

The Book of Revelation and Eschatology

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In this presentation I will deal with the Book of Revelation. I will particularly speak to the issues of its date of composition and theme. In that establishing Revelation's time of origin is a crucial issue for the proper interpretation of the book, I will begin with a brief presentation of the case for the early dating of Revelation. In that understanding the flow and purpose of Revelation should be among the interpreter's leading goals, I will deal a little more at length with the question of the book's theme. Once the question of *when* Revelation was written is resolved, I believe the question of *what* it is about becomes more evident.

The Date of Composition

There are two basic positions on the dating of Revelation, although each has several slight variations. The current majority position is the late-date view. This view holds that John wrote Revelation toward the close of the reign of Domitian Caesar—about A.D. 95 or 96. The minority view-point today is the early-date position. Early-date advocates hold that Revelation was written by John prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70.

I hold that Revelation was produced prior to the death of Nero in June, A.D. 68, and even before the formal engagement of the [Judahite] War by Vespasian in Spring, A.D. 67. My position is that Revelation was written in A.D. 65 or 66. This would be after the outbreak of the Neronian persecution in November, 64, and before the engagement of Vespasian's forces in Spring of 67.

Though the late-date view is the majority position today, this has not always been the case. In fact, it is the opposite of what prevailed among leading biblical scholars a little over seventy-five years ago. Late-date advocate William Milligan conceded in 1893 that "recent scholarship has, with little exception, decided in favour of the earlier and not the later date."¹[1] Two-decades later in 1910 early-date advocate Philip Schaff could still confirm Milligan's report: "The early date is now accepted by perhaps the majority of scholars."²[2]

In the 1800s and early 1900s the early-date position was held by such worthies as Moses Stuart, Friederich Dhsterdieck, B. F. Westcott, F. J. A. Hort, Joseph B. Lightfoot, F. W. Farrar, Alfred Edersheim, Philip Schaff, Milton Terry, Augustus Strong, and others. Though in eclipse presently, the early-date view has not totally faded away, however. More recent advocates of the

¹[1]William Milligan, *Discussions on the Apocalypse* (London: Macmillan, 1893), p. 75.

²[2]Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (3rd ed: (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950 [1910]), 1:834.

early-date include Albert A. Bell, F. F. Bruce, Rudolf Bultmann, C. C. Torrey, J. A. T. Robinson, J. A. Fitzmeyer, J. M. Ford, C. F. D. Moule, Cornelius Vanderwaal, and others.

But rather than committing an *ad verecundiam* fallacy, let us move beyond any appeal to authority to consider very briefly the argument for the early date of Revelation. Due to time constraints, I will succinctly engage only three of the internal indicators of composition date. The internal evidence should hold priority for the evangelical Christian in that it is evidence from Revelation's *self-witness*. I will only summarily allude to the arguments from *tradition* before concluding this matter. Generally it is the practice of late-date advocates to begin with the evidence from tradition, while early-date advocates start with the evidence from self-witness.

The Temple in Revelation 11

In Revelation 11:1, 2 we read:

And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.

Here we find a Temple standing in a city called "the holy city." Surely John, a Christian [Judahite], has in mind historical Jerusalem when he speaks of "the holy city." This seems necessary in that John is writing scripture and Jerusalem is frequently called the "holy city" in the Bible. For example: Isaiah 48:2; 52:1; Daniel 9:24; Nehemiah 11:1-18; Matthew 4:5; 27:53. In addition, verse 8 informs us that this is the city where "also our Lord was crucified." This was historical Jerusalem, according to the clear testimony of Scripture (Luke 9:22; 13:32; 17:11; 19:28). Interestingly, historical Jerusalem is never mentioned by name in Revelation. This may be due to the name "Jerusalem" meaning "city of peace." In Revelation the meanings of specific names are important to the dramatic imagery. And so it would be inappropriate to apply the name "Jerusalem" to the city upon which woe and destruction are wreaked.

Now what Temple stood in Jerusalem? Obviously the [Judahite] Temple ordained of God, wherein the [Judahite] sacrifices were offered. In the first century it was known as Herod's Temple. This reference to the Temple must be that historical structure for four reasons:

It was located in Jerusalem, as the text clearly states in verse 8. This can only refer to the Herodian Temple, which appears over and over again in the New Testament record. It was the very Temple which was even the subject of one of Christ's longer prophetic discourses (Matt. 23:37-24:2ff).

Revelation 11:1, 2, written by the beloved disciple and hearer of Christ, seems clearly to draw upon Jesus' statement from the Olivet Discourse. In Luke 21:5-7, the disciples specifically point to the Herodian Temple to inquire of its future; in Revelation 11:1 John specifically speaks of the Temple of God. In Luke 21:6 Jesus tells His disciples that the Temple will soon be destroyed

stone by stone. A comparison of Luke 21:24 and Revelation 11:2 strongly suggests that the source of Revelation's statement is Christ's word in Luke 21. [Luke 21:24b: "Jerusalem will be *trampled underfoot* by the *Gentiles* until the *times of the Gentiles be fulfilled*." Revelation 11:2b: "it is given unto the *Gentiles*: and the *holy city* shall they *tread under foot* for *forty and two months*." The two passages speak of the same unique event and even employ virtually identical terms.

According to Revelation 11:2 Jerusalem and the Temple were to be under assault for a period of forty-two months. We know from history that the [Judahite] War with Rome was formally engaged in Spring, A.D. 67, and was won with the collapse of the Temple in August, A.D. 70. This is a period of forty-two months, which fits the precise measurement of John's prophecy. John's prophecy antedates the outbreak of the [Judahite] War.

After the reference to the destruction of the "temple of God" in the "holy city," John later speaks of a "new Jerusalem" coming down out of heaven, which is called the "holy city" (Rev. 21:2) and which does not need a temple (Rev. 21:22). This *new* Jerusalem is apparently meant to supplant the old Jerusalem with its temple system. The old order Temple was destroyed in August, A.D. 70.

Thus, while John wrote, the Temple was still standing, awaiting its approaching doom. If John wrote this twenty-five years *after* the Temple's fall it would be terribly anachronous. The reference to the Temple is hard architectural evidence that gets us back into an era pre-A.D. 70.

The Seven Kings in Revelation 17

In Revelation 17:1-6 a vision of a seven-headed beast is recorded. In this vision we discover strong evidence that Revelation was written *before* the death of Nero, which occurred on June 8, A.D. 68.

John wrote to be understood. The first of seven benedictions occurs in his introduction: "Blessed is he that reads, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein" (Rev. 1:3). And just after the vision itself is given in Revelation 17:1-6, an interpretive angel appears for the express purpose of *explaining* the vision: "And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns" (Rev 17:7). Then in verses 9 and 10 this angel explains the vision: "Here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space."

Most evangelical scholars recognize that the seven mountains represent the famed seven hills of Rome. The recipients of Revelation lived under the rule of Rome, which was universally distinguished by its seven hills. How could the recipients, living in the seven historical churches of Asia Minor and under Roman imperial rule, understand anything else but this geographical feature?

But there is an additional difficulty involved. The seven heads have a *two-fold* referent. We learn also that the seven heads represent a *political* situation in which five kings have fallen, the sixth is, and the seventh is yet to come and will remain but a short while. It is surely no accident that Nero was the sixth emperor of Rome, who reigned after the deaths of his five predecessors and before the brief rule of the seventh emperor.

Flavius Josephus, the [Judahite] contemporary of John, clearly points out that Julius Caesar was the first emperor of Rome and that he was followed in succession by Augustus, Tiberius, Caius, Claudius, and Nero (*Antiquities* 18; 19). We discover this enumeration also in other near contemporaries of John: 4 Ezra 11 and 12; Sibylline Oracles, books 5 and 8; Barnabas, *Epistle* 4; Suetonius, *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*; and Dio Cassius' *Roman History* 5.

The text of Revelation says of the seven kings "five have fallen." The first five emperors are dead, when John writes. But the verse goes on to say "one is." That is, the sixth one is *then reigning* even as John wrote. That would be Nero Caesar, who assumed imperial power upon the death of Claudius in October, A.D. 54, and remained emperor until June, A.D. 68.

John continues: "The other is not yet come; and when he comes, he must continue a short space." When the Roman Civil Wars broke out in rebellion against him, Nero committed suicide on June 8, A.D. 68. The seventh king was "not yet come." That would be Galba, who assumed power in June, A.D. 68. But he was only to continue a "short space." His reign lasted but six months, until January 15, A.D. 69.

Thus, we see that while John wrote, Nero was still alive and Galba was looming in the near future. Revelation could not have been written after June, A.D. 68, according to the internal political evidence.

The [Judahites] in Revelation

The final evidence from Revelation's self-witness that I will consider is the relationship of the [Judahite] to Christianity in Revelation. And although there are several aspects of this evidence, we will just briefly introduce it. Two important passages and their implications may be referred to illustratively.

First, when John writes Revelation, Christians are tensely mingled with the [Judahites] . Christianity is deemed the true Israel and Christians the real [Judahites]. In Revelation 2:9 we read of Jesus' word to one of His churches of the day: "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are [Judahites] and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan."

Who but a [Judahite] would call himself a [Judahite] ? But in the early formative history of Christianity, believers are everywhere in the New Testament presented as "Abraham's seed," "the circumcision," "the Israel of God," the "true [Judahite] ," etc. We must remember that even Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, took [Judahite] vows and had Timothy circumcised. But after the destruction of the Temple (A.D. 70) there was no tendency to inter-mingling. In fact, the

famed [Judahite] rabbi, Gamaliel II, put a curse on Christians in the daily benediction, which virtually forbade social inter-mingling.

In Revelation the [Judahites] are represented as empty calling themselves “[Judahites].” They are not true [Judahites] in the fundamental, spiritual sense, which was Paul’s argument in Romans 2. This would suggest a date prior to the final separation of Judaism and Christianity. Christianity was a protected religion under Rome’s *religio licita* legislation, *as long as it was considered a sect of Judaism*. The legal separation of Christianity from Judaism was in its earliest stages, beginning with the Neronian persecution in late A.D. 64. It was finalized both legally and culturally with the Temple’s destruction, as virtually all historical and New Testament scholars agree. Interestingly, in the A.D. 80s the Christian writer Barnabas makes a radical “us/them” division between Israel and the Church (*Epistle* 13:1).

Second, at the time John writes, things are in the initial stages of a fundamental change. Revelation 3:9 reads: “Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are [Judahites], and are not, but lie -- behold, I will make them to come and bow down at your feet, and to know that I have loved you.”

John points to the approaching humiliation of the [Judahites], noting that God will vindicate His Church against them. In effect, He would make the [Judahites] to lie down at the Christian’s feet. This can have reference to nothing other than the destruction of Israel and the Temple, which was prophesied by Christ. After that horrible event Christians began making reference to the Temple’s destruction as an apologetic and vindication of Christianity. Ignatius (A.D. 107) is a classic example of this in his *Magnesians* 10. There are scores of such references in such writers as Melito, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Lactantius, and others.

There are other arguments regarding the [Judahite] character of Revelation, such as its grammar, its reference to the twelve tribes, allusions to the priestly system, temple worship, and so forth. The point seems clear enough: When John writes Revelation, Christianity is not divorced from Israel. After A.D. 70 such would not be the case. This is strong socio-cultural evidence for a pre-A.D. 70 composition.

Conclusion

I have surveyed the political evidence regarding the Seven Kings, the architectural evidence of the standing Temple, and the socio-cultural evidence of the uneasy [Judahite] /Christian mixture. These suggest Revelation was written prior to the destruction of the Temple in August, 70, and even before the death of Nero Caesar, which occurred on June 8, 68. I believe we can even press it back before the formal engagement of the [Judahite] War in 67, though not before the outbreak of the Neronian persecution beginning in November, 64.

Were time available we could consider the external evidence. I believe a case may be made for the reconstruction of Irenaeus’ famous statement, which is *the* major evidence from tradition. This would allow for an early-date for Revelation by applying his reference about the reign of Domitian to *John himself* regarding his *active ministry*, rather than to John’s *writing of Revelation*.

With a great number of biblical scholars, I am convinced that the Shepherd of Hermas shows dependence on Revelation. I also believe there is evidence for the Shepherd's date of writing in the late 80s. The Muratorian Canon says John wrote letters to seven churches *before* Paul finished his church letters, which were to seven different congregations. Tertullian relates a tradition that seems to indicate John was banished at about the same time as Peter and Paul were martyred. Clement of Alexandria informs us that all revelation ceased under Nero's reign. He makes this claim while elsewhere holding that John's Revelation was inspired of God. Epiphanius dates Revelation under Claudius' reign. This is either a wild, unaccountable, and unique error, or it is a reference to Nero by his other name. Nero's full adoptive name was Nero Claudius Caesar. Various Syriac manuscripts specifically assign John's banishment to the reign of Nero. Arethas interprets many of the prophecies of Revelation as being fulfilled in the [Judahite] War and Andreas has to combat such interpretations in his day.

I believe the early-date of Revelation may be firmly established in the seventh decade of the first century, not the last. Having come to this conclusion, let me now turn to consider:

The Theme of Revelation

When interpreting any book of the Bible, it is important for us to understand the audience to which it was originally directed. There are at least three factors in Revelation that emphasize the original audience and their historic circumstances. These *begin* to move us toward the preterist position. When these are combined with the matter of the *expectation* of Revelation (with which I will deal in a moment), the preterist approach becomes justified on the basis of sound hermeneutical principle.

Audience Relevance

First, in Revelation we have clear evidence that John is writing to particular, historic, individual churches that existed in his day. Revelation 1:4a reads: "John to the seven churches which are in Asia." In verse 11 he specifically names the seven churches to whom he speaks. We know these are historical cities containing historical churches. These churches are specifically dealt with in terms of their historically and culturally unique circumstances in chapters 2 and 3. Real first century Christians are being addressed.

Second, as I indicated previously, John writes to these churches in order to be *understood*. Revelation 1:3 reads: "Blessed [is] he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein." Real first century Christians are expected to understand and to heed John's message as something most relevant to themselves.

Third, in Revelation John notes that he and the seven churches have *already* entered "the tribulation" (Rev. 1:9a): "I John, who also am your brother, and companion in the tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." In Revelation 2 and 3 there are allusions to greater problems brewing on the world scene. Real first century Christians were to have a deep and personal concern with the era in which they lived.

Contemporary Expectation

It is terribly important that the interpreter of Revelation begin at the first verses of the book and let them lead him to the proper interpretive approach. The truth of the matter is: *John specifically states that the prophecies of Revelation, which were written to seven historical churches, would begin coming to pass within a very short period of time.* He emphasized this truth in a variety of ways. Let us briefly note his contemporary expectation from two angles.

First, we should note that he *varies his manner of expression*, as if to avoid any potential confusion as to his meaning. The first of these terms we come upon in Revelation is the Greek word *tachos*, translated “shortly.” John is explaining the purpose of his writing in Revelation 1:1, which reads: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must *shortly* [*tachos*] take place.” This term also occurs in Revelation 2:16; 3:11; and 22:6, 7, 12, 20.

Another term John uses is *eggus*, which means “near.” This term is found in Revelation 1:3 and 22:10. In Revelation 1:3 we read: “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heeds the things which are written in it; for the time is *near* (*eggus*).” Revelation 22:10 reads: “And he saith unto me, ‘Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is *at hand* (*eggus*).’” The import of *eggus* in our context is clearly that of *temporal* nearness.

Second, John emphasizes his anticipation of the soon occurrence of his prophecy by *strategic placement* of these time references. He places his boldest time statements in both the introduction and conclusion to Revelation. The statement of expectancy is found twice in the first three verses: Revelation 1:1 and 3. The same idea is found four times in his concluding remarks: Revelation 22:6, 7, 12, 20. *It is as if John carefully bracketed the entire work to avoid any confusion.* It is important to note that these statements occur in the more historical and didactic sections of Revelation, before and after the major dramatic-symbolic visions.

With the particularity of the audience emphasized in conjunction with his message of the imminent expectation of the occurrence of the events, I do not see how a preterism of some sort can be escaped.

Theme Statement

The theme of Revelation is found in Revelation 1:7: “Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen.”

I am convinced that the apocalyptic language in this passage must be applied to Christ’s *judgment-coming upon Israel*, rather than to the Second Advent at the end of temporal history. The events of A.D. 70, like those associated with the collapse of Babylon, Egypt, and other nations, are typological foreshadowings of the consummational Second Advent.

Cloud-comings are frequent prophetic emblems in the Old Testament. They serve as indicators of divine visitations of judgment upon ancient, historical nations. God “comes” in *judicial judgment* upon Israel’s enemies in general (Psa. 18:7-15; 104:3), upon Egypt (Isa. 19:1), upon disobedient Israel in the Old Testament (Joel 2:1,2), and so forth. To cite one example, Isaiah 19:1 says: “Behold, the LORD rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it.”

A coming of Christ in judgment upon Israel is clearly taught in parabolic form by Christ in Matthew 21:40, 41, 43, 45:

When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out [his] vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.... Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.... And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.

This surely speaks of the destruction of the Jerusalem of the chief priests and Pharisees of Jesus’ day. And it will occur “when the Lord of the vineyard comes.” This is the judgment-coming of Christ in A.D. 70.

For several reasons I am convinced that Revelation 1:7 also refers to His coming in judgment upon Israel.

First, this coming is a judgment-coming upon “those who pierced Him.” The New Testament emphatically points to first century Israel as responsible for crucifying Christ. Israel forced the hand of the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, when the [Judahites] cried out in John 19:15: “‘Away with him, away with him, crucify him.’ Pilate saith unto them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar.’” See also: Acts 2:22-23, 36; 3:13-15; 5:30; 7:52; 1 Thess. 2:14-15.

Second, Revelation 1:7 states that as a consequence of this judgment “all the tribes (*phule*) of the Land (*he ge*) will mourn.” “The Land” is a familiar designation for Israel’s Promised Land. And as is well known, Israel was divided into twelve tribes. In fact, Revelation 7 has the marking out of 144,000 from among the specifically designated twelve tribes of Israel before the winds of destruction blow upon the “land.” When Revelation broadens the definition of “tribes” to incorporate non-[Judahites], it does not speak of “the land” (*he ge*), but “the nations” (*ethnoi*).

Third, Jesus even told the first century [Judahite] leaders that they would witness this judgment-coming. In Matthew 26:63-64 we read: “But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, ‘I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.’ Jesus saith unto him, ‘Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.’”

This coming, dealt with at length in Matthew 24:1-34 was to occur in His generation. Matthew 24:30 and 34 read: “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.... Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.”

Drawing this information together, along with the historical facts of the era, we learn that:

The [Judahite] War with Rome from 67 to 70 brought about the deaths of tens of thousands of the [Judahites] in Judea, and the enslavement of thousands upon thousands more. The [Judahite] historian Flavius Josephus, who was an eye-witness, records that 1.1 million [Judahites] perished in the siege of Jerusalem.

But as awful as the [Judahite] loss of life was, the utter devastation of Jerusalem, the final destruction of the temple, and the conclusive cessation of the sacrificial system were lamented even more. The covenantal significance of the loss of the temple stands as the most dramatic outcome of the War. It was an unrepeatably loss, for the temple has never been rebuilt. The old covenant era was forever closed. Hence, any [Judahite] calamity after A.D. 70 would pale in comparison to the redemptive-historical significance of the loss of the temple.

Thematic Character

Before we can actually develop the flow of Revelation, we need to ascertain the identity of a major character in the drama presented: Who is the harlot identified in Revelation 17?

So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.... And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH (Rev. 17:3, 5).

Some have thought that the harlot is representative of the city of Rome because she is here seen resting upon the seven hills and she is called “Babylon.” But since the Beast itself is representative of Rome, it would seem redundant to have the woman representing the same. Neither does the name “Babylon” historically belong to either Rome or Jerusalem, and thus cannot be proof that the city is Rome rather than Jerusalem. I am convinced beyond any doubt that this harlot is *Jerusalem*.

First, in Revelation 14:8 “Babylon” is called “the great city.” The first mention of “the great city” in Revelation 11:8, indisputably points to Jerusalem. There we read that it is the place “where also our Lord was crucified” (cp. Luke 9:31; 13:33-34; 18:31; 24:18-20).

Her greatness is in regard to her covenantal status in the Old Testament. “Jerusalem” appears in Scripture 623 times. She is called “the city of the great king” (Psa. 48:2; Matt. 5:35), “the city of God” (Psa. 46:4; 48:1; 87:3), “the joy of the whole earth” (Psa. 48:2; Lam. 2:15), and other such laudable names. She is even called “the great city” elsewhere in Scripture: “People from many nations will pass by this city and will ask one another, ‘Why has the LORD done such a thing to

this great city?” (Jer. 22:8). “How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! How like a widow is she, who once was *great among the nations!* She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave” (Lam. 1:1).

Even pagan writers speak highly of Jerusalem. Tacitus calls it “a famous city” (*Histories* 5:2). Pliny the Elder writes that Jerusalem was “by far the most famous city of the ancient Orient” (*Natural History* 5:14:70). Appian, a Roman lawyer and writer (*ca.* A.D. 160), calls her “the great city Jerusalem” (*The Syrian Wars* 50).

Second, the Babylonian harlot is filled with the blood of the saints, according to Revelation 16:6; 17:6; 18:21, 24. For instance, Revelation 18:24 reads: “And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth.” Of course, with the outbreak of the Neronian persecution, which had just gotten under way, Rome was stained with the blood of the saints. Yet Rome had only recently entered the persecuting ranks of God’s enemies. Throughout Acts *Jerusalem* is portrayed as the persecutor and Rome as the protector of Christianity.^{3[3]} Furthermore, Rome was not guilty of killing any of the Old Testament prophets, as was Jerusalem.^{4[4]} Before his stoning, Stephen rebukes Jerusalem: “Which of the *prophets* have not *your fathers persecuted?* And they have slain them who showed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers” (Acts 7:51-52).

In the context of the Olivet Discourse Jesus reproaches Jerusalem. Matthew 23:34-35 reads: “Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.”

Throughout Revelation it is the *slain Lamb* who acts in judgment upon His slayers, the [Judahites] . “Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth” (Rev. 5:6; cp. 5:12; 13:8). This Lamb is mentioned twenty-seven times in Revelation.^{5[5]} And Jerusalem literally called down judgment upon herself for slaying the Lamb of God: “All the people answered, ‘Let his blood be on us and on our children!’” (Matt. 27:25).

3[3]See for example: Acts 4:3; 5:18-33; 6:12; 7:54-60; 8:1ff; 9:1-4, 13, 23; 11:19; 12:1-3; 13:45-50; 14:2-5, 19; 16:23; 17:5-13; 18:12; 20:3, 19; 21:11, 27; 22:30; 23:12, 20, 27, 30; 24:5-9; 25:2-15; 25:24; 26:21. See also: 2 Cor. 11:24; 2 Thess. 2:14-15; Heb. 10:32-34; Rev. 2:9; 3:9; etc.

4[4]Jer. 2:30; Matt. 5:12; 23:34, 35; Acts 7:52; 1 Thess. 2:15.

5[5]See: Rev. 5:6, 8, 12-13; 6:1, 16; 7:9-10, 14, 17; 12:11; 13:8, 11; 14:1, 4, 10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7, 9; 21:14, 22-23; 22:1, 3.

Third, the harlot is arrayed in the [Judahite] priestly colors of scarlet, purple, and gold described in Exo. 28.6[6] These colors were also found in the Temple: Josephus carefully describes Jerusalem's Temple tapestry as "*Babylonian* tapestry in which blue, purple, scarlet and linen were mingled" (*Wars* 5:5:4). He does so while giving the color decor of the Temple much emphasis and elaboration.

The harlot even has a blasphemous inscription on her forehead that gives a negative portrayal of the holy inscription which the [Judahite] high priest wore. On the high priest's forehead we read: "Holy to the Lord" (Exo. 28:36-38). On the harlot's forehead we read: "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth" (Rev. 17:5). And she has a gold cup in her hand, as did the high priest on the Day of Atonement, according to the [Judahite] Talmud.⁷ Interestingly, the Temple's main door had on it golden vines with great clusters of grapes (from which wine is derived). The golden grape clusters on the vine were very prominent, being the size of a man (Josephus, *Wars* 5:5:4). These are suggestive of the golden cup to be filled with blood.

Fourth, there is an obvious literary contrast between the harlot and the chaste bride. This juxtaposition suggests an intentional contrast between the Jerusalem below (Rev. 11:8) and the Jerusalem above (Rev. 21:2). This is not unfamiliar to writers of Scripture (cp. Gal. 4:24ff.; Heb. 12:18ff.). When you compare Revelation 17:2-5 and Revelation 21:1ff the contrast provides a remarkable negative and positive image. And we must remember that the bride is specifically called the "New Jerusalem" from heaven (Rev. 21:1-2). Consider:

John is introduced to the *harlot* and to the *bride* in a similar fashion:

Revelation 17:1: "And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, 'Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters.'"

Revelation 21:9: "And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, 'Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.'"

The two women are contrasted as to character.

Revelation 17:1: "Come here, I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters."

[6]Cp. Rev. 17:4-5 with Exo. 25:2, 4; 26:1, 31, 36; 27:16; 28:1-2, 5-12, 15, 17-23, 33.

[7]Golden bowls were used elsewhere in the Levitical services. See: Exo. 25:29; 37:16, 17.

Revelation 21:9: “Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife.”

The two women are seen in contrasting environments to which John is carried by the angel.

Revelation 17:3: “So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast.”

Revelation 21:10: “And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.”

The dress of each is detailed and contrasted:

Revelation 17:4: “And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication.”

Revelation 19:8; 21:11: “And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.... Having the glory of God: and her light [was] like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.”

Fifth, Jerusalem had previously been called by pagan names quite compatible with the designation “Babylon.” In Revelation 11:8 she was called “spiritually Sodom and Egypt.” Isaiah did the same to her in Isaiah 1 where he called Jerusalem “Sodom and Gomorrah.” The idea is that rather than conducting herself as the wife of God, she had become one of His enemies like Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon.

The fact that the harlot is seated on the seven-headed Beast (obviously representative of Rome) indicates not *identity* with Rome, but *alliance* with Rome against Christianity. The [Judahites] demanded Christ’s crucifixion and constantly agitated against the Christians to get the Romans involved in their persecution (cp. Matt. 23:37ff.; John 19:16-16; Acts 17:7). (I have not completed my research yet, but I believe her being seated on the beast in a drunken state represents the female-superior position in sexual intercourse. She is a drunken harlot taking the lead in her immorality. In the drama of Revelation she is not engaged in just adultery, but in bestiality, as well.

Thematic Flow

Now we are ready briefly to sketch the thematic idea of Revelation. Not only is Israel’s destruction the focus of Revelation, but her judgment is set forth in an interesting and significant covenantal fashion.

Israel as the Wife of God. We must remember that in the Old Testament Israel was graciously taken by God to be His covenantal wife. Oftentimes the prophets mention the covenantal marriage relation between God and Israel.

Jeremiah 3:14: “Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you.”

Ezekiel 16 portrays in beautiful poetic imagery, the husbandly love of God for Israel.

Ezekiel 16:8: “Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine.”

Other passages alluding to the marriage covenant between God and Israel include: Isaiah 50:1; 54:5; 62:4; Jeremiah 3:20; 31:32; and Ezekiel 16:31-32.

As a covenantal action, Israel’s marriage was formally established with proper witnesses. Deuteronomy 31:28 reads: “Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to record against them.” See also: Deuteronomy 4:26; 30:19.

But as an unfaithful wife Israel chased after foreign gods, committing spiritual adultery against the Lord. This adulterous infidelity is portrayed in many Old Testament passages.^{8[8]} The old covenant prophets served as God’s lawyers. As VanGemeren expresses it: “The prophets had spoken as God’s covenant prosecutors, bringing God’s charge and stating God’s verdict.”^{9[9]} On the basis of God’s Law and before witnesses, they legally called upon her to return to her covenantal husband, the Lord God. They often brought a “case” (Heb.: *ribh*) against Israel, calling heaven and earth as witnesses in this heavenly court-room drama and as per the public confirmation of the covenant.

Isaiah 1:2: “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.” Isaiah laments: “How is the faithful city become an harlot!” (Isa. 1:21 a).

Hosea 4:1: “Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a *controversy* with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land.”

Micah 6:2: “Hear ye, O mountains, the LORD’S *controversy*, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the LORD hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel.” See also: Hos. 12:2

Ultimately, their work was futile in that Israel finally demanded the crucifixion of the Son of God, crying out: “We have no king but Caesar!”

^{8[8]}See: Isaiah 1:21; 50:1; 57:8; Jeremiah 2:2, 20; 3:1-20; 4:30; 11:15; 13:27; Ezekiel 6:9; 16:32; Hosea 1:2; 2:5, 7; 3:3; 4:15; Malachi 2:7.

^{9[9]}Willem VanGemeren, *The Progress of Redemption: The Story of Salvation from Creation to the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), p. 290.

The Divorce Decree Against Israel

The dramatic visions of Revelation are framed in such a way as to represent God's judicial divorce decree against Israel. Following upon that we witness her capital punishment for all sorts of sins, which flowed from her spiritual adultery.

In Revelation 4 God is seen seated on His judicial throne. Interestingly, God's throne is mentioned in eighteen of Revelation's twenty-two chapters. In fact, of the sixty-two appearances of the word "throne" in the New Testament, forty-seven of these are found in Revelation. The judicial element is strong in this book, including references to judgments, witnesses, and the like.

In Revelation 5 a seven sealed scroll is seen in God's hand, while He is seated upon His throne of justice. The seven sealed scroll seems to represent God's "bill of divorcement" handed down by the Judge on the throne against Israel. It is known that divorce decrees were written out among the [Judahites] in the biblical era: Deuteronomy 24:1, 3; Isaiah 50:1; Jeremiah 3:8; Matthew 5:31; 19:7; and Mark 10:4. It is equally certain that marriage was understood in terms of a covenant contract: Proverbs 2:17; Ezekiel 16:8; and Malachi 2:14. That the scroll in Revelation 5-8 would be a bill of divorcement is suggested on the following considerations.

First, in Revelation we have prominent emphases on two particular women, two women that obviously correspond as opposites to one another. The two women are the wicked harlot of the Beast (Rev. 17-18) and the pure bride of Christ (Rev. 21). As I have shown, they correspond with the earthly Jerusalem that was the scene of Christ's crucifixion (Rev. 11:8) and the heavenly Jerusalem which is holy (Rev. 21:10). The flow and drift of the book is the revelation and execution of the legal judgment (Rev. 15:3; 16:5-7) on the fornicating harlot.

Following this we witness the coming of a virginal bride (Rev. 21), obviously to take her place after a marriage supper (Rev. 19). This fits well with the Pauline imagery in Galatians 4:24ff, where he speaks of the casting out of the one wife (Hagar who is representative of the Jerusalem below) and the taking of the other wife (Sara who is representative of the Jerusalem above).

Second, the apparent Old Testament background for this imagery is found in Ezekiel and Leviticus. In Ezekiel 2:9-10 Israel's judgment is portrayed as written on a scroll on the front and back and given to Ezekiel. This corresponds perfectly with the scroll in Revelation 5:1. In Ezekiel 2ff the devastation of Israel is outlined, which corresponds with Revelation 6ff. In Ezekiel 16 Israel is viewed as God's covenant wife which became a harlot that trusted in her beauty and committed fornication (Eze. 16:15). This is the case with Jerusalem-Babylon in Revelation (Rev. 18:7). She is cast out and judged for this evil conduct.

The reason for *seven* seals is found in covenantal imagery, as well. The seven seals on Revelation's scroll reflect the seven-fold covenantal judgment God forewarned Israel about in Leviticus 26:14-33. These judgments are threatened against *Israel*, if she should forsake God. The seven-fold judgments in Leviticus have a strong influence on the judgment language of Revelation. When these seals are opened, the preliminary judgments begin.

Third, following the “divorce” and judgments associated with it, John turns to see the coming of a new “bride” out of heaven (Rev. 21-22). It would seem that the new bride could not be taken until the harlotrous wife should first be taken care of legally. John imports the imagery of the harlot, bride, and marriage feast; this is not being read into the text from outside. Thus, the imagery of divorce well fits the dramatic flow of the work.

The Execution of the Judgments

The punishment in God’s Law for adultery is death (Lev. 20:10), which in biblical law was by stoning. So we discover huge hailstones raining down on Jerusalem in Revelation 16:21: “And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.” This was accomplished historically by the tenth legion of the Roman armies:

The engines [i.e., catapults], that all the legions had ready prepared for them, were admirably contrived; but still more extraordinary ones belonged to the tenth legion: those that threw darts and those that threw stones, were more forcible and larger than the rest, by which they not only repelled the excursions of the [Judahites] , but drove those away that were upon the walls also. Now, the stones that were cast, were of the weight of a talent, and were carried two furlongs and further. The blow they gave was no way to be sustained, not only by those that stood first in the way, but by those that were beyond them for a great space. As for the [Judahites] , they at first watched the coming of the stone, for it was a white colour. (*Wars* 5:6:3)

Now Israel is not only Jehovah’s wife in the Old Testament, but she is to serve Him as a kingdom of priests ministering to the nations. Thus, she is represented in Revelation as being a *harlot in priestly garments*. Being such, another Old Testament Law comes to bear. Leviticus 21:9 warns, “The daughter of any priest, if she profane herself by playing the harlot, she profaneth her father, she shall be burned with fire.” Consequently, we see reference to Israel’s being burned with fire in Revelation 17:16: “And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.”

Then, having legally disposed of Israel as an harlotrous, priestly wife, Revelation turns to consider a new bride. In Revelation 21 we see a city coming down out of heaven adorned as a spotless virgin bride for her husband. This new city is a New Jerusalem. This “New Jerusalem” is the Church, according to Galatians 4:21ff. and Hebrews 12:18ff.

Thus, the theme of Revelation is the execution of God’s divorce decree against Israel, her subsequent capital punishment and cremation, followed by His turning to take a new bride, the Church.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe that Revelation was written in about A.D. 65. I further believe that it speaks to the original Christian audience regarding difficulties they were facing and in explanation of the coming final removal of Jerusalem by God’s wrath.

The book is to be understood preteristically, rather than futuristically. We learn this not only from the imminent expectation in the book, but also from its theme (which involves the judgment of the [Judahites]) and due to its leading characters: Jerusalem (as a harlot) and Rome (as a Beast).
