophets, especially the manner of Daniel; and that the only prophetic writing in the New Testament naturally approaches nearer the Old Testament in coloring and linguistic features.”¹⁰

“(f) The very early appearance of pseudo-apocalypses (uninspired imitations of the Apocalypse given to John) implies that they had yet an earlier prototype.”

There were pseudo-apocalyptic writings from the time of Daniel. They “appeared during the period between B.C. 210 and A.D. 200. These were produced by both Jewish and

Christian writers, and they have many features in common. The most striking is the resemblance they all bear to the Book of Daniel."¹¹ In an article in *Peake's Commentary*, Prof. H. T. Andrews describes these writings, which, he points out, appeared during the 200 years before and 100 years after the New Testament Apocalypse.¹²

¹ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book III, ch. xx.

² Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, Ch. 5, v. 3-5 (pp. 29-31).

³ Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*, Intro., p. 13.

⁴ *Nelson's Bible Commentary*, "Revelation", by F.C. Grant, Intro., p. 374.

⁵ Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament*, "Revelation", Intro. p. xlviii.

⁶ *Clement of Alexandria* (Translation by G. W. Butterworth), p. 363.

⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book II, Ch. 22.5 and Book III, Ch. 3.4.

⁸ Suetonius, *Domitian Vita*, xiii (pp. 367-9).

⁹ *Abingdon Bible Commentary*, p. 1367-8.

¹⁰ Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament*, "Revelation", Intro., xliii.

¹¹ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, "Apocalyptic Literature", Vol. I, pages 161-178.

¹² *Peake's Commentary* (1920 edition), "Apocalyptic Literature", by Prof. H. T. Andrews, pp. 431-5.

REVELATION AND THE EPISTLES

Bro. Whittaker attempts to build a case for the early dating of the Revelation through *Biblical Evidence*. Thus,

"It is possible to identify many allusions to the Book of Revelation in Hebrews and in the two Epistles of Peter. If this assertion can be established as true, then Revelation must predate the three epistles mentioned." (*Revelation*, page 55, H.A.W.).

A close look at the list of "parallels" between the Revelation and the Letter to the Hebrews and the Epistles of Peter reveal similarities which are not that remarkable. Most of them are drawn from the Old Testament and are allusions that one would expect these writers to use. All three apostles were of course inspired by the same Holy Spirit to write a harmonious message.

Notice for instance Item 13 on page 60 of Bro. Whittaker's book, quoting 2 Peter 3:13. "*We according to his promise (in Revelation) look for new heavens and a new earth.*" This is supposed to be convincing evidence that Peter is quoting from the Revelation. But both Peter and John are in fact alluding to Old Testament passages familiar to them both. They would have had in mind Isaiah 66:22 — "As the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall endure before me, says the LORD, so shall your race and your name endure. From one new moon to another, all mankind shall come to worship before me, says the LORD."

"*The city which hath foundations*" (Heb. 11:10) is taken by Bro. W. to allude to "*the wall of the city*" which "*had twelve foundations*" (Rev. 21:14). But again both Paul and John are utilizing Old Testament phraseology. The allusion is found in Isaiah 54:11-13: "*Behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires.*"

Another example in which New Testament writers independently allude to an Old Testament concept is the figure of *the last trumpet*. John uses the trumpet symbol throughout the Revelation; Paul uses it in his epistles (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16; Heb. 12:19), and all the New Testament references are traced to similar expressions in the Old Testament, as Exodus 19:16.

CONCLUSION

Late in the first century seven ecclesias in Asia Minor received a message from the the last living apostle. In his exile on Patmos, the aged apostle had received wondrous visions. It was a message of comfort and hope in that the future destruction of the present world order was foretold, and the coming reign of Messiah was assured. Before that day should dawn, however, there would be difficult times for which the ecclesias must be prepared. The Spirit, through the apostle, viewed each of the ecclesias in turn, analysed their current position before God and gave warnings appropriate to each of them. Seven ecclesias, representing the whole community of believers, were given a message which had to be carefully considered, lest they lose their place among the lightstands. Already, significant signs of apostasy were there in their midst, and if not checked, the ecclesias would cease to be instruments for revealing God's Truth in the world. Nicolaitanism and other false teachings had been brought into the communities and were having their effect. The message was urgent, and it was timely.

Over the ecclesias of Asia Minor storm clouds were gathering. Under Nero believers had for the first time suffered persecution at the hands of the Roman authorities. This persecution did not extend much beyond Rome itself, but there would have been reverberations from it through the Empire. Under the Caesars who came after Nero, persecution of Christians was sporadic but not sustained. Serious harassment by Roman authorities became a widespread reality under Domitian, who reigned A.D. 81-96. This emperor was the son of Titus and brother to Vespasian, the destroyers of Jerusalem, and he was hostile to both Jews and Christians. He forced the Jews to pay a tax to the temple of Jupiter in Rome — replacing their temple tax, and he demanded that his subjects, particularly in the provinces, worship him as a deity.

“ ... The Domitian authorities charged Christians with being criminals, confiscated their property, exiled some, and decreed death for others ... Nerva (96-98) reversed Domitian's policy and recalled many of the banished.”¹

There were assertions during the latter part of the nineteenth century by some German and English theologians, among them Westcott and Hort, to the effect that the Revelation was more likely written during the time of Nero or Vespasian (*i.e.* between 66 and 70 A.D.). The evidence they present for this conclusion is not weighty.² It appears in fact to have been something of a passing fancy, for scholars from the same school as these men, *i.e.* Alford and Swete, offer exhaustive evidence in support of the later date of the Apocalypse. Thus, James Orr writes, after discussing the Nero theory, "...the tide of opinion flows back to the age of Domitian as the time of its origin, (*i.e.* the Apocalypse)."³

The following is a brief summary from *Peake's Commentary* on the dating of the Revelation.

"The book (of Revelation) was written to meet an extremely grave situation with persecution on all sides. Systematic attempts were made to establish Caesar worship. An edict was issued. Devotees to the cult of Caesar wore a special mark 'on the right hand or the forehead' ... untold sufferings came upon the followers of Christ. To profess the Christian faith meant the risk of martyrdom and the certainty of petty persecution in ordinary avocations. Large numbers of Christians grew weak in the faith and compromised ...

"Some have attempted to place it as early as the reign of Nero. The main argument for this is a statement in 11:1 which appears to imply that the Temple at Jerusalem was still intact. This theory is not easy to maintain in view of the following facts: (a) the widespread cult of Caesar worship (large in the Apocalypse) belongs to the age of Domitian rather than the earlier period. Moffatt says, 'No worship of the emperor which is adequate to the data of the Apocalypse was enforced until Domitian's reign.' (b) There is no trace before Domitian of such a persecution in Asia Minor as is described in the Apocalypse. Nero's persecution was limited in

the main to Rome, and there does not seem to have been another serious outbreak until we reach Domitian's reign. (c) The allusion to the 'eighth' emperor in 17:11 carries us beyond Vespasian (A.D. 69-79) and seems to identify *Nero redivivus*⁴ with Domitian. In view of these facts, it seems best to maintain the traditional date during the reign of Domitian (A.D. 80-96).'⁵

¹ Manschreck, *A History of Christianity in the World*, "In Conflict with Rome", p. 26.

² Neither Westcott nor Hort wrote commentaries on the Apocalypse, and except for three published lectures on the Revelation by Hort, their references to the subject are incidental. Dr. Swete, in his commentary on the Apocalypse, notes that in the partition of the New Testament between the three (Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort), the Revelation was "not finally assigned". "It would appear," he writes, "that they were guided in their judgment on this point partly by the relation which they believed the Book to occupy with reference to the Fall of Jerusalem, partly by the contrast which it presents to the Fourth Gospel" (Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. ciii).

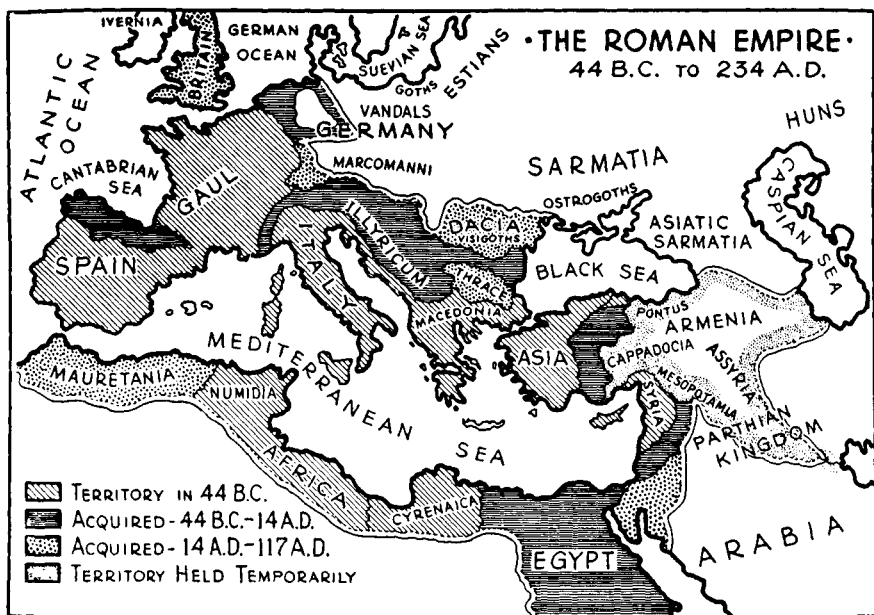
³ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, "Revelation of John: Date and Unity of the Book", Vol. IV, p. 2585.

⁴ The term *Nero redivivus* ("Nero back again"), refers to a legend current toward the end of the first century, that Nero would return in some form to renew his cruelties. The term was applied to some of his successors, particularly Domitian. Some expositors have suggested that the apostle John alluded to this as another subtle means of stressing the Roman character of the Beast. Henry B. Swete in his commentary, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, presents the basis of this view (p. ci) in the very extensive section on the background and the dating of the Apocalypse.

⁵ *Peake's Commentary*, 1920, ed. A.S. Peake, "Revelation", by Prof. H. T. Andrews, p. 926.

This quotation is from the original edition of the commentary. The 1962 edition, edited by Matthew Black, retains this view, and the following is taken from the new edition.

"... It is doubtful whether Nero's persecution was sufficiently sustained to provoke such a book as the Apocalypse, and the edict concerning emperor-worship which appears to be envisaged in 13:15 hardly belongs to this reign. The church of Ephesus, moreover, would scarcely have had time to forsake its first love (2:4) ... The most reasonable suggestion is the reign of Domitian (81-96), and this accords with the very early Church tradition of Irenaeus and also with the demand for emperor-worship in this reign, and the fierce persecution of Christians (c. A.D. 92, according to Pliny)" (*Peake's Commentary*, (Nelson, 1962) ed. Matthew Black, p. 1045).



The Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands (p. 388)



The Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands (p. 506)

PART II

THE IDENTITY OF BABYLON

BABYLON IN THE APOCALYPSE

In concert with a study of the dating of the Revelation, the identity of Babylon in the Apocalypse should also be considered. An incorrect dating of the Apocalypse is often associated with an erroneous identification of this symbolic city which figures so prominently in the apocalyptic visions.

The Revelation designates a city as *Babylon the Great*, and the language is emphatic and sinister. Babylon is also described as a *great whore* and *the mother of harlots*. The word *mystery* (Gk. *musterion*, "what is known only to the initiated" - Young) indicates that *Babylon* would be identified by those to whom the Apocalypse was written, while the identity of the city would be veiled to the Roman authorities.

A comparison of the Rome of John's day with ancient Babylon reveals prominent similarities, and a very good case can be made for the usually accepted conclusion that Rome was indeed the place intended in the term *Babylon*. Like Rome, ancient Babylon was a great city and much more than a city. It was the center of both political and religious power and influence. Rome and Babylon each held sway in its own time over most of the civilized world, and each exercised a despotic authority that few dared to question.

The comments of many early Jewish and Christian writers indicate that *Babylon* was often used as a cypher for pagan Rome. Gibbon, speaking of the expectation of early Christians about the end of the world and the glory of the literal reign of the Messiah, says, "Whilst the happiness and glory of a temporal reign were promised to the disciples of Christ, the most dreadful calamities were denounced against an unbelieving world. ... *The epithet of Babylon was applied to the city and to the empire of Rome.*"¹

"As Edom was the name applied to the Roman empire, so Babylon became the mystic name for the city of Rome". So writes Isbon Beckwith, and he cites in support of his statement Jewish and Christian writings from the Roman

period.² One of these sources was the *Apocalypse of Baruch*, a Jewish work that has survived from the first century. It is a composite of several writings which actually appeared between 50 and 90 A.D.; so it is a book that is contemporaneous with the New Testament writings. It contains several allusions to Rome as Babylon, contrasting downtrodden Zion with the oppressive imperial city.³ A search through early Christian writings reveals that *Babylon* was a euphemism for Rome. The analogy was commonly applied, and the theme persists for several centuries. Hippolytus, bishop of Portus (born A.D. 155) compares the Apocalypse with Old Testament prophecies and alludes to the spiritual connection between the Babylon of the prophet Daniel and the Rome of the apostle John's day. "Tell me, blessed John," he writes, "Apostle and disciple of our Lord, what didst thou see and hear concerning Babylon? Arise, and speak; for it sent thee also into banishment."⁴ It was under the authority of Rome that the apostle John was exiled.

Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea in Palestine (born A.D. 262), writes with regard to the use of the term *Babylon* by the apostle Peter and illustrates that the apostle was understood at that time to be referring to Rome.

"This account is given by Clement, in the sixth book of his Institutions, whose testimony is corroborated also by that of Papias, bishop of Hierapolis. Peter mentions Mark in his first epistle, which they say he composed in Rome itself; and it is said that he indicates this by referring to the city metaphorically as *Babylon* in these words: 'the church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; as also my son Mark.' I Peter v. 13." ⁵

Mark, mentioned by Peter as being with him in "Babylon", is further associated with the city of Rome in a reference by the apostle Paul. In Rome, Paul sends for Mark in 2 Tim. 4:11.

Augustine, bishop of Hippo, (born A.D. 354) in his *City of God* repeatedly alludes to the pagan city of Rome as Babylon. He speaks of "Babylon, the first Rome," and he writes that "Rome plays the role of a second Babylon."⁶

The following excerpt from *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* provides a helpful summary.

“There are some striking facts which point to Rome as the city that is designated (in the Apocalypse) as Babylon.

(1) The characteristics ascribed to this Babylon apply to Rome rather than to any other city of that age: (a) as ruling over the kings of the earth; (b) as sitting on seven mountains; (c) as the center of the world’s merchandise; (d) as the corrupter of the nations; (e) as the persecutor of the saints.

(2) Rome is designated as Babylon in the Sibylline Oracles (5:143)⁷, and this is perhaps an early Jewish portion of the book. The comparison of Rome to Babylon is common in Jewish apocalyptic literature (see 2 Esdras and the Apocalypse of Baruch).

(3) Rome was regarded by both Jews and Christians as being antagonistic to the kingdom of God, and its downfall was confidently expected. This conception is in accord with the predicted downfall of Babylon (Rev. 14:8; 18). As Babylon had been the oppressor of Israel, it was natural that this new power, which was oppressing the people of God, should be designated as Babylon.”⁸

¹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. I, p. 263.

² Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, p. 656.

³ *Apocalypse of Baruch*, 11.1 (p. 18), 67.7 (p. 110).

⁴ Hippolytus, *The Writings of Hippolytus, Bishop of Portus*, “Treatise on Christ and Antichrist”, II, 36.

⁵ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 2, ch. 15.

⁶ Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XVIII, Ch. 2 (p. 86).

⁷ During the Hellenistic age and under the early Roman empire, literary-minded Jews and Christians were impressed by the respect paid to the various sibyls (Greek writings) and they proceeded to create a collection of oracles, written in Greek hexameters, ... The oldest oracle probably found in book 3 (150-100 B.C.), books 4, 5 are Jewish works of the reign of Domitian (81-96 A.D.); 6, 7 are Christian. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 20, p. 464, 1977 edition).

⁸ *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, “Babylon in the New Testament”, Vol. I, p. 358.

HARLOT CITIES

References can be found in the Old Testament prophets in which Jerusalem was termed a harlot. Some writers have therefore concluded that the harlot of Revelation should also be identified with Jerusalem. However, in the Old Testament several cities are termed harlots. The expression is used of Tyre (Isa. 23) and Nineveh (Nahum 3:4) and the descriptions are remarkably similar to those applied to the Babylon of Revelation. Tyre is spoken of as committing fornication with the kingdoms of the world, and Nineveh is described as "*the well favored harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts.*" As a result of their wickedness these cities faced a destruction similar to that which was reserved for the apocalyptic Babylon.

Israel, Judah and Babylon are all charged with spiritual whoredom in the Old Testament. Babylon, Ezekiel tells us, practiced harlotry with Judah. "*And the Babylonians came to her into the bed of love, and they defiled her with their whoredom, and she was polluted with them*" (Ezek. 23:17).

The king of Babylon is indicted in Isaiah 14 in terms that parallel the condemnation of Babylon in the Apocalypse. "How hath the oppressor ceased! The *golden city* ceased!" *Lucifer*, the Babylonian ruler, was judged for his *oppression* of the nations and his *blasphemy* against the God of heaven (Isa. 14:12, 13).

Babylon, the preeminent Old Testament harlot city, cannot point to Jerusalem as its antitype in the Revelation, because Isaiah involves Israel in the destruction of Babylon. (We would have the paradox of Israel vanquishing herself!) Isaiah paints a picture of a clear contrast: *Israel* versus *Babylon*.

*"And Babylon, the glory of the kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellence, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah ... For Yahweh will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel ..."*¹

"They (the Jews) shall take them captives, *whose captives they were*," writes the prophet, "and they shall rule over their oppressors" (Isa. 14:1-2). These statements occur in the context of the destruction of Babylon - with

obvious latter day overtones! And other prophets join in confirming the contrast.

“The portion of *Jacob* is not like them; for He is the former of all things: and *Israel* is the rod of His inheritance: the LORD of hosts is his name ... and I will render unto *Babylon* and to all the inhabitants of *Chaldea* all their evil that they have done in *Zion* in your sight, saith Yahweh.”²

“Deliver thyself, O *Zion*, that dwellest with the daughter of *Babylon*. For thus saith Yahweh of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of His eye.”³

It is necessary that there be a continuation of Babylon in some form for a final, latter day destruction. The mantle was passed to pagan Rome which shared with its earlier counterpart the two distinguishing features: *oppression* and *blasphemy*. Nebuchadnezzar demanded the worship of the golden images he had made to represent himself and his great empire; the Caesars likewise required the worship of themselves and their images. As the Jewish Ecclesia suffered under the yoke of Babylon, so the Ecclesia of Christ endured persecution in the pagan Roman empire.

It has been observed by Hislop (*The Two Babylons*) and others that the prominent features of idolatry which existed in the original Babylon were transmitted to pagan Rome and that many of these elements were preserved in the apostate Church. The doctrine of the Trinity and the immortality of the soul, the worship of a madonna and child and the veneration of “the Queen of Heaven” were some of the many features these harlot-city systems held in common. A continuity of apostasy can be seen, beginning with ancient Babel, the progenitor of Babylon, and ending with apostate Christendom. Pagan Rome merged into papal Rome, which in a very real sense also “*ruled over the kings of the earth*” (Rev. 17:18). Babylon is thus perpetuated to challenge the Messiah himself at his coming. It is then that the long awaited prophecy will be fulfilled. “*So shall Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and shall be found no more*” (Rev. 18:21 RSV).

Babylon
The Harlot City

“... the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication ... I sit a queen and am no widow.”

-Rev. 17, 18

Pagan Rome

“... glorious Rome shall bound her empire by earth, her pride by heaven ...”⁴

“... Rome, mistress of the world ...”⁵

-Virgil

Papal Rome

“... this mistress of the nations, the queen of cities, the mother of the churches ...”⁶

-Pope John VIII

¹ Isa. 13:19; 14:1, 2.

² Jer. 51:19-24.

³ Zech. 2:7-9.

⁴ Virgil, *Aenid*, VI.

⁵ *Ibid.*, VII.

⁶ Llewellyn, *Rome in the Dark Ages*, p. 284.

THE OLD TESTAMENT SOURCE

There is a remarkable parallel between Jeremiah, chapter 51, and the 17th and 18th chapters of the Revelation. The words of Jeremiah are a denunciation not of Israel but of Israel's great enemy and conqueror, the historical Babylon. The Spirit through John uses identical expressions in describing the judgments to come upon the latter day Babylon. Babylon is the antithesis of God's people: first, against natural Israel in Old Testament times, and then as the antagonist of spiritual Israel— from the apostolic era to the return of the Master.

JEREMIAH

Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul: be not cut off in her iniquity; for this is the time of the Lord's vengeance; he will render unto her a recompense (v. 6).

Babylon hath been a golden cup in the Lord's hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad (v. 7).

Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed: howl for her. O thou that dwellest upon

REVELATION

And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues (18:4).

I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication ... thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived (17:1-2).

Alas, alas that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment

many waters, abundant
in treasures, thine end
is come (v. 8,13).

Thus shall Babylon
sink, and shall not rise
from the evil that I will
bring upon her (v. 64).

come ... and the mer-
chants of the earth
shall weep and mourn
over her (18:10).

And a mighty angel
took up a stone like a
great millstone, and
cast it into the sea,
saying, Thus with vio-
lence shall that great
city Babylon be thrown
down, and shall be
found no more at all
(18:21).

The judgment upon Babylon in each case has a finality about it. The opposer of God and His people is being taken out of the way, and in the Revelation it is to give place to the righteous reign of the Lord's Christ. Whatever punishments Israel must bear, she is to be restored and redeemed. Babylon has no promise of redemption but is to be destroyed utterly.

The fact that John conforms so closely to the description of Jeremiah in his portrayal of Babylon must clue us in to its meaning in the Apocalypse. Like Babylon of old it is a political and religious system which defies the Deity and persecutes His people, and as such it is doomed to destruction.

THE GREAT ENEMY OF THE TRUTH

Bro. Whittaker validly points out in chapter 8 of his book that "practically every prophecy of the Old Testament springs out of the immediate circumstances surrounding the prophet at the time of writing." But then he writes:

"At the time when the prophecy was given to John (A.D. 66), the outstanding circumstances of importance to the early believers were the ferocious persecution of the Christians by Nero, and the seething restlessness and turmoil in Judaea which already gave plain promise of worse to come in the troubles of the Jewish War, A.D. 67-70."

Neither the prophet John nor those to whom he was writing were in Rome, where the Nero persecution raged for a short time, nor were they in Palestine, where the Jewish War occurred. The Apocalypse was not given to Jews in Israel, nor was it written to the ecclesia in Jerusalem. It was addressed to Gentile ecclesias. The real circumstances under which the Revelation was written were (1) a time when there was severe persecution throughout Asia Minor — some 30 years after Nero's reign, and (2) a threatened falling away from the true faith on the part of the ecclesias (see footnotes 1 and 2). These were the prominent issues which the Spirit, through the apostle John, had to address.

Bro. Whittaker includes an important section in his book under the title, *The Great Enemy of the Truth*, and presents a point of view to which we must state serious objection. If *the great enemy of the Truth* be mis-identified, we have a problem of considerable magnitude.

"There can be no question that the Gospel's biggest enemy in the very earliest days was not Rome but Jerusalem" (*Revelation*, page 75, H.A.W.).

It must be obvious to most readers at this point in our consideration of the Apocalypse that we are not dealing with the *very earliest* days but with the later apostolic era. The very earliest days would be the time of Christ and the early ministry of the apostles. But whether the Apocalypse was written in A.D. 66 or A.D. 95, it was written to ecclesias existing in a Gentile world, upon whom Jerusalem had no direct influence. These ecclesias faced two crises of the

utmost gravity. The opening chapters of the Revelation testify to both of these *real* crises: *severe persecution from Gentile sources*¹ and *a growing apostasy*.²

The growth and influence of gnosticism during the late apostolic period was perhaps the greatest evil the disciples had to face. Attempts to blend Christian doctrine with a variety of theosophical ideas posed the most severe threat to the gospel. Paganism, astrology, Platonism, hellenized Zoroastrianism, Judaism, magic — these were all exerting their influence.³ False teachings characterized by the terms *Balaam* (a non-Jew who caused Israel to sin) and *Jezebel* (a Zidonian who promoted Baal worship in Israel) had found their way into the ecclesia (Rev. 2:14, 20; Num. 31:16; 1 Kings 16:31). There is a striking parallel in the way in which both Israel in the Old Testament and the first century Ecclesia were defiled by heathen beliefs and practices.

It is true that in several New Testament books a considerable emphasis is placed upon the danger of the Judaizing influence in the ecclesias at that time. It may be wondered why the ecclesias were not given more warning of the threat of pagan philosophies, since these would be the ultimate corrupting influence at the end of the century and beyond. The apostles were not remiss. They performed well their work of establishing the foundation of the Truth as it is in Jesus. It was necessary that the teaching of Christ be thoroughly clarified with respect to the Old Testament. The work and influence of the apostles was such that Judaistic teaching within the ecclesias was rendered ineffective by the end of their ministry. They had not overlooked the threat of pagan influences, and they warned of the pernicious enemy to be revealed. The apostle John would have been especially aware of this threat, writing when and where he did, and his epistles indicate this.⁴ *It is the primary concern of the Apocalypse.*

The Revelation was to serve the same purpose for the followers of Christ as the Old Testament prophetic writings had done for the people of Israel. It had to warn and prepare the Ecclesia for the long journey through the darkness that lay ahead. John was ministering to Gentile ecclesias which were rushing headlong into the fires of persecution and apostasy. It is hardly reasonable to suppose that he would now turn his attention back to the Jews. They and

their nation had already been set aside following their rejection of the Messiah.

It is impossible to accept that all the elaborately symbolic visions of the Apocalypse — chapter after chapter — refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Inasmuch as this event had already been foretold by Jesus himself in plain, simple language, such a revelation was not required. Even had the Apocalypse been written before that holocaust, it would have been redundant and of little real help to Gentile ecclesias facing a holocaust of their own. The great antagonist of the apostolic Ecclesia at the time when John was writing was not Jerusalem, already fading into oblivion. The great enemy of the Ecclesia was the pagan Roman system. And looking to the future, as the apostle was enabled to do, the greatest enemy of the Truth was the Roman Catholic system. This is a fact of history that persisted for at least a thousand years. Jerusalem, as a persecutor, was replaced by pagan Rome which would in turn give way to an apostate Christendom. The latter became the most formidable foe the people of God have had to face.

¹ Rev. 1:9 (John exiled by Caesar); 2:10 (“devil shall cast some of you into prison” - Only the Roman authorities had the power to imprison.); (“tribulation ten days” - persecution under Trajan, 110-120 A.D.).

² Rev. 2:2 (those who “say they are apostles and are not”); 2:5 (“I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place”).

³ Chadwick, *The Early Church*, Ch. 2, p. 35.

⁴ 1 John 2:18, 26; 4:1-3; 2 John vv. 7-11.

THE WRATH OF GOD

“In all this there is a strong suggestion that the trumpet visions, soon to follow, have to do with divine retribution and chastisement of Israel in the First Century and in the last days” (*Revelation*, p. 106, H.A.W.).

There have been two great apostasies, Jewish and Christian. The latter has turned the truth of God into a lie, beginning with the very nature of the Creator Himself, and has exercised itself in the persecution of the faithful from the third century until now. There were judgments upon Israel, as her prophets foretold; the Revelation speaks of similar judgments upon the Christian apostasy. The bride turned whore is not to pass through history unaffected by any judgments of God, while Israel suffers continual anguish and punishment for her sins.

The trumpet visions are mainly concerned with divine retribution and chastisement of apostate Christendom. According to the account in the Revelation, these visions describe the judgments to be poured out upon *mankind* (Gk. *anthropos*). “The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot either see or hear or walk; nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their immorality or their thefts” (Rev. 9:20-21 RSV).

The admonitions of the Apocalypse were addressed to the seven churches of Asia — *seven ecclesias* representing the entire community of believers. The Revelation was given to the first century Ecclesia for counsel and for warning. If they failed to heed this warning *they* would suffer God's rejection as had the Jews in the destruction of their nation and the dispersion of their people. Israel had already been rejected. The Apocalypse was given so that the Gentile ecclesias would not suffer the same fate as their Jewish counterparts.

“Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel.” The commission had been given to the disciples and had been carried out by them with all diligence and in the spirit and power of their Lord. The word was preached and it produced a community of believers enlightened by it and responsible to it. The lapse into apostasy by the greater part

of the Ecclesia did not relieve that community of a collective responsibility. Its continued rejection of the Truth would make it liable to these judgments upon “mankind”.

A "JEWISH BABYLON"?

"I will shew thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters" (Rev. 17:1).

"Babylon is Jerusalem" (*Revelation*, p. 209, H.A.W.)

"The influence of Jerusalem throughout the Roman Empire was amazing. Every city of any size had its colony of Jews, and through the synagogue these all gave allegiance to Jerusalem, making direct annual payments to the temple and accepting the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin" (*Revelation*, page 210, H.A.W.).

The ecclesias in Asia Minor would have had little reason to see Jerusalem as their great enemy. Jerusalem had no power over them. They did have reason however to fear Rome and to look forward to its destruction. Furthermore the apostle in writing of Jerusalem would have had no reason to use a cypher; he could have referred to it by name without fear of reprisal. But Rome had the power to oppress and living under its authority required caution. It was Rome who controlled the waters, for she held full sway over the peoples of the Mediterranean world.

"The waters that you saw, where the harlot is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues" (Rev. 17:15 RSV).

Rome was the great maritime power who controlled the Mediterranean Sea; she had mastery over all shipping and access to all ports. She not only ruled the sea but all the nations surrounding it, from Europe to Asia, including the Middle East and Africa. All these people, including the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judaea were subject to her edicts. The following historical references describe the situation that existed in the first century.

"Because the province of Judaea was such an infinitesimal sector of the sprawling Roman empire, and because its people so conscientiously avoided assimilation into the dynamic yeast of the new western civilization, the military and political histories which have come down to us from these distant times scarcely mention the Jews at all.

If ever, they are passed off as a troublesome but relatively insignificant minority occupying a strange and ancient city at the brink of a distant desert. Their Messianic prophecies were considered so mystic and arcane by philosophers and so unrealistic by politicians that none but the most curious bothered to record the ripple which their religious unrest made in the stream of contemporary events.”¹

“The overwhelming influence in the first century of the Christian era was the Roman empire. At the time of Jesus the Romans controlled southern Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. *The legions and navies of the empire had made the Mediterranean a Roman lake.*”²

A correct application of Revelation, chapters 17 and 18, must depend upon a right understanding of the first chapters of the prophecy. Approaching the book carefully from its beginning, we are led to consider it as a message to seven Gentile ecclesias — believers whose ties to Judaism and contemporary Jerusalem had been disconnected. The book must be seen as having primary relevance to this community, the Ecclesia in the Gentile Roman world in the latter part of the first century. Thus, expositors have most often viewed the Revelation as unfolding history relating, not to Israel, but to that community which is represented in Rev. 1:12, 20 by the seven golden lampstands. These represent the household of faith — the ecclesias.

The foundation laid in these early chapters direct us to a consideration of what is to take place from that time forward with respect to the Christian community. Significantly, Bro. Whittaker in his *Revelation, a Biblical Approach* almost passes over the first three chapters of the Apocalypse. But they are essential as the groundwork for our consideration of the book as a whole. These chapters focus our attention upon the conditions of the ecclesias along with exhortations and warnings directed to them — rather than leading us to consider the Jewish nation or the judgment of Jerusalem. “Those things which must shortly come to pass” concern the first century Ecclesia. Thus when we

come to Revelation 17 and 18 we see a connection with what has come before.

As Israel "played the harlot" and forsook Yahweh, so the betrothed of Christ followed the same tragic course. What is first revealed in the early chapters of the Apocalypse is the elect woman. She is given warnings of her precarious position before God, and she is told that she will be rejected unless she repents. Then we see in Rev. 12 a further stage of development, for there is depicted a compromised woman delivered of a man child of sin. Finally there are the visions of a woman abandoned to sin — a harlot. From the vision of the Ecclesia we have been led to a picture of the Apostasy — fully developed and targeted for destruction.

¹ Williams, *The Holy City*, p. 228.

² Sarno, *The Cruel Caesars, Their Impact on the Early Church*, Preface, x, 3.

THE SEPTIMONTIUM

"The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sitteth" (Rev. 17:9).

"Rome is not the only city in the world built on seven hills. Is not the same true of Jerusalem? What expositors very often overlook is the fact that the hills of Rome are hardly hills; they are certainly not mountains, which is the word used in Revelation 17:9. Indeed, the highest of the seven hills of Rome is a mere 150 feet ... In sharp contrast with Rome, Jerusalem is built on seven mountains. The city stands at an altitude of 2400 feet above sea-level"

(Revelation, page 210, H.A.W.).

In John's day, there was a familiar expression which referred to Rome as the *Septimontium*, the city built on seven hills. This idiom can be found frequently in first century and even more ancient writings. Every Roman knew the phrase — Rome of the seven hills — and the term had become commonplace throughout the empire. The figure of Rome as the seven-hilled capital appears in the works of all the well-known Latin Poets and in the later Sibylline Oracles.¹ Ancient Roman literature abounds with references to imperial Rome as the queen-city sitting upon its seven mounts.

"Rome ... the city of the seven hills".²

(Cicero, c. 76 B.C)

"Rome became of all things the fairest, and with a single city's wall enclosed her seven hills."

"... glorious Rome shall bound her empire with earth, her pride by heaven, and with a single city's wall shall enclose her seven hills."³

(Virgil, c. 40 B.C.)

"... sing the hymn in honour of the gods who love the Seven Hills. ... ne'er mayest thou be able to view aught greater than the city of Rome!"⁴

(Horace, c. 35 B.C.)

“The city high-throned on the seven hills, the queen of all the world ... Rome take thy triumph ...”⁵

(Propertius, c. 20 B.C.)

“... Rome, that gazes about from her seven hills upon the whole world, — Rome, the place of empire and the gods”.⁶

(Ovid, c. 12 B.C.)

“... may you see the seven sovereign hills and take the measure of all Rome ...”⁷

(Martial, 40-104 A.D.)

Expositors generally agree that there can be no doubt as to the meaning of the apostle's reference, identifying the city-woman who sits upon the seven mountains. The allusion was too obvious to be missed by his readers.

“In the first place they are seven mountains where the woman had her seat in the days when the angel was speaking to John. To him and his readers this could scarcely have any meaning other than the city of Rome. For many centuries there had been held there annually a festival known as the *Septimontium* (seven mounts) to celebrate the inclusion of the seven hills *within the city wall*. Rome was known everywhere as **THE CITY OF THE SEVEN HILLS** ... the woman had her seat in Rome, but the name on her forehead proclaimed a secret connection with another city, *Babylon*.”⁸

No atlas, no historian speaks of Jerusalem as being situated on seven hills — or *mountains*! Usually Jerusalem has been identified with one hill — Zion.

“Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is *Mount Zion*, on the sides of the north, *the city of the great King*” (Psa. 48:2).

Zion is the name that from antiquity has been applied to the site of Jerusalem itself, though actually the height of Zion consists of two elevations, Zion and Moriah. “The mount itself was split into two hills, west and east, by a much shallower valley, scarcely visible today, called the

Tyropoeon (Cheesemakers) Valley.’’⁹ The Oxford Bible Atlas describes the site of Jerusalem as “an indented rocky plateau, having a slope from north to south, and divided into two unequal ridges by a deep re-entrant valley ...”¹⁰

Josephus described the city as being built upon two hills, divided by a valley,¹¹ a description that accords with other topographical accounts. He goes on to mention five natural subdivisions of these two ridges. They are the Upper City (Zion); the Lower City (Akra); Ophel, the southeastern hill; Moriah, the Temple hill; and Bezetha, the northeastern hill. In the various ancient descriptions of Jerusalem there has been some ambiguity in the names and descriptions of these hills, but the delineation of five hills is consistent.¹² So the numbers *one*, *two* and *five* have been found in the various descriptions of the site of Jerusalem — but never the number *seven*.

“Jerusalem ... is located on a 1,000 - acre plateau, next to Gihon Spring in the central Judean mountains. It slightly slants toward the southeast and is encircled by the Kedron and Hinnom valleys. A lesser valley known as ‘the Tyropoeon’ drains central Jerusalem and divides the ‘Lower City’ from the ‘Upper City.’ ... Within the walls of Jerusalem are five famous hills - Mount Ophel, Mount Moriah, Mount Zion, the Northwestern Hill and Bezetha.”¹³

The comparative elevations of the cities of Rome and Jerusalem are simply not relevant. The word *oros* (hill, mount, mountain — Young) does not necessarily indicate great elevation and is sometimes translated *hill* (as it is in this particular verse in the RSV).¹⁴

¹ Cited by Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 220.

² Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, VI. 5.

³ Virgil, *Georgics*, II; *Aenid*, VI.

⁴ Horace, *A Secular Hymn (The Odes and Epodes*, p. 351).

⁵ Propertius, *The Elegies*, III.xi.

⁶ Ovid, *Tristia*, I. 70.

⁷ Martial, *Epigrams*, IV.lxiv.

⁸ Lang, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 267.

⁹ *Jerusalem* (Keter Publishing House), p. 648.

¹⁰ *Oxford Bible Atlas*, “Jerusalem in Old Testament Times”, p. 80.

¹¹ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, Book V, Ch. iv.1.

¹² *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, "Jerusalem", Vol. III, p. 1600;

Simons, *Jerusalem in the Old Testament*, "The City of Josephus", p. 36;
Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, "Jerusalem", p. 460.

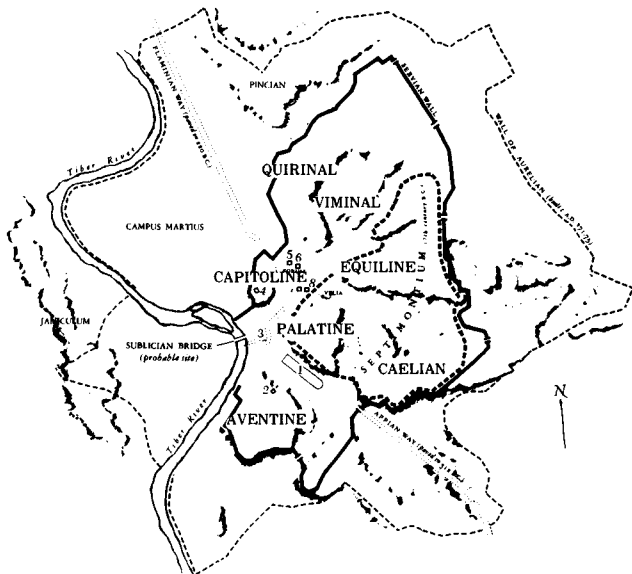
¹³ Owen, *The Holy Land*, pp. 165-166.

¹⁴ "... the seven heads are seven hills on which the woman is seated" (Rev. 17:9).

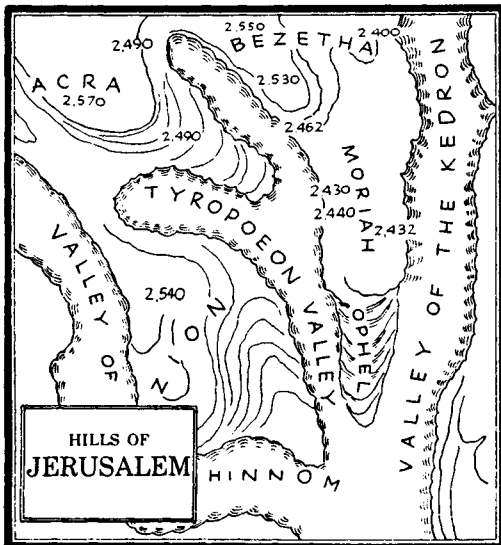
TOPOGRAPHY OF ROME AND JERUSALEM

ROME BEFORE 500 B.C.

1. Circus Maximus
2. Temple of Diana
(probable site)
3. Cloaca Maxima
4. Temple of Jupiter,
Juno, and Minerva
5. Curia (first meeting
place of the Senate)
6. Temple of Janus
7. Temple of Vesta
8. Regia (palace of the
early kings; under
the republic the
residence of the
pontifex maximus)



Ancient Rome with the seven hills delineated. They are the Capitoline, Aventine, Palatine, Quirinal, Viminal, Equiline and Caelian hills. *Septimontium*, an ancient term for Rome, celebrated the *seven mounts* within the city wall. (Illustration from *Ancient Rome*, Robert Payne, American Heritage Press, 1970).



Jerusalem was built on a ridge into which were cut several valleys. The five elevations are indicated. The Mount of Olives is across the Kedron valley, outside the city. The mountains round about Jerusalem are higher yet than the elevations of the city. In the future it will be exalted *above the hills* which surround it. (Illustration from *The Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands*.)

JERUSALEM A.D. 66-70

The fact of history is that Jerusalem at the time of the apostles was a city which was subject to Rome without any real authority of its own. At the middle of the first century it had become an oppressed city, not only subject to its Roman masters but precarious in its existence. It was threatened with annihilation. In his book *The Holy City*, a history of Jerusalem, Albert Williams describes events in the city leading up to its destruction.

“From the year 44 to the dread date of 66, events in the Holy City degenerated into a long parade of procurators who seemed helpless to quiet the rebellious Jews. One by one they came to the imperial seat at Caesarea, and one after another admitted themselves unable to cope with the inflamed tempers of their subjects ... To combat the increasing recalcitrance of the residents of Jerusalem, the successive procurators became increasingly tyrannical and brutal to the Jews. At last, in the year 66, the caldron of hatred spilled over into open battle.

“Those who hoped to live out their lives in some semblance of peace now packed such of their belongings as they could carry and fled the city, seeking homes in other sections of Palestine than Judea, for the zealots determined it a capital offence for any Jew even to desire to live at peace under Roman rule.”¹

Bearing in mind the desperate situation of Jerusalem at this time, abandoned by most of her children and facing destruction at the hands of fired up Roman legions, we consider the following comment by Bro. Whittaker (*Revelation*, page 214).

“In A.D. 66, the well supported early date for the writing of Revelation, Jerusalem also was a city which ‘had a kingdom over the kings of the Land.’ Indeed, not only was Jerusalem a city with special authority over the various tetrarchies adjoining Judaea, but also the temple had an amazing degree of

authority over Jewish communities in all parts of the Roman empire."

The *Land* was occupied by legions of Roman soldiers and was ruled, not from Jerusalem, but from Caesarea, by a governor appointed by Rome. Not since the days of Herod the Great had Jerusalem been even nominally in control of the Land. The tetrarchs were mere figureheads, particularly at this time, who answered to no one in Jerusalem but rather to Roman authority. Indeed, even the high priests in Jerusalem were, from the time of Christ, practically Roman appointees.

The scene was set for the destruction of Jerusalem some time before the event occurred. That is why Jesus had warned his followers to flee the city when the Roman armies appeared. And appear they did in A.D. 66. While the destruction of the city did not occur until A.D. 70, it must have been plain to all observers, and to many within the city itself, that the die was cast.

It is revealed by historians that Jewry outside the Land were not so affected by the destruction of their temple and holy city as might be supposed. Many of them, living in Gentile lands, had come to face the fact that the strength of Rome would prevail. Unlike the zealots in Jerusalem, Jews outside Palestine were realists, and they were somewhat prepared for their ties to Jerusalem to be broken; "... even before the destruction the sacrifices had ceased to be the main liturgical element, as the focus of religious life had to a large extent shifted to the synagogue, and Torah study ...".² The synagogue system was already in effect before the fall of Jerusalem, and it would assure the survival of the Jews as a separate people. There were autonomous Jewish communities in various parts of the Roman empire; in one of them, Alexandria in Egypt, the Jews were largely self-governed. The community there had its own seventy elders and even its own temple. So it was that when Judaea sought to throw off the Roman yoke, no real support was to be had from the Jews in dispersion. A Jewish historian writes: "Nobody will join Jews in a war against the Roman Empire. Not even the Jewish Diaspora will lift a finger. Thus the war is lost before it is fought."³

"The Jews of the Diaspora stood aside virtually completely from the revolt of the province of Judaea in 66-70 A.D. Not only was

there no widespread rising in support of the homeland but the amount of external help forthcoming for the rebels in Palestine seems to have been negligible. ... The Diaspora within the Roman empire had no quarrel with Rome and therefore no wish to jeopardize their own favorable position by supporting the rebellion.¹⁴

In A.D. 66-70 Jerusalem was able to exercise little authority or influence over Judaea or the Jewish community in other parts of the Roman world. The truth is that none of the *Babylon* phrases from the Apocalypse can be applied with any credibility to Jerusalem.

¹ Williams, *The Holy City*, p. 249.

² *A History of the Jewish People*, "The Jewish Diaspora in the Second Temple Era", ed. H. H. Ben-Sasson, pp. 277-281.

³ *The Jewish World: History and Culture of the Jewish People*, ed. Elie Kedourie, p. 107.

⁴ Smallwood, *The Jews Under Roman Rule*, p. 357.

AN IMPORTANT AND DIFFICULT PROBLEM

The Apocalypse begins and ends with the expressions, *"things which must shortly come to pass"*, and *"behold I come quickly"*. These are idioms which do pose some problems inasmuch as 2000 years have elapsed since the words were spoken, and still our Lord has not returned. These and similar statements (as *"the Lord is at hand"*) move Bro. Whittaker to suggest that *"it can only be that God Himself has brought about a wholesale deferment of the consummation of His purpose, so that what was originally to have happened in or soon after A.D. 70 is to be fulfilled in the 20th century"* (page 264). Following a very detailed argument for this point of view, he concludes: *"In the light of these findings, the conclusion seems to follow that the divine intention that Jesus should come again some time in the First Century suffered a drastic postponement because of the general rejection of the Gospel, especially by Israel"* (page 269).

Against these conclusions must be set a number of statements in Scripture which indicate that a very long period of time would transpire before the culmination of all things. *"That day" (the day of Christ's coming)*, writes the apostle Paul, *"shall not come except there be a falling away first"* (2 Thess. 2:3,8). Paul and the other apostles repeatedly make the point that there would be an extended period of time during which the Faith would be in danger of being lost, in short when an apostate condition would persist.

"After my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock ... In latter times some shall depart from the faith ... The time will come when they shall not endure sound doctrine ... they shall turn away their ears from the Truth, and shall be turned unto fables." *"The mystery of iniquity"*, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, *"doth already work ... God shall send them a strong delusion that they should believe a lie."* Peter likewise predicted that there would be false teachers who would bring in damnable heresies, *"and many shall follow their pernicious ways."* He also writes, *"there shall come in the last days scoffers ... saying, where is the promise of his coming?"*¹

There are no indications in Scripture that God's time periods, with respect to His overall Purpose, are variable

according to man's response to Him. In Old Testament prophecies and in the Revelation there are "*set times*" with relation to the fulfillment of His Purpose. Four times in the book of Daniel the phrase *a time appointed* occurs. In Psalm 102:13 it is declared: "*Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come.*" The apostle Paul, in his speech on Mars hill, makes it clear that God's appointed time schedule for manifesting His glory in the earth does not vary significantly.

"God that made the world and all things therein ... hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth, and hath determined *the times before appointed*, and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts 17:24-26).

The phrase, "*things which must shortly come to pass*," must be seen in the light of other Scriptural usage of the same expression. That which Daniel declared would occur "in the latter days" is described in the Apocalypse as coming to pass "*shortly*" (Gk. *en tachei*). The expression is literally "in haste" (quickly, suddenly), indicating that the events are to be fulfilled rapidly. As the events are unfolded they are spoken of as coming to pass quickly (Rev. 11:14), and a form of the word occurs in Rev. 22:20: "*Behold I come quickly*". The things foretold include the decay and fall of empires, conflicts among nations and the development of the apostasy. Centuries would be required for the fulfillment of these things before the millennial reign of Christ should begin. They did however begin to come to pass shortly after they were revealed to John, and they continue in their succession until all are fulfilled in the new heaven and the new earth. The Apocalypse itself indicates an extended period of time before the servants of God are saved out of their affliction.

"They cried out with a loud voice, 'O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?' Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been" (Rev. 6:10-11 RSV).

The term *en tachei* occurs in Acts 12:7 (*rise up quickly*), Acts 22:18 (*get out quickly*) and Acts 25:4 (*depart shortly*). In these passages the meaning is clearly "within a short time". In Luke 18, however, the expression is used in a somewhat different sense. There is a long-range implication similar to that of the Apocalypse.

"And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry unto him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily (*en tachei*). Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:7-8 RSV).

The prophets offer some remarkable studies in the use of these terms, as in Hab. 2:3 (RV):

"For the vision is yet for *the appointed time*, and it hasteth toward the end, and shall not lie (fail): *though it tarry*, wait for it; because it will surely come, *it will not tarry*."

Henry Alford, in his commentary on the Revelation, gives an exposition of these expressions. He writes in part:

"*What things must shortly come to pass (i.e. before long)*. This expression must not be urged to signify that the events of the apocalyptic prophecy were to be close at hand: for we have a key to its meaning in Luke 18:8. ... Here long delay is evidently implied, though the term *en tachei* is used, as in Rev. 1:1. ... So that we are driven to the very same sense of *en tachei* as that of Luke, viz. to *God's speedy time*, though He seem to delay ... It remains to observe that these words cannot with any fairness be used as furnishing a guide to the interpretation of the prophecy. They are far rather to be regarded as a prophetic formula, common to Him to whom a thousand years are as one day, and used in order to teach us how short our time, and the time of this world is." ²

¹ Acts 20:29-30; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; 2 Thess. 2:7-8, 11; 2 Peter 2:1-2; 3:3-4.

² Alford, *The Greek Testament*, "Revelation", pp. 544-547.

A FINAL WORD

The ministry of the prophets of Israel continued for hundreds of years; the witness of the apostles lasted for less than a century. And when that witness ended, when the last apostle had fallen asleep, the silence was great indeed. God's precious Truth had been given to the Gentiles, and they proved even less capable of maintaining it than the Jews. Within an unbelievably short period of time basic elements of the true gospel had been replaced by pagan sophistries: belief in the immortal soul, demonism, confused teachings about God and the nature of Christ. The Apocalypse itself fell into disfavor with many prominent men in the Church and was for a time in danger of being excised from the New Testament canon. Its symbolism was no longer understood, and its millennial teaching had become incompatible with Christian thought. At the council of Laodicea, in the fourth century, representatives from the very churches to whom the Revelation had been addressed questioned its veracity.

Believers who have lived and endured through the centuries — those of whom we have records — have taken the sinister symbols of the Revelation to be referring to the established Church. The twelfth century Albigensians, for instance, "rejected the cross as a symbol not of redemption but of torture and degradation. They rejected all veneration of saints and martyrs, whose relics they regarded as hardly different from sticks and stones. They rejected, above all, the Church of Rome, which they attacked as the betrayer of Christianity. *They likened it to the Antichrist, and to the whore of Babylon.*"¹

The Apocalypse would serve to give hope to God's people in whatever situation they should find themselves. Interspersed between its somber visions were the wonderful scenes of future glory when the Lamb is enthroned upon Mount Zion. This purpose it continues to serve today; it is still efficacious to strengthen the hearts of the faithful. It assures us that there is a Master Plan, and that God's purpose is progressing on schedule. Its fulfillments are a matter of record; that which is revealed of the future will surely come to pass.

A central theme in the Apocalypse is the development of the pernicious enemy of the saints. A correct identification of the symbols of Revelation which pertain to this great

adversary is requisite to a satisfactory comprehension of the book. It is all the more imperative because the *arch-enemy* almost always takes on the guise of a friend. The counterfeit employs every means at his disposal to resemble the true, so that, if possible, even the elect might be seduced.²

Our pioneer brethren were familiar with both the *preterist* and the *futurist* interpretations of the Revelation, and they considered it necessary that they be rejected. A wrong understanding, they believed, would leave us vulnerable to the false teachings of the enemy whom the Apocalypse reveals.

“A correct understanding of the Apocalypse is of more importance than may at first sight appear. (1) It was given ‘that his servants **MIGHT KNOW**’ the things it speaks of; and if a wrong view of it prevails, the object of its communication is to that extent frustrated. (2) The Spirit pronounces a blessing on those who understand it ... (3) Jesus pronounces a curse on those who take away from its words; and no one takes away from them more effectually than the man who misrepresents its meaning.”³

“Over a dozen times it is written in the Apocalypse: ‘He that hath ears let him hear *what the Spirit saith* unto the churches’. Jesus says, ‘My sheep hear my voice.’ He identifies the Apocalypse with his voice in saying: ‘I, Jesus, have sent mine angel *to testify these things* in the churches’. Thus the Apocalypse is an important part of the Shepherd’s voice ...

“Among the ‘words of the book of this prophecy’ is a heavy warning against participation with a system described under the symbol of a beast and his image: ‘If any man worship the beast and his image and receive his mark on his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation.’ ...”⁴

“Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book” (Rev. 22:7).

¹ Friedrich, *The End of the World, A History*, “The Birth of the Inquisition”, p. 70.

² Matt. 24:24; 2 Cor. 11:14; 2 Thess. 2:9-10.

³ Robert Roberts, “The Apocalypse and the Obedience of Faith”, *The Christadelphian*, August, 1872, pp.380-381.

⁴ Robert Roberts, “The Apocalypse and the Question of Fellowship”, *The Christadelphian*, November, 1897, pp.467-468.

APPENDIX

JESUS CHRIST VS. THE MAN OF SIN

Just as Babylon is the antithesis of Jerusalem in Bible symbolism; so *the man of sin*, in all its manifestations, is the exact opposite of the Son of man. The two are irreconcilable, and yet the sin-power reveals purposeful likeness to its divine opposite in many ways, with the result that the multitudes are deceived, including some within the household itself. At times it is nearly impossible to distinguish between the real and the counterfeit — the true and the false — the legitimate and the imposter. Some masterpiece paintings have been copied by artists so precisely like the original that only the experts can tell the difference. Some gemstones can be produced with such authentic luster, that they are preferred over the original and are often worn to foil the thief.

But what has this to do with Scripture? Consider the following. In Revelation, chapter 12, the identity of Michael is key to the understanding of this section of the book. If the man child is in fact the Lord Jesus, then we are presented with yet another vision of the exaltation of the Savior as in chapters 7 and 14, and we are left with no introduction to the 13th chapter. On the other hand, if Michael, the man child, is the emperor Constantine — depicted as overthrowing the dragon of paganism and establishing Christianity as the State religion - then chapter 13 becomes an extension of 12, with the Sea Beast depicting the development of mainstream Christianity in its full blown apostasy. The man child “rules with a rod of iron” (Rev. 12:5), and since the same is said of Jesus (Rev. 2:27), it is asserted that the two must be the same. But this flies in the face of other facts which are even more important.

For example, when Michael is exalted to heaven and casts out the dragon, the saints are described as being killed (Rev. 12:11). Similarly, when Michael is exalted, Satan is released in the earth (12:12) to torment its inhabitants. However, when Jesus returns to set up his kingdom, the saints will be immortalized and Satan will be bound for a thousand years (Rev. 19:11-21; 20:2.) So the conclusion — that Michael, the man child, and Jesus Christ are the same — appearing on the surface to be correct, is in fact a hasty and inaccurate interpretation. The differences between

Jesus and the man child are seen, on closer observation, to be greater than their similarities.

Why are there similarities at all? Because the man child is claiming to be a messenger and representative of the Son of God. 2 Thessalonians 2 is a parallel passage to Revelation 12 and fills in the details of the “coming” or “revelation” of the “man of sin”. By using similar terms to describe the system of sin and the Lord Jesus, the Spirit is telling us that to outward appearance the apostasy and the Truth would seem to be the same. Apart from “trying the spirits” or testing the teaching, we may be misled and believe that the Truth and the Church are reconcilable.

Apart from recognizing the great apostasy, Catholic and Protestant, as the system to which the prophet Daniel and the Lord Jesus in the Revelation direct such vehement condemnation, there would seem to be no justification for Christadelphians to remain a separate community.

The list of comparative Bible phrases appearing on pages 71-73 will establish the remarkable similarity between “the man of sin” in his several guises, and the Lord Jesus Christ and his Ecclesia. There are characteristic differences as well, which will be recognized by those who can discern them.

The apostle Paul warned against “false apostles, deceitful workmen, *disguising* themselves as apostles of Christ.” “And no wonder,” he writes, “for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.”¹ The claim to be able to *enlighten* is typical of the power of sin — it began with the serpent in Eden. The serpent became in Scripture the epitome of sin and deception. Notice that in his conversation with the woman the serpent first contradicts God and then presumes to speak for Him. “You will not die”, he insisted before offering further enlightenment, pretending to be in the confidence of the Elohim. “God knows”, he reveals, “that when you eat of it (the forbidden fruit) your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God knowing good and evil.”²

The practice of deception had its origin in Eden, and the apostle Paul alludes to this in another warning. “I am afraid that *as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning*, your thoughts will be *led astray* from a sincere devotion to Christ.”³ Paul uses the Greek word *exapattao* (to deceive greatly) in this passage, as he refers to the original action

of the serpent. Sin itself deceives,⁴ we are told, and the word "deceive" is from the Greek word meaning "to lead astray" (Young). Paul again cautions against those "who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught ... by fair and flattering words they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded."⁵ These figures — sin, deceit, the serpent — are brought forward into the Book of Revelation, where the ultimate power of deception is described.⁶

In the twentieth century the Ecclesia again faces a crisis. For more than a hundred years the apostolic truths have been maintained, and the errors of Christendom have been steadfastly resisted. The Ecclesia has seen remarkable fulfillments of Bible prophecy — as witness the miraculous return of the Jews to their ancient homeland and the rebirth of a nation called Israel. So many prophecies have been fulfilled that we tend to take them for granted, but now the stage is set for the divine drama to play itself out. As latter day prophecy is fulfilled, we see that our brethren of the last century could not anticipate all the details of unfolding events nor the length of time that would be required for their fulfillment. Nevertheless, the general theme of Bible prophecy, as it has been understood in our community from its inception, remains unchanged.

One of the significant signs which we may overlook is the perpetuation of the Roman system. The papacy survives intact to play out its last scene, but its appearance in our day is so benign that we are apt to disregard its ominous presence along with its Protestant daughters. But the apostasy which was so distinctively *Roman* persists in its influence today, not only in the papal system itself, but in the spiritual darkness of our day in all its forms. Brethren in Christ must continue to resist its teachings and its influence. It is Daniel's fourth (Roman) beast which speaks great words against the Most High and wears out His saints ... until ... "the judgment shall sit, and the saints shall take away his (the fourth beast's) dominion, *to consume and destroy it unto the end.*"⁷

¹ 2 Cor. 11:13-14.

² Gen. 3:5.

³ 2 Cor. 11:3.

⁴ Rom. 7:11; Heb. 3:13.

⁵ Rom. 16:17-18.

⁶ Rev. 13:14; 18:23.

⁷ Dan. 7:26.

JESUS CHRIST	THE MAN OF SIN
Jesus = King of Kings Rev. 19:16	Nebuchadnezzar = a king of kings Dan. 2:37
The Lord's is "the kingdom, power and glory." Matt. 6:13 (Matt. 28:18)	Nebuchadnezzar had "kingdom, power ... and glory." Dan. 2:37
God of heaven shall set up a kingdom ... it shall <i>break in pieces</i> and consume all these kingdoms. Dan. 2:44	The 4th (iron, Roman) kingdom <i>breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things</i> . Dan. 2:40
Kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed ... it grew, and waxed a great <i>tree</i> and fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it. Luke 13:18, 19	<i>Tree</i> grew ... strong ... leaves fair ... fruit meat for all: beasts had shadow under it, fowls of heaven dwelt in boughs, all flesh was fed of it. Dan. 4:11,12
God ... changeth the times and the seasons. Dan. 2:21	Little horn ... thinks to change times and laws. Dan. 7:25
The Lord Jesus <i>shall be revealed</i> , (APOKALYPTIS) 2 Thess. 1:7	That Wicked <i>shall ... be revealed</i> , (APOKALYPTO) 2 Thess. 2:3,6,8
Christ has a <i>coming</i> , (PAROUSIA) 2 Thess. 2:1	Man of Sin has a <i>coming</i> , (PAROUSIA) 2 Thess. 2:9
Jesus of Nazareth, "a man approved by God among you by miracles and wonders and signs."	Man of Sin performs signs and lying wonders with power. 2 Thess. 2:9

<p>Acts 2:22 (Cp. Acts 2:43 - apostles) (Cp. Rom. 15:18-19 - Paul)</p>	<p>(Cp. Matt. 24:24)</p>
<p>Christ has <i>many crowns</i> on his head. Rev. 19:12</p>	<p>Beast has <i>ten crowns</i> on his horns. Rev. 13:1</p>
<p>Son of man ... "given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all people, nations and languages should serve him ..." Dan. 7:14 (Compare Rev. 5:10)</p>	<p>Beast is given authority over every tribe, people and tongue and nation. Rev. 13:7</p>
<p>Christ = Lamb on Mount Zion Rev. 14:1</p>	<p>Earth beast has two horns "like a lamb". Rev. 13:11</p>
<p>Christ healed of a wound. Gen. 3:15</p>	<p>Beast healed of a wound. Rev. 13:12</p>
<p>"Fire came down from God out of heaven." Rev. 20:9</p>	<p>Earth beast makes a fire come down from heaven. Rev. 13:13</p>
<p>Christ has an <i>image</i> Rom. 8:29</p>	<p>The Beast has an <i>image</i>. Rev. 13:14</p>
<p>The Lord destroys with the sword of his mouth. Rev. 19:15</p>	<p>Image of the beast <i>speaks</i> and kills those who do not worship him. Rev. 13:15</p>
<p>Christ has diversified following - "Jew, Greek, bond and free, male and</p>	<p>Beast has diversified following - "small and great, rich</p>

female.” Gal. 3:28	and poor, free and bond”. Rev. 13:16
The 144,000 have the Father’s name written in their foreheads. Rev. 14:1	Beast worshippers have a mark on their fore- heads. Rev. 13:16
Saints given a <i>new</i> <i>name</i> . Rev. 2:17	Followers of the Beast have his name. Rev. 13:17
Christ riding a <i>horse</i> clothed with a vesture dipped in blood. Rev. 19:11, 13	Whore riding a <i>beast</i> clothed in purple and scarlet. Rev. 17:3-7
Holy City/New Jeru- salem, city of pure gold, foundations of precious stones, gates of pearls. Rev. 21	Harlot decked with gold, precious stones and pearls. Rev. 17:4
“It is given unto you to know the <i>mysteries</i> of the kingdom of heaven.” Matt. 13:11	“ <i>Mystery</i> , Babylon, The Great.” Rev. 17:5
Jesus ... is, was and is to come. Rev. 1:4	Beast ... was and is not and yet is. Rev. 17:8

Thus it is not inconsistent when we read ...

Christ and the saints to
rule with a rod of iron.
Rev. 2:27, Rev. 19:15

A “man child ... to rule
all nations with a rod of
iron.”
Rev. 12:5

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