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The Date of Revelation: Written Before June AD 68

In the reading of the Book of Revelation, there are certain questions that arise in the minds of every reader. When was the book written? When John writes, “what must soon take place,” what does he mean (Revelation 1:1)? When the Scripture speaks of “the time is near,” what does that phrase mean (1:3)? Who is the man who bore the number 666 as recorded in Revelation 13? Who is the king that followed the five kings mentioned in Revelation 17? Is the Book of Revelation continuous history down through the ages or is it dealing with a specific period of time during the early history of the church? Are there proper divisions in the book? Answers to the above questions should assist us in assigning a date to the Book of Revelation. This chapter analyzes three distinct categories—(1) the time is near (Revelation 1:3), (2) the number of the beast (Revelation 13:18), and (3) the sixth king (Revelation 17:10)—in order to try to arrive at an approximate date of John’s writing about “The revelation of Jesus Christ.”¹

As we seek to ascertain the date of this volume, we must endeavor to take ourselves away from the present and transport ourselves back to the historical situation of the author of this book. We must seek to understand the position of John. We must look through his eyes. We must stand on his threshold. We must note his surroundings. For us to decode this report from Jesus the Messiah to John correctly, we must give special concentration to the internal evidence found in the Book of Revelation in order to determine the time of writing, which understanding will enable us to interpret the book more accurately. **The generally accepted date among many scholars is AD 96, but the internal evidence indicates a date of AD 68 as the latest date for the writing of this prophetic book.** We cannot assign an exact date for John’s writing, but we can give a date before June AD 68. Since Nero, the sixth emperor of Rome

¹This chapter examines the internal evidence in order to arrive at a more accurate date as to the composition of this mysterious book. The evidence does not support a date that is commonly advanced by many sincere and godly Christians, namely, AD 95. As stated above, since Nero committed suicide in June AD 68, we know that the book had to have been written before the date of his death since he was still alive at the time of writing.

committed suicide in June of AD 68, we know that this unique book was written prior to his death because John uses the present tense when he speaks of the sixth emperor. The Book of Revelation, according to the internal facts, was written prior to AD 70, which is the date assigned to the destruction of Jerusalem under the leadership of Titus who later became emperor (AD 79-81) of the Roman Empire.

Since there is historical distance from the text—2000 years—we must seek answers within the book itself for a solution to determine the date of writing. We today have unknowingly canonized the traditions of men in our studies of this book, which was written originally to give comfort and hope to believers who suffered persecution from the Jews and from Rome, especially harassment under the Emperor Nero (AD 54-68). There is still a great deal of cultural and personal bias on the part of many Christians as they seek to unravel the Book of Revelation. As we study this book, we are conscious that the correct interpretation is not an easy science.

Frequently, our inherited tradition is the foundation for our understanding as we seek to unearth the meaning of this mysterious book with its symbols and imagery. Our preunderstanding plays a role in our reading of the text at hand. The objective in this study is to unpack, as much as possible, the internal evidence in order to arrive at a correct analysis of the approximate date of John's letter, which is described as "The revelation (*ἀποκάλυψις*, *apokalypsis*) of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 1:1). This study will briefly analyze certain Scriptures with the intention of establishing from the internal evidence the time frame for this writing so that we might avoid fanciful and unfounded beliefs built around this book. So as to avoid reading into the Scriptures our own presuppositions, this chapter seeks to pull apart, as it were, the biblical evidence so that we might discover an accurate date for the Book of Revelation in order to avoid so many outlandish fertile imaginations among so many sincere and devout Christians. To begin with, this study analyzes the phrase, "the time is near" (*ὁ καιρὸς ἐγγύς*, *ho kairos engys*) in order to call attention to the urgency of the call to be faithful in spite of persecution. This particular phrase is crucial to a proper understanding of the Book of Revelation.

THE TIME IS NEAR

John alerts his readers about the impending destruction of Jerusalem, which devastation Jesus warned His disciples about before His death. Matthew, Mark, and Luke record Jesus' prophecy concerning the complete overthrow of the old Jewish system, which prophecy includes the obliteration of apostate Jerusalem with its Temple. Now, about thirty-five years later, Jesus reveals to John that the prophecy is about to be fulfilled. John, as he receives this announcement about the fulfillment of Jesus' earlier prophecy, begins his book with Jesus' revelation about the nearness of the catastrophe upon this once holy city. Within the first three verses, John uses two expressions that draw attention to the nearness of the approaching judgment of God—"soon take place" and "the time is near."

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place (*ἐν τάχει*, *en tacei*). He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, ² who testifies

to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.³ Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because **the time is near** (ὁ καιρὸς ἐγγύς, *ho kairos engys*). [Revelation 1:1-3]

We should always interpret any text within its full unit of meaning. The first three verses in the prologue sets forth the idea that the things enumerated in this book would “soon take place.” John is simply saying that the things he is writing about will occur “with speed” (ἐν τάχει, *en tacei*, immediately, without delay² [1:1]). “What must **soon take place**” has reference to the approaching overthrow of Jerusalem as predicted by Jesus in His discourse on the Mount of Olives (see Matthew 24). In the Mount of Olives discourse, Jesus says, “I tell you the truth, **this generation** (ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη, *hē genea hautē*) will certainly not pass away until **all these things** have happened” (Matthew 24:34). Twice, within the first three verses, John calls attention to the swiftness of the approaching event (Revelation 1:1, 3). We should give special attention to the phrase “**this generation**.” This expression does not refer to 2000 years later, but rather to those living at that time. In other words, the events foretold by Jesus would happen within the lifetime of those present, even though some, no doubt, would die before the destruction of Jerusalem. An example of this concept is found in Jesus’ statement to His disciples:

For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.²⁸ I tell you the truth, **some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.** (Matthew 16:27-28)

The second reference in the prologue to the Book of Revelation concerning the coming wrath of God upon Israel reads: “for the time is near” (ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς, *ho gar kairos engys*). The KJV reads: “for the time is at hand” (1:3). In this verse, John encourages the recipients to **read**, to **hear**, and to **take to heart** the things written in this book. Why? John informs the Christians, “The time is near.” This Apocalypse was written for a practical purpose, that is, to call attention to the time (ὁ καιρὸς, *ho kairos*) of the events foretold by Jesus. Once more, John says the “time is near” for this judgment of God to come upon the nation of Israel. Listen to Jesus as He too addresses the religious leaders of Israel—forty years earlier—for their hypocrisy and forewarns them of the impending destruction of Jerusalem:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous.³⁰ And you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’³¹ So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets.³² Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!³³ You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?³⁴ Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town.³⁵ And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berehiah, whom you murdered between

²See Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., “*tachos (τάχος)*” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 3:338.

the temple and the altar. ³⁶ I tell you the truth, all this will come upon **this generation.**” ³⁷ O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. ³⁸ Look, your **house is left to you desolate.** ³⁹ For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” (Matthew 23:29-39)

Jesus pointedly calls attention to the fact that all these atrocities will descend upon “this generation.” In His description of the just-round-the-corner judgment upon Israel, He describes this sentence of God upon Israel with words that pierced the very heart and soul of the religious leaders: “Your house is left to you desolate.” John the Baptist, too, began his ministry by calling attention to the looming verdict upon Israel:

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! **Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?**” ⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ **The ax is already at the root of the trees,** and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. ¹¹ I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹² **His winnowing fork is in his hand,** and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and **burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.**” (Matthew 3:7-12)

John the Baptist is announcing to the Pharisees and Sadducees that the “coming wrath” (*ἀπὸ τῆς μελλούσης ὀργῆς*, *apo tēs mellousēs orgēs*, “**about** to come wrath”) is just around the corner. From a cursory reading of Matthew 3:7-12, we discover that the “**ax is already at the root of the trees**” and that “**His winnowing fork is in his hand.**” The Book of Revelation sets forth in greater detail what was enunciated by John the Baptist in Matthew 3 and by Jesus in Matthew 24. In the Book of Revelation, Jesus informs the seven churches of Asia that *that* “time is near.” Not only does John begin the book with reference to the immediacy of the impending events, he also concludes the book (epilogue) with the final warning of Jesus: “Behold, **I am coming soon!** (*ἰδοὺ ἔρχομαι ταχύ*, *idou erchomai tachy*) Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book” (Revelation 22:7). Again, John informs his readers about Jesus’ admonition to him:

Then he told me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near (*ὁ καιρὸς γὰρ ἐγγύς ἐστιν*, *ho kairos gar engys estin*). ¹¹ Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy. ¹² Behold, **I am coming soon!** (*ἰδοὺ ἔρχομαι ταχύ*, *idou erchomai tachy*) My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. ¹⁴ Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.” (22:10-14)

Earlier, John had said, “**Look, he is coming** (*Ἴδου ἔρχεται*, *Idou erchetai*) with the clouds, and every eye will see him, **even those who pierced him**; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen” (1:7). The clause, “Look, he is coming”

(Ἰδοὺ ἔρχεται, *Idou erchetai*) [1:7] corresponds with the clause, “Behold I am coming soon” (22:12). “Look, he is coming” is the keynote of the Book of Revelation. This clause is the thesis of the whole book. For us to grasp the tenor of the book, we must observe that His coming shortly is the text of the Book of Revelation. When we take the phrase, “Behold, he is coming,” to refer to the so-called millennium or to hundreds of centuries later, we miss the full import of the phrase as it is employed in this book. Once more, listen to the final words of Jesus as recorded in Revelation by John with his comments preceding the words of Jesus: “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon’” [ἔρχομαι ταχύ, *erchomai tachy*] (Revelation 22:20).

We cannot help but wonder how the seven churches of Asia understood “I am coming soon.” Another Scripture that is helpful in understanding the time frame of Revelation is 1:19: “Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.” The KJV renders this verse: “Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.” The translations—“take place later” and “shall be hereafter”—are translated from the Greek: ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι, *ha mellei genesthai*, the things which are about to occur. The above translations do not adequately express the sense of the original. It should read: “the things which are about to occur (μέλλει γενέσθαι, *mellei genesthai*).” This Greek phrase is indicative of the near approach of the violent persecutions that Christians were about to face throughout the Roman Empire. Again, this same warning appears in the letter to the church in Philadelphia:

Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come (μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι, *mellousēs erchesthai*, being about to come) upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. (3:10)

Immediately, following these words of comfort, Jesus says, “I am coming soon (ἔρχομαι ταχύ, *erchomai tachy*). Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown” (3:11). This warning is repeated over and over throughout the Book of Revelation. Its meaning—“I am coming soon”—is obvious to the unbiased reader. Toward the end of the book, John says that an angel said:

Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near [ὁ καιρὸς γὰρ ἐγγύς ἐστιν, *ho kairos gar engys estin*]. (22:10)

Just a few words before this pronouncement, an angel said: “These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place (ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, *ha dei genesthai en tachei*).” This Scripture repeats the declaration in 1:1 and proves conclusively that it refers to the events that were to almost immediately take place—war against Jerusalem and its destruction. The threefold declaration in Chapter 22 shows that *that* event, that is to say, the overthrow of Jerusalem was almost ready to take place. For ease of reference, see the following chart:

Revelation 22:7

Revelation 22:12

Revelation 22:20

Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.

Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.

He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.”

The internal evidence sets forth the idea that the predicted events of judgments are about to come soon upon the nation of apostate Israel. The above Scriptures give their own testimony as to the time frame of the events foretold. The internal evidence seems to be overwhelming on the side of the early date—on or before AD 68. The “coming” refers to the Parousia (παρουσία, parousia, “coming, arrival, presence”), that is to say, the judgment upon Israel in which its house will be left desolate. Jesus’ Olivet Discourse, as revealed by Matthew, presents the same thought:

At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. **They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.** (Matthew 24:30)

I tell you the truth, **this generation** (ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη, hē genea hautē) will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. (24:34)

For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.²⁸ I tell you the truth, some who are standing here **will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.** (16:27-28)

The coming of the “Son of Man” has reference to the coming of the “Son of Man” in judgment against His enemy—apostate Jerusalem, not the end of the world (κόσμος, kosmos). The next evidence called forth deals with the number 666. If we can identify the man behind this number, this should go a long way in helping us to decipher the date of this book. For many Christians, the number 666 sends chills up-and-down their spines. Just recently, I was told about a sister in Christ who observed her grandchild dialing on the telephone the number 666. Whereupon the grandmother said the child had a demon and was on her way to hell. This kind of fanciful imagination is what this study seeks to set straight. This kind of wild imagination can wreak havoc upon the Christian community. This incorrect teaching can lead to bizarre and destructive behavior.

THE NUMBER AND NAME OF THE BEAST

Number 666

I have listened to many fanciful interpretations placed upon this number 666. If we wish to arrive at a correct understanding of this number and the name of the person to whom the number is assigned, we must allow the internal evidence of the book to set forth the unfolding of this mystery. Pay attention to John as he discloses God’s revelation concerning the man and his number:

He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, ¹⁷so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name. ¹⁸This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man’s number. His number is 666. (Revelation 13:16-18)

The identification of this man should assist one in assigning an approximate date for the writing of this book. It seems, at least to me, that Nero Caesar’s name is the primary identification of the number 666. For example, in the Hebrew alphabet, the name Nero Caesar is spelled נְרוֹן קֶסַר (*nē-rôn qē-sār*). The following is the numerical value of his name in Hebrew:

נ = 50 200 = ר 6 = ו נ = 50 100 = ק 60 = ס 200 = ר 666
 n r w n q s r

Frederick C. Grant (1891-1974), biblical scholar and theologian, captures the force of the code in his remarks concerning the identity of the number 666:

In this passage (13:11-18) the “beast” is no longer the empire; it is “a man,” whose number is 666; and the “second beast” is the imperial priesthood which enforces his worship. Who is this man, this beast-man that other men are compelled to worship under penalty of death? Many interpretations have been offered, but the most probable is to translate the name into Hebrew, the language of the original author, and sum up the letters after the ancient fashion.

נ	n	= 50			
ר	r	= 200	ק	q	= 100
ו	w	= 6	ס	s	= 60
נ	n	= 50	ר	r	= 200
		306	plus		
		360 = 666			

NRWN-QSR (Neron Qasar) is the Hebrew for the Emperor Nero—“Nero Caesar.” The cryptogram is solved. It would have been dangerous to refer in so many words to the worship of the Emperor. Hence this cryptic, oracular style of writing, which was common in all the apocalyptic

literature of Judaism and early Christianity (see Daniel 9:27 and Mark 13:14).³ Bob Emery, too, writes in this same vein:

As you know, in the ancient languages, letters of the alphabet carry dual meanings. First, they can spell words and names. Second, they can be used to represent numbers.... By using the numerical value for each letter in Nero's name, it was easy for the Christians throughout the Empire to see that he was the beast.⁴

The following chart of the Hebrew and Greek alphabet used in the first century should assist us in comprehending more quickly the use of the alphabet for numerals in the first century:

TABLE OF NUMERALS IN USE
DURING THE BIBLICAL PERIOD

	<i>Hebrew</i>	<i>Greek</i>
1	א	α
2	ב	β
3	ג	γ
4	ד	δ
5	ה	ε
6	ו	ς
7	ז	ζ
8	ח	η
9	ט	θ
10	י	ι
20	כ	κ
30	ל	λ
40	מ	μ
50	נ	ν
60	ס	ξ
70	ע	ο
80	פ	π
90	צ	
100	ק	ρ
200	ר	σ
300	ש	τ
400	ש	υ
500	ת ק	φ
600		χ
700		ψ

³Fredrick C. Grant, *The Early Days of Christianity* (New York: Abingdon, 1922), 232-232. Also, see Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Beast of Revelation* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2002), 37-47 for an excellent treatment of the number of the beast.

⁴Bob Emery, *An Evening in Ephesus with John, the Son of Thunder* (Charlottesville, VA: BenchPress Publishing, 1998), 82-83.

Just a casual glance of the Book of Revelation reveals a number of Hebraicized names, which information tends to give validity to the Hebraic riddle concerning the name of Nero with its Hebrew spelling. To illustrate this principle, consider the following words that are transliterated from Hebrew into Greek letters: (1) “Abaddon” [Ἄβαδδών, *Abaddōn*, Hebrew אָבַדְדֹן, *’ābād-dōn*, Revelation 9:11], (2) “Armageddon” [Ἄρμαγεδών, *Armagedōn*, Hebrew: אֶרְמֻגְדוֹן, *hār m’ēgidw*, 16:16], (3) Satan [σατάν, *satan*, Hebrew: שָׂטָן, *śā-tān*, 12:9], (3) “Amen” [ἀμήν, *amēn*, Hebrew: אָמֵן, *’āmēn*, 3:14], and “hallelujah” [ἀλληλουιά, *hallēlouia*, הללללה, *hāl-lū-yā(h)*] 19:1, 3, 4, 6]. For John to use a cryptogram (a secret code, that is, a figure or representation having a hidden significance) for the name of Nero Caesar would not be out of character based upon the use of other Hebrew names, which names are transliterated into Greek characters, as listed above. Foy E. Wallace, Jr. (1896-1979), an influential figure among American Churches of Christ in the middle 20th century, writes about the secret letters, or symbolic figures:

It is a basic truth that the book of Revelation was written in code, on the same principle that the army communicates messages in code intended only for the military personnel, but to be withheld from the public. For the same purpose the contents of Revelation were composed in code for the vital information and concealed instruction to the churches facing the impending persecutions; but to be withheld from the pagan Roman world. There were in all of the churches the spiritually endowed teachers, who possessed the “spiritual gifts” of the inspiration era, as recorded in chapters twelve and thirteen of First Corinthians.⁶

Since John employs several Hebrew names in his book, we cannot discover any reason as to why he would not employ Hebrew ciphers in the identification of the number of the man, namely, Nero, the one in whom the empire was personified. F. W. Farrar’s (1831-1903), Anglican scholar, comments are also helpful:

That Nero was intended would be as clear to a Jew as that Babylon meant Rome, though Rome is never mentioned. He would not try the name Nero Caesar in Latin, because *isopsephia* (which the Jew called *Gematria*⁷) was almost unknown among the Romans, and their alphabetic numeration was wholly defective. He might try Νέρων Καῖσαρ [*Nerōn Kaisar*] in Greek, but it would not give him the right number. Then, as with a flash of intuition, it would occur to him to try the name in Hebrew. The Apostle was writing as a Hebrew, was evidently thinking as a Hebrew. His soloecistic Greek was sufficient to prove that the language was unfamiliar to him, and that all persons of whom he thought would primarily present themselves to his mind by their Hebrew designations. This, too, would render the cryptograph additionally secure against the prying inquisition of treacherous Pagan informers. It would have been to the last degree perilous to make the secret too clear. Accordingly, the Jewish Christian would have tried the name as he thought of the name—that is in Hebrew letters.

⁵For this chart, see David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), 352.

⁶Foy E. Wallace, Jr., *The Book of Revelation* (Nashville, Tennessee: Foy E. Wallace Jr. Publications, 1966), 299.

⁷*Gematria*, that is to say, Geometry, or the numerical indication of names.

And the moment that he did this the secret stood revealed. No Jew ever thought of Nero except as “*Neron Kesar*,” and this gives at once— $\text{נרֹן קסר} = 50 + 200 + 6 + 50 + 100 + 60 + 200 = 666$.⁸

Bart D. Ehrman’s (b. 1955), American New Testament scholar and textual critic of early Christianity, comments about the number 666 are insightful and worthy of citation:

Intriguingly, when the name “Caesar Nero” is spelled in Hebrew letters (“Nero” becomes “Neron”), their numerical total is 666. More intriguingly still, the name can be spelled in another way, without a final n at the end. The n is worth 50 in Hebrew numerical system. When the alternative spelling is employed, the name adds up to 616. The author of Revelation is not referring to Hitler or Mussolini or anyone else in modern times. His enemy was Rome and its Caesars. It was Rome that had dominated the other nations of earth, exploited their native populations, and oppressed the people of God; it was the Roman emperor who was worshipped as divine and who persecuted Christians and sometimes put them to death. This book is about how God was going to overthrow this emperor and his empire at the end of time (see especially chaps. 18-19) prior to rewarding his saints with the kingdom in a new heavens and a new earth (chaps. 20-22).⁹

THE SIXTH KING IN REVELATION 17

As stated in the beginning of this study, if we wish to identify correctly the date of the Book of Revelation, we must seek our answer from the internal evidence found within the book itself. Earlier, this chapter focused on the expression “the time is near” in order to demonstrate that the people in the first century would have understood this phrase to mean within their own lifetime. The second part of the internal evidence focused on Revelation 13 concerning the number 666, which number is the number of a man—Nero. The third internal evidence surrounds the kings mentioned in Revelation 17:9-11. It is my position that the sixth king is none other than Nero (“one is,” $\acute{\omicron}\ \epsilon\acute{\iota}\varsigma\ \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\iota\nu$, *Jo eis estin* —17:10). Listen to John as he identifies the beast that has seven heads and ten horns:

This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits.¹⁰ They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is ($\acute{\omicron}\ \epsilon\acute{\iota}\varsigma\ \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\iota\nu$, *ho heis estin*), the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while.¹¹ The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction. (Revelation 17:9-11)

As we read carefully, the entirety of Revelation 17, we can only conclude that the seven hills are representative of the Roman Empire, which also is represented by “seven heads.” In verse 3 of Revelation 17, John writes:

⁸F. W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity* (New York: Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co, 1882), 471. See also David H. van Daalen, “Six Hundred Sixty-six,” in Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, editors, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 700. For a thorough detail analysis of “The Number of the Beast,” see Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Beast of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2002), 37-50.

⁹Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 436.

Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and **had seven heads and ten horns**.

The “seven heads” are identified as “seven hills” as well as “seven kings.” Alternatively, the “ten horns” represent the ten provinces of the Roman Empire. Joseph Ernest Renan (1823-1892), French historian, critic, and essayist, identifies the seven kings as: “**Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero and Galba**.”¹⁰ Also, Frederic William Farrar (1831-1903), Dean of Canterbury and author, lists the ten horns as the ten provinces of the Roman Empire: “**Italy, Achaia, Asia, Syria, Egypt, Africa, Spain, Gaul, Britain, Germany**.”¹¹

John writes that the **beast had seven heads**, which heads **represent seven mountains as well as seven kings**. Rome was associated with seven mountains. Those to whom the Book of Revelation was written would have understood this to be Rome. In order to give more credence to this view, citations from individuals who lived during this time frame should clarify beyond doubt that the seven heads refer to Rome. For example, Virgil (70-19 BC), Roman poet, speaks of Rome and the seven hills:

Lo, under his auspices, my son, shall that **glorious Rome** extend her empire to earth’s ends, her ambitions to the skies, and shall embrace **seven hills** with a single city’s wall, blessed in a brood of heroes.¹²

Ovid (43 BC-AD 17), Roman poet, also speaks of the **seven hills** of Rome:

My home is not Dulichium or Ithaca or Same, places from which absence is no great punishment, but **Rome**, that gazes about her from her **seven hills** upon the whole world.¹³

Marcus Valerius Martialis (b. AD 40), Roman poet, too, speaks of the Seven Hills of Rome:

Rising gently to the clear stars are the dainty rooftops of a lofty villa. On one side you may see the **seven imperial mounts** and appraise all **Rome**.¹⁴

Kenneth L. Gentry (b. 1950), Reformed theologian and an ordained minister in the Reformed Presbyterian Church General Assembly, lists the names of the seven hills as:

¹⁰Joseph Ernest Renan, *Renan’s Antichrist*, trans., William G. Hutchison (London: Walter Scott, 1899), 215.

¹¹Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity*, 464.

¹²Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid 1-6*, I, Aeneid, VI: 780-784, Loeb Classical Library, translated by H. R. Fairclough, revised by G. P. Goold, Vol., 63 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1909, 2004), 587, 589. Note: the numbers (780-784) represent the number of lines on the page. The number 780 represents the first line.

¹³Ovid, *Tristia, Ex Ponto*, VI, Tristia, V: 66-71, Loeb Classical Library, translated by A. L. Wheeler, revised by G. P. Goold, Vol., 151 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1924, 2002), 33.

¹⁴Martial, *Epigrams, I, On the Spectacles*, iv: 64, Loeb Classical Library, translated and edited by D. R. Shackleton Bailey, Vol., 94 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993, 2002), 331. The number 64 represents a paragraph, not lines.

“Palatine, Aventine, Caelian, Esquiline, Viminal, Quirinal, and Capitoline hills.”¹⁵ In counting the kings in Revelation 17:10, the logical starting point is with Julius Caesar. John speaks of “Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come” (17:10). These six kings are:

1. Julius Caesar (49-44 BC)
2. Augustus Caesar (31 BC-AD 14)
3. Tiberius Caesar (AD 14-37)
4. Gains [Caligula] Caesar (AD 37-41)
5. Claudius Caesar (AD 41-54)
6. **Nero Caesar (AD 54-68)**

Since the emperors following Julius Caesar continued the Caesarean line, we would naturally include Julius Caesar, so it seems, as the first of the kings in Revelation 17:10. Bart D. Ehrman (b. 1955), American New Testament scholar, in spite of his assigning the date of Revelation to about AD 95, still makes some relevant remarks about the six kings in his informative work (My disagreement with Ehrman on this point does not detract from my high regard for his book.). The following is a lengthy quotation from Ehrman, but the citation is extremely enlightening:

The Beast of Babylon in chapter 17, which, as we will see, appears to represent the city of Rome, is said to have seven horns on its head. These represent seven “kings,” evidently meaning the rulers of Rome (17:9). Five of these are said to have come and gone and one is currently reigning (17:10). **This would presumably mean that the vision was written during the reign of the sixth Roman ruler**, but with which ruler should we begin counting—with the dictator Julius Caesar or with his adopted son, the first emperor, Caesar Augustus? And does this vision date the entire book or simply this portion of it?

On the basis of a detailed study of all such clues in the text, most investigators think that parts of the book were written during the 60s of the Common Era, soon after the persecution of the Christians under Nero. **If we begin counting with Julius Caesar, Nero happens to have been the sixth ruler of Rome.** He was also one of the author’s chief enemies.¹⁶ (Emphasis mine)

The sixth ruler (Nero) reigned from October 13, AD 54 to June 9, AD 68.¹⁷ The next ruler to appear was Galba (June AD 68 to January 15 AD 69), who reigned only for seven months. The seven-month reign coincides with John’s statement:

They are also seven kings. Five have fallen (**οἱ πέντε ἔπεσαν**, *hoi pente epesan*), one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little (**ὀλίγον**, *oligon*) while. (Revelation 17:10)

The word “little” (**ὀλίγον**, *oligon*) fits the seventh king in this chronological order. Flavius Josephus (AD 37-101), Jewish historian, in his Jewish Wars, comments about Nero’s reign of thirteen years:

¹⁵Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2002), 12.

¹⁶Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 432. The highlight (underlining) belongs to me—Dallas Burdette.

¹⁷Arthur Weigall, *Nero: Emperor of Rome* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1930, 1934), 77, 289.

Vespasian had returned to Caesarea and was preparing to march in full strength upon Jerusalem itself, when the news reached him that Nero was slain, after a reign of thirteen years (eight months) and eight days.¹⁸

Josephus did not record all the events since many of the happenings were common knowledge, as demonstrated below from his own writings. Having said this, Josephus, following his reason for leaving out some details, still gives some information about the kings following Nero:

All these matters I may be excused from narrating in detail, because they are commonly known and have been described by numerous Greek and Roman historians; but to preserve the connexions of events and to avoid any break in the narrative, I have summarily touched upon each.

Vespasian, therefore, when the news first came deferred his expedition against Jerusalem, anxiously waiting to see upon whom the empire would devolve after Nero's death; nor when he subsequently heard that Galba was emperor would he undertake anything, until he had received further instructions from him concerning the war. But he sent his son Titus to the new emperor to salute him and to receive his orders with reference to the Jews; king Agrippa also embarked with Titus on the same errand to Galba. However, before they reached their destination and while they were sailing round through Achaea (for it was the winter season) in vessels of war, Galba was assassinated after a reign of seven months and as many days, and was succeeded as emperor by Otho, the rival claimant to the sovereignty.¹⁹

Whether we employ the term Dictator, Emperor, Caesar, or King as titles, we still speak of the same individual. Some object to the title Emperor as being applicable to Julius Caesar, especially since Augustus is generally referred to as the first emperor—not the second. Kenneth Gentry comments on this particular point:

But even more persuasively, Julius was commonly recognized as the first ruler of the empire, since he 'first claimed the rights of Roman Emperor.' Though he was not emperor *de jure*, he was *de facto*.²⁰

Even Leonard L. Thompson, late date—AD 95/96, lists Julius Caesar as the first of the Roman emperors in his chronology of the emperors.²¹ In his book, Chapter 1, "Historical

¹⁸Josephus, *The Jewish War*, Books III—IV, 4. 9. 2, Loeb Classical Library, translated by D. H. St. J. Thackeray, Vol., 487 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1927, 1997), 303.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 305.

²⁰Kenneth Gentry Jr., *The Beast of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2002), 141. I am deeply indebted to Kenneth Gentry for his many voluminous endnotes, which has greatly eased my load in locating the sources for this study. Henry Campbell Black writes:

De facto: In fact, in deed, actually. This phrase is used to characterize an officer, a government, a past action, or a state of affairs which must be accepted for all practical purpose, but is illegal or illegitimate. In this sense it is the contrary of *de jure*, which means rightful, legitimate, just, or constitutional, in Henry Campbell Black, *Black's Law Dictionary*, 4th edition (St. Paul: Minn: West Publishing Co, 1951), 479.

Setting and Genre,” Thompson draws attention to the “five have fallen” (Revelation 17:10), along with an excellent explanation of how to determine the five who had fallen. Listen to his insightful comments:

More evidence for dating Revelation seems to be given in the reference to the seven heads of the beast as seven kings (emperors) (17:9-14). Of those seven kings, “five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come and when he comes he must remain only a little while. As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to perdition.” One needs simply to figure out which five emperors have already fallen, and then the sixth emperor is reigning during the time that John writes. The earliest possible of the five past rulers would be Julius Caesar who died in 44 BCE. The complete list following Julius Caesar would then be the five emperors of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, the three emperors during the confusion after Nero’s death, the three Flavian emperors, and then, if relevant, Nerva and Trajan. Their reigns occurred as follows:

- Julius (d. 44 BC)²²
- Julio—Claudian dynasty (27 BC-AD 68)
 - Augustus (27 BC-AD 14)
 - Tiberius (14-37)
 - Gaius (Caligula) (37-41)
 - Claudius (41-54)
 - Nero (54-68)
- Three short-lived emperors
 - Galba (68-69)
 - Otho (69)
 - Vitellius (69)
- The Flavians (69-96)
 - Vespasian (69-79)
 - Titus (79-81)
 - Domitian (81-96)
- Nerva (96-98)
- Trajan (98-117)²³

Josephus (AD 37-100) referred to Augustus (reigned 27 BC-AD 14) as the second emperor and Tiberius (AD 14-37) as the third emperor, which indicates that he considered Julius as the first emperor. The following citation sets forth the common recognition of Julius as the first emperor:

²¹Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), xi. In this chapter, I refer to many scholars with whom I disagree, but this disagreement does not question their integrity or their relationship to God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. This in-depth study is designed to assist individuals in their quest for a better understanding of God’s Word, not to impugn the motives of godly men and women who disagree with my conclusions.

²²Some scholars employ BCE (before the Common Era) rather than BC (before Christ). Also, some scholars employ CE (Common Era) rather than AD (*Anno Domini*; Latin: “In the year of our Lord”).

²³Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 14.

Ambivulus' successor was Annius Rufus, whose administration was marked by the death of Caesar, **the second emperor** of the Romans,²⁴ who had ruled for fifty-seven years, six months, and two days. Antony had shared authority with him for fourteen years of this period. He was seventy-seven years old when he died. Caesar's successor in authority was **the third emperor, Tiberius Nero**, the son of his wife Julia.²⁵

Not only did Josephus consider Augustus and Tiberius as second and third in the list of emperors, he also speaks of Gaius (Caligula, AD 37-41) as the fourth emperor of the Roman Empire. He writes down:

After appointing Gaius as his successor to the empire, Tiberius (AD 14-37) lived on for a few days. He then died, having held the imperial rule for twenty-two years, five months, and three days. Gaius was the fourth emperor.²⁶

As we seek to unravel the five kings of Revelation 17:10, we observe a similar phraseology by Tacitus (AD 56-117), a senator and a historian of the Roman Empire. In his comments about the seventh emperor of Rome (**Galba**), he does not list **Julius** as the first emperor, which illustrates the latitude of the writer as he seeks to record history. His comments about Galba's rule and the preceding emperors remind one of John's choice of words:

Galba's head, which had been fixed on a pole and maltreated by camp-followers and servants, was finally found the next day before the tomb of Petrobius—he was one of Nero's freedmen whom Galba had punished—and was placed with the body which had already been burned. This was the end of Servius Galba. He had lived seventy-three years, through the reigns of five emperors, with good fortune, and he was happier under the rule of others than in his own.²⁷

A. M. Renwick, Professor of Church History, Free Church of Scotland College, gives a clue as to the differences in naming the emperors: "In one sense Julius Caesar was the founder of the empire, and Augustus the founder of the principate."²⁸ It is in this same vein that Suetonius (AD 69-130), a historian during the Roman Empire, wrote a biography of *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, which biographical sketches began with Julius Caesar and ended with Domitian (the twelfth emperor of the Roman Empire). Whether we employ the various designations—Dictator, Emperor, or King—we must still begin with **Julius Caesar** as the beginning of the Julio—Claudian dynasty (27 BC-AD 68).

²⁴This footnote added for clarification: "Augustus, whose rule is here reckoned from the death of Julius Caesar in 44 B.C. to his own death in A.D. 14," see footnote 'd' in Josephus, *The Jewish War*, Books XVIII--XIX, 18. 3. 2, Loeb Classical Library, translated by D. H. St. J. Thackeray, Vol., 433 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1927, 1997), 29. Emphasis mine)

²⁵Josephus, *The Jewish War*, Books XVIII--XIX, 18. 3. 2, Loeb Classical Library, translated by D. H. St. J. Thackeray, Vol., 433 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1927, 1997), 29.

²⁶Josephus, *The Jewish War*, Books XVIII--XIX, Ibid., 137.

²⁷Tacitus, *Tacitus Histories*, II, Books I--III, I. 49, Loeb Classical Library, translated by Clifford H. Moore, Vol., 111 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1925, 2003), 83.

²⁸A. M. Renwick, "Roman Empire and Christianity," in G.W. Bromiley, General Editor, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, revised edition, 4 volumes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 4:208.

Did the world leaders in the first century refer to the Caesars as kings? Six hundred years before the Caesars came on the scene, the prophet Daniel, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, called the leaders of Rome by the term “kings.” Daniel (605 BC) prophesied concerning four world empires, one of which was the Roman Empire. During the fourth of these kingdoms, Daniel speaks of the establishment of God’s spiritual kingdom under the leadership of His Son. Daniel’s description of the leaders (Caesars) is quite revealing:

In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. (Daniel 2:44)

Jesus was born during the reign of the second emperor, or king, of the Roman Empire, namely Augustus. During Jesus’ trial, Pilate and the religious leaders entered into a heated controversy over Jesus. They lashed out against Pilate with these words:

But they shouted, ‘Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!’ ‘Shall I crucify your king?’ Pilate asked. **‘We have no king but Caesar’** (οὐκ ἔχομεν βασιλέα εἰ μὴ Καίσαρα, *ouk echomen basilea ei mē Kaisara*) the chief priests answered (John 19:15)

We discover similar language and concepts about Caesar as king from the Jews who sought to stop Paul and Silas from preaching the Resurrection of Jesus in Thessalonica: “They are all defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus” (Acts 17:7). John, as demonstrated above, identifies the emperors of Rome as “kings” in Revelation 17:10: “They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while.” The name Caesar in Greek is **Καῖσαρ** (*Kaisar*) and the term *king* in Greek is **βασιλεύς** (*basileus*), which term was “used by courtesy of Herod the Tetrarch, Mt 14.9; of the Roman Emperor, as freq. in **κοινή** (*koinē*).”²⁹ The *Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* is also helpful in understanding the name Caesar:

Gradually this family name developed into a title. In the eastern part of the Roman Empire “Caesar” referred to the supreme ruler (cf. “Kaisar,” “Czar”; cf. also Gk. **βασιλεύς** “king”); in the West the emperor was called Augustus and his sons were each named Caesar, until the second century A.D., when “Caesar” became the title of the specific son designated to succeed to Rome’s highest office.³⁰

²⁹G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1921, 1964), 77.

³⁰“Caesar,” in *Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, John W. Simpson, Jr., Philip A. Frank, Timothy P. Jenney, Ralph W. Vunderink, Associate Editors, and Allen C. Myers, Revision Editor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 179.

CONCLUSION

If we are to interpret the Book of Revelation correctly, we must consider the internal evidence in order to arrive at a correct date for the composition of this apocalyptic book. This chapter examined three phases of the internal evidence in order to assign a date that is in harmony with the context: (1) what “must soon take place” and “the time is near” in Revelation 1:1, 3, (2) the identity and number of the man [666] in 13:18, and (3) the identification of the seven heads and ten horns in 17:3, 7, 9.

First, John, as examined above, began this book with “what must **soon** take place” (Revelation 1:1) and closes with “the things that must **soon** take place” (22:6). Again we observe the nearness of the events with “the time is **near**” (1:3) and “the time is **near**” (22:10). These four Scriptures call attention to the nearness of the events, not events 2000 years in the future. In 1:1 John employs the Greek words **ἐν τάχει** (*en tachei*, “with speed”) and the same phrase occurs in 22:6, which is translated “**shortly**” in the King James Version.

Even in 1:3 John writes once more with attention to the nearness of the events about to transpire. Listen to him as he puts pen to paper—**ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς** (*ho gar kairos engys*, “for the time is near”), and one also observes this same phrase in the end of the book in 22:10: **ὁ καιρὸς γὰρ ἐγγύς ἐστίν** (*ho kairos gar engys estin*, “for the time is near”). “With speed” or “shortly” can mean nothing else than the events are close at hand or are just around the corner.

These events were to begin with the people to whom the book was written, not to thousands of generations in the future. This line of internal evidence helps us to date the Book of Revelation early rather than late. The internal evidence associates the number 666 with the sixth emperor of the Roman Empire, namely Nero Caesar. John, in Chapter 17, also identifies the sixth the king as the one who is, which is Nero Caesar. The way to date the Book of Revelation is with internal evidence, that is to say, within the book itself. The context is the deciding factor in our determining the date that we assign to the Book of Revelation.

The next chapter (Chapter 18) seeks to unravel the identity and character of the beast in the Book of Revelation as found in Chapters 13 and 17. In the following chapter, I will examine these two chapters in Revelation, in which the identification of the beast also sheds light on the date of the Book of Revelation, which I discussed in the previous study. This identification is critical to a proper understanding of John’s writings found in this prophetic book addressed to the Christians undergoing persecution.