

HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUNDS OF THE WHORE OF BABYLON
IN REVELATION 17 & 18 IN A JEWISH CONTEXT

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I argue that some ancient Jewish sects, specifically the community at Qumran and the early Christians, did in fact write against, speak out against, and interpret ancient texts as being against their fellow Jews, the Temple, Jerusalem or all three. Given the time in which these occurred, I argue that those sects believed that the Roman Empire would be means in which their god would punish/destroy Jews that did not believe as they did, the Temple that did not represent what they thought it should, and Jerusalem as they believed it had become a sinful city.

I examine the writings and persons of the Greek Bible. I examine specifics such as the Parable of the Tenants and demonstrate that this was delivered against Jewish leadership and the Olivet Discourse that, like the book of Jubilees, presents a series of tribulations that will fall on a wicked generation, specifically the one living in Jerusalem during the first century C.E. I also demonstrate how the motif of these writings affected the book of Revelation. I examine the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible and show how the author used them as allusions in regards to the Whore of Babylon that appear in the book of Revelation. In doing so, I demonstrate that the Whore of Babylon is correctly identified as the city of Jerusalem. Additionally I show that the author used Babylon, the ancient foe of Israel, as a metaphor to demonstrate what he believed Israel had become.

Lastly, I examine the author, a man named John, and the social world he lived in and the time he wrote during. I demonstrate that the commonly held belief of persecution against the early Christians and the use of Roman religion, such as the imperial cult, has been over stated

and has led not only to a misinterpretation of chapters 17 and 18 in the book of Revelation, but they have led to an overall misunderstanding of the book as a whole.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The imagery of Revelation 17-18 is among the most memorable in the entire corpus of early Christian literature. Within these two chapters there is a whore who is riding a multi-headed beast.¹ The kings of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality, she was drunk with the blood of the saints; she is killed and burned. So who is she? Who is the Whore of Babylon? The symbolism employed in the book of Revelation is often loose, or perceived as such and has therefore allowed for more than one interpretation. Over the centuries readers of Revelation have been divided as to what the symbols of Revelation mean, the Whore of Babylon included. Alexander Hislop, perhaps echoing the Reformation, thought that the Whore of Babylon was the Catholic Church. Elaine Pagels notes that she is the “evil” Roman Empire. Popular writers such as Tim LaHaye claim that the Whore of Babylon will be part of a future one-world government. The early twentieth-century writer, James Pryse saw it not as history or prophecy but as a manual of sorts for spiritual development. In regards to the book of Revelation, the interpretations are limitless.²

This thesis examines the topic of the Whore of Babylon as found in the book of Revelation chapters 17-18 by looking at contemporary historical issues and theological ideologies that would have influenced the author of the book of Revelation. My aim is to

¹ The Greek word used is *pornê*. I’m translating it as “whore” due to the emphasis that I believe the author of Revelation is trying to convey. Other biblical translations such as the New International Version translate it as “prostitute” and the New American Study Bible uses “harlot”; the King James Version translates it as “whore.”

² Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons or The Papal Worship Proved to be the Worship of Nimrod and His Wife* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1916); Elaine Pagels, *Revelations* (New York: Viking, 2012); Tim LaHaye, *Are We Living in the End Times?* (Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999; LaHaye also has a popular fiction series, collectively known as the Left Behind series, that has been the basis for several movies); James Pryse, *The Apocalypse Unsealed* (London: John M. Watkins, 1910). For an exhaustive look at the variety of interpretations, see, Arthur Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse: Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993).

demonstrate that the Whore of Babylon is the city of Jerusalem and that its author, a man known as John, used symbols, motifs and allusions from the writings collectively known as the Old Testament as well as other Jewish traditions he would have been familiar with, including those that are found in the New Testament.³ In addition, this thesis will look at social issues around the time the book of Revelation was written, specifically the first century of the Common Era. It will examine factors such as Roman religion (especially the imperial cult), and whether persecution of early Christians would have been the antecedent that spurred John to write the book of Revelation. This thesis sees the book of Revelation's overall motif as being similar to that of both the prophetic writings from the Old Testament, and other examples of Jewish thought (such as Jesus' preaching) in that it is a polemic against what they believed to be an unfaithful, apostate Israel that was to be conquered by a foreign power as a result of "her" iniquity. In doing so, this thesis will demonstrate that the book of Revelation, specifically chapters 17 and 18 are in no way historically unique in their pronouncement that Jerusalem will be overthrown by a foreign power.

This thesis argues that the author known as John is not the Apostle John and that he was writing the book of Revelation shortly after the death of the Emperor Nero at a time when the Roman Empire was going through difficult civil wars and insurrections, including one in Judea. John's purpose is to warn Christians in Asia that the prophesized "end of the age" was upon them and they should remain steadfast and resolute.⁴ Therefore, though not the focus of this thesis, it will look at surrounding issues such as the authorship and date of the book of Revelation, as well as the eschatological theology that John most likely grew up with. This thesis challenges the largely held notion that the Whore of Babylon is either the Roman Empire itself or

³ *New King James Version*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005).

⁴ Matt. 24:3-22 and parallels. Also see Matt. 12:32, 13:39 and 28:20. Rev. 3:10, written to the church at Philadelphia notes, "I will keep you from the hour of trial which is about to come upon the whole earth to test those who dwell upon the earth."

a part of it⁵ and instead proposes that John, like prophets from the Old Testament as well as others such as Jesus and John the Baptist, is noting that because the Jewish people and by extension Jerusalem have a covenant with God, which according to various theological writings they have broken, they are about to face the wrath of God.⁶ This view is explored by Bart Ehrman in his book about the historical Jesus, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, noting that Jesus was one of several apocalypticists that spoke out against the Temple, those in control of it and saw a judgment of Israel's god as imminent.⁷ In relation to this thesis, Ehrman points out that the tradition of Jesus speaking out against the Temple is historically sound and stands up to criticism and this thesis will use this historical tradition of Jesus' pronouncements against the Temple as one of the elements that have an impact on John and his writing.⁸

A word on prophecy since the book of Revelation makes prophetic statements in regards to what John of Patmos believes will happen in the future. There are several ways to approach prophecy but for this thesis, an in-depth look at philosophical and theological views will not be provided. Historically, one way to categorize many prophecies is as *vaticinia ex eventu*, which means "prophecies after the fact." These are *ex post facto* prophecies invented (or "remembered") by the writer of the account later, or even forced interpretations cast back onto

⁵ Elaine Pagels, *Revelations*. (New York: Viking, 2012), Pagels is one of the more recent writers to view Revelation as being written largely, if not exclusively, against the Roman Empire around 90 C.E., in the aftermath of the Jewish Revolt.

⁶ Exodus 24:6-8; Matt. 23, Mark 12, Luke 20; Matt. 3:7 and parallels.

⁷ Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), For a brief historical examination of prophetic proclamations, see 117-118. For historical examination of Jesus being opposed to the Temple, see 154-159.

⁸ Ehrman, *Jesus*, 157. For the historical soundness on the tradition, Ehrman notes that the tradition passes three criteria commonly used for textual criticism; independent attestation, dissimilarity and contextual credibility. For specifics on the criteria, see 90-96. For an exhaustive look at textual criticism see, Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

earlier historical events when there is perhaps no real connection.⁹ Another type is “consciously fulfilled prophecies,” or “self-fulfilled prophecies,” in which someone consciously does what a prophecy has claimed would happen, therefore validating the prophecy. Jesus purposefully riding into Jerusalem on a donkey in validation of the prophecy found in Zechariah 9:9 is one example. Lastly are actual prophecies made by a historical person and these include ones that happen to be fulfilled, even if by accident as well as those that are “wrong” or go unfulfilled. In many ways, these might even be best understood or defined in a modern sense as predictions since they may be proclaimed during or shortly before the events unfold.

This thesis moves forward with the last of the three, that John of Patmos is living during a time of crisis in the Roman Empire, specifically 66 C.E. and beyond when the Jewish Revolt has broken out in Judea and Rome itself would experience a civil war. John of Patmos is therefore aware of the surrounding events and is in part seeing these events, such as the Roman army marching against Jerusalem, and is making a prophetic statement that Jerusalem will be overthrown.

Could the book of Revelation have been written after Jerusalem was conquered by the Romans in 70 C.E.? Certainly and even more so if the book was edited and redacted over a period of time as scholars such as David Aune suggest. However, this leaves one to wonder why John of Patmos remains vague in his usage of symbols and does not explicitly note monumental events such as the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem.

⁹ This was an early charge against the book of Daniel by the Neo-Platonist philosopher Porphyry (died *ca.* 304 C.E.) that the author lived during the days of Antiochus IV in the second century B.C.E and that the prophetic events listed in the book of Daniel were contemporary events. Porphyry’s works are no longer fully extant, but quotations have been preserved in Jerome’s *Commentary of Daniel*, see Louis Hartman and Alexander DiLella, eds. *The Book of Daniel*. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978), 46-47.

Historically, being conquered and occupied by a foreign power is a major motif that runs through the prophetic books of the Old Testament and is therefore the lens that one must view and understand at least in part, the book of Revelation. This thesis will also examine other often ignored Jewish writings such as those from the Intertestamental Period (*ca.* 420 B.C. to 1 C.E.) to demonstrate that John's writing in opposition to Jerusalem and the Temple are not unique to him (or to Christianity), but instead is a common theme in many Jewish theological writings.¹⁰ Though this view may not have been the dominant view held by all Jews at the time, it was a view held by several smaller groups or sects, the largest of these being the Jewish sect that would be known collectively as Christianity. Ignorance of other writings have led many readers to misidentify the Whore of Babylon as Rome and not Jerusalem. Looking at historical texts, it is important to take note of when the author felt that the events listed would happen and to whom. To study the book of Revelation in isolation, without first understanding the background of other Jewish writings, causes an error in interpretation. Similarly, to study the book of Revelation exclusively from social issues in Asia or elsewhere in the Roman Empire also leads to a misinterpretation of the text. Therefore, a section of this thesis will be dedicated to exploring Jewish writings and teachings as well as touching on the people who wrote and spoke them.

For clarification purposes, I do not distinguish between Jerusalem (or Judea or Israel) and the Temple.¹¹ In many ways the Temple defined the city of Jerusalem and the two are synonymous with one another. Physically it would be impossible for anyone living in or visiting Jerusalem to ignore the Temple; the Temple complex at 500 yards by 325 yards could hold

¹⁰ This theme is largely found in the prophetic books of Ezekiel, Isaiah and Jeremiah, but can also be found in works such as Zechariah and Daniel. Jerusalem was conquered in 586 B.C.E. by the Babylonian Empire and the prophets of the Old Testament note that one of the major reasons for this was Jerusalem's unfaithfulness towards God. This theme also appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament as well. For more on this, see below.

¹¹ Lloyd Gaston, *No Stone on Another: Studies in the Significance of the Fall of Jerusalem in the Synoptic Gospels*. (Leiden: Brill, 1970), Though Gaston is not looking at Revelation specifically, he holds a similar view that Jerusalem, the Temple and those in power are linked; with reservations that whenever possible one should distinguish them, 111. He cautions using this as an *a priori* argument but his study follows the model nonetheless.

twenty five American football fields and its walls rose 100 feet from street level. Certainly any Jew, particularly those living in either of the first centuries would view any opposition to Jerusalem as opposition to the Temple and vice versa. Those in power seemed to have rightfully understood it as a statement against their livelihood as well as their source of power and influence, and this paper uses that understanding as well. It is highly probable that a statement against the ruling elite, priestly class or the Sadducees (and quite possibly some specific Pharisees and scribes) would also be synonymous with speaking out against Jerusalem and the Temple --and vice versa. It seems to be one of the main reasons that people in power during the first century C.E., specifically those that oversaw the Temple, sought the death of Jesus and others who spoke out against them, Jerusalem, or the Temple.¹² Later Jewish writings corroborate this synonymous view as well.¹³

It is important to understand that the Temple was very much the focal point of the Jewish religion before its destruction, not only for those in Jerusalem or Israel, but those also in the Diaspora, as it was the one place that was on earth to house Israel's god.¹⁴ When Israel was under Roman rule, whether directly or indirectly, local officials such priests were able to enforce many laws, including the death penalty.¹⁵ Therefore this thesis will use these connections as a

¹² This is explicit in Mark 11:18, also see Josephus *J.W.* 2.261-263; 6.300-309.

¹³ 2 Baruch 1:4 notes that God will destroy Jerusalem, yet the author focuses on the Temple. Later in 6:4-8:5, the author laments the loss of Jerusalem, but he does so at the ruins of the temple and his lament focuses on the loss of both the sacrificial system and the temple. Jerusalem and temple unity are also seen in 59:4 and 68:5-6.

¹⁴ During the Second Temple period there were three other temples, one in Elephantine in Upper Egypt, one on Mount Gerizim and one in Leontopolis in Egypt. The temple in Elephantine was completely forgotten about until the 19th century. The temple on Mount Gerizim, which would be part of the Samaritan schism, was destroyed by John Hyrcanus and the temple at Leontopolis failed to gain wide recognition even by Jews living in Egypt. These further attest the importance of the temple at Jerusalem. Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.23.193, "One temple for the one God."

¹⁵ E. P. Sanders, *Judaism Practice and Belief 63 BCE - 66 CE*. (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 61. See 47-72 for an in depth look at the temple. For additional information and a look at sectarian issues around the Temple see Shaye Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*. 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.), 99-102 and 126-127. Lastly see John Meier, *A Marginal Jew, Vol. III Companions and Competitors*. (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 498. Meier additionally notes that Mosaic Law would have been a "battlefield" for power and control. He sums it up noting that, "Intended to be unifying symbols, they became major sources of division."

motif to help understand John of Patmos' writings as being in opposition to not only Jerusalem, but also and perhaps more specifically the Temple itself.

CHAPTER 2

AUTHORSHIP, EXILE AND DATE

Authorship

Though the authorship of the book of Revelation is not the focus of this thesis, it is important to examine who the author John was, since his identity has bearing on the overall book. Christian tradition considers John of Patmos to be John the Apostle, however the majority of recent scholarship now holds that John was an unknown prophet who would have been familiar with the churches of Asia.¹⁶ The name John implies that he was Jewish; it is a Grecized form of the Hebrew name Yohanan which is a theophoric name meaning “Yahweh is gracious” and was common among Jews in the Hellenistic Period.¹⁷ We do not know where John grew up or even if he had any sort of permanent residence in Asia but the use of his name suggests that the recipients knew him well.¹⁸ If he were born in Asia, this certainly would have made him familiar with the region, though being a native of the region would not have been a necessity.¹⁹ In all likelihood, the fact that John uses his name as opposed to the work being anonymous or pseudographical implies that he is well known to those that he is writing to.

As to whether or not Paul and John knew each other, it is unclear. It is possible and probable that John was familiar with the letters that Paul wrote, or that John may have even personally known Paul. Paul having written to churches in Asia such as the one at Ephesus might

¹⁶ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 4.20.11; Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 3.14.3; 3.24.4; Clement of Alexandria, *Quis Dives.* 42; *Strom.* 6.106; *Paed.* 2.108, 119; Hippolytus, *De Antichristo* 36-42; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.18.1. For recent scholarship, see Ben Witherington, *Revelation*. (New York: Cambridge Press, 2003), 3. For a view supporting the author being John the Apostle see Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 2-3.

¹⁷ David Aune, *World Biblical Commentary: Revelation 1-5*. Vol. 52A. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 18. Theophory is the practice of embedding the name of a god or a deity in, usually, a proper name. This can be seen in proper names such as Daniel which is translated as “God is my judge”.

¹⁸ Possibly he was born in the province of Cilicia just as the Apostle Paul was, see Acts 9:11.

¹⁹ By John’s day, Asia was well travelled and had several roads. Several cities, such as Ephesus, were coastal cities and could be traveled to by boat. All seven churches were within 100 miles of Ephesus and might have formed an established route for early Jewish and Christian prophets and teachers, see Aune, 131.

have introduced John to the churches and helped them accept him as a legitimate prophet. John might have simply been writing to churches that had been established for some period of time and therefore had a Christian population of a certain amount and sought out or were accepting of prophets. There is no evidence that John was attempting to follow in Paul's footsteps or that he had any intention of doing so; Paul's aim was largely missionary work in the form of an apostle whereas John's function is more of a prophet though he never explicitly states that he is one.

There is some evidence to suggest that John came from Palestine or the surrounding area; John engages in a literary genre known as *apocalypse* and this was at home in and possibly originated from within Palestinian Judaism. There are no known examples of apocalypses originating in the eastern or western Diaspora and the genre did not survive long in early Christianity once it moved outside the boundaries of Palestine.²⁰ From the book of Revelation, it seems that John was familiar with the Jewish Temple and the cult in Jerusalem as well as the areas around Jerusalem.²¹

The book of Revelation is also written in a distinctive type of Semitizing Greek that suggests that he is not a native speaker of Greek but instead was a native speaker of a Semitic language such as Aramaic. There is evidence to suggest that because the way Greek was used in the book of Revelation is so drastically different from the way Greek was used to write the Gospel of John that John of Patmos and the author of the Gospel of John are not the same person.²² There are counter arguments to this view, one being that the Greek varies between the works due to their scope and purpose; the Gospel of John is a more straightforward telling of the

²⁰ Aune, 1.

²¹ Rev. 8:3-4; 11:1-2, 19; 16:16.

²² Aune, clx-ccxi for an exhaustive examination of the usage of Greek in the book of Revelation. For the Semitizing of the Greek, see cxcix-cciii.

life and times of Jesus, whereas the book of Revelation is apocalyptic.²³ Being born and growing up in Palestine also means John would have grown up directly around Jerusalem, would have grown up in the shadow of the Temple at Jerusalem, and makes it possible that he was in direct contact with the apostles and other people that knew Jesus personally.

Galilee is another attractive possibility as the birthplace for John for several reasons. Under Hyrcanus II, Herod the Great was governor of Galilee from 47 to 37 B.C.E. and when he became king, Galilee was one of the areas of opposition to his rule. John the Baptist and Jesus both came from the area of Galilee and it is possible that their eschatological views against the leaders of Jerusalem had a strong foothold there; John the Baptist was also executed by the order of Herod Antipas – Herod the Great’s son. Strong eschatological views are further evidenced by the fact that John of Giscala, one of the foremost leaders of the Zealots during the Jewish Revolt came from there.²⁴ The area was also suppressed very early into the Jewish Revolt after Josephus lost it to the Romans in 67 C.E. John might have been a first or second generation Jewish believer in Jesus as the messiah that grew up with and studied the writings or heard the oral message of Jesus and perhaps even John the Baptist.

For this thesis, in agreement with most current scholarship, John of Patmos and the author of the Gospel of John (and three epistles attributed to the apostle John) are different people. John of Patmos was Jewish and came from either the area of Palestine or Galilee and may have been a disciple of John the Baptist or grew up with people that knew him and possibly Jesus personally. As will be explored in more detail below, this thesis works with the view that

²³ Another argument is the possibility of the Gospel of John being dictated to a scribe, whereas John being exiled on the island of Patmos would not have the benefit of a scribe and would have written the book of Revelation using a language that he was less familiar with, see Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 2-3. Apostles Paul and Peter both used scribes at times, see Rom. 16:22; 1 Cor. 1:1, 16:21; Col. 4:8; 1 Pet. 5:12.

²⁴ Josephus, *J.W.* 4.3. John of Giscala and Josephus were rivals so specific details about him should be noted for bias, but there is no reason to believe that Josephus would fabricate where he came from.

John is writing the book of Revelation shortly after the death of Nero in June of 68 C.E., but before 70 C.E.

Patmos and Exile

According to Revelation 1:9, John tells us that he is writing from the island of Patmos, an island belonging to a group of islands collectively known as the Sporades in the ancient world.²⁵ The overwhelming consensus among scholars is that John was banished or exiled to Patmos as a result of his preaching.²⁶ One historical question is whether or not Rome used Patmos as an island for exile and banishment. There is no direct historical source that names Patmos as an island used specifically for exile or banishment; however there are sources that mention islands in the proximity of Patmos as being used for such purposes.²⁷ Tacitus lists the islands of Gyaros, Donusa, and Amorgos as places of banishment and Juvenal notes that islands in the Aegean Sea were, “craggy rocks crowded with our noble exiles.”²⁸

In a related historical question, if John were exiled involuntarily, which form of exile would he have been sentenced to? The Romans used two forms of exile as punishment, the first and more harsh of the two being *deportatio* which was permanent banishment to a specific location; in the case of an island it would be known as *deportatio ad insulam*. Additionally the emperor or governor could mandate that those under this punishment lost their property and civil rights. The second form of exile was *relegatio*, a lesser form of punishment that could involve either exclusion from one’s province, *relegatio ab* or *relegatio extra*, or relegation to a particular place; in the case of an island, this would be known as *relegatio ad insulam*. This punishment

²⁵ Strabo, *Geo.* 10.5.13.

²⁶ Ian Boxall, *Patmos in the Reception History of the Apocalypse*. (New York: Oxford University Press. 2013), 173. Boxall notes scholars such as Swete, Farrer, Y. Collins, Fiorenza, Beale, Koester, Witherington and Charles are among the noteworthy that hold this view.

²⁷ Pliny, *Nat. hist.* 4.69-70.

²⁸ Tacitus, *Ann.* 4.30.; Juvenal, *Satires* 13.246-7: *maris Aegaei rupem scopulosque frequentes exulibus magnis.*

could be with or without a specific time limit and could be imposed by a provincial governor.²⁹ Though these forms of punishment were largely used on elite *honestiores*, there were exceptions.³⁰ One point of interest is that of astrologers being banished under *relegatio*, noted in 139 and 33 B.C.E. as well as 16 and 52 C.E. The Emperor Vespasian also seemed to banish them under his reign as well.³¹ If John was known to be a prophet or one that could predict the future, it might follow that he was banished under this premise as well.

As for who meted out the exile, this too is unclear. Though John was known locally in Asia, it is difficult to imagine him being known to a Roman emperor. Both John the Baptist and Jesus, who were much more prominent than John of Patmos, were executed, but theirs was a local issue and punishment was not handed down from the emperor but instead came from local authorities. According to the Gospels Jesus was crucified by Pontius Pilate who was the Roman prefect of Judea.³² John the Baptist is particularly interesting because according to Josephus, Herod Antipater who was a Tetrarch at the time, beheaded him and the reason for his death was because of a fear that John's preaching might start a rebellion.³³ The answer to the question as to which governor John was exiled under is also unknown and would largely depend on when one thinks the book of Revelation was written. If John was in Asia in the early 60s it could have been Barea Soranus who was governor from around 61 – 63 C.E. Scholar David Magie notes that he was a kind governor who might have used exile as opposed execution. Soranus was followed by Salvinus Otho Titianus who was governor from 63 – 64 C.E. and could have equally exiled John as opposed to executing him. His successor was Antistius Vetus who was governor from 64 – 65

²⁹ Boxall, 175.

³⁰ Roland Worth, *The Seven Cities of the Apocalypse and Greco-Asian Culture*. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 129-30. Worth notes that there were at times mass expulsions in the Roman Empire, Jews were expelled in 19 and 48 C.E.; also in 19 C.E. was the expulsion of Isis worshippers.

³¹ J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Romans and Aliens*. (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1979), 106-107.

³² Matt. 26 and parallels.

³³ Josephus, *Ant.* 18.5.116-118; *cf.* Mark 6:17-29, Matt. 14:3-12.

C.E. Vetus is appealing because he would have been governor just prior to the Jewish Revolt, which started the following year in 66 C.E.³⁴ It is quite possible that Vetus might have received word of a rebellion starting in Judea among the Jews and preemptively exiled John in hopes that a revolt wouldn't break out in his province during his reign. Fonteius Agrippa was governor of Asia in 68-69 C.E., but according to Tacitus he was removed and sent to Moesia as the civil war in Rome was at its height.³⁵ It is not known if during the chaos he would have had time to exile people, but it is possible. Vestus and Fonteius Agrippa with their rules being close to or during the Jewish Revolt are the best candidates for being the governors of Asia that exiled John to Patmos, but exactly which governor was in power during the time John was exiled to Patmos remains a matter of speculation.

Dating

Like many ancient works, dating the book of Revelation with absolute certainty to a specific year is impossible. Though it is not the goal of this thesis to examine in detail the dating issues of the book of Revelation, it is necessary to explore them since the purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that the Whore of Babylon is the city of Jerusalem and to note its destruction in 70 C.E. by the Roman Empire is one of the overall motifs of the book of Revelation itself.

The dating of the book of Revelation generally falls within two possibilities, an early date somewhere between 60 to 70 C.E. and a later date somewhere between 90 to 96 C.E.³⁶ In addition there are scholars such as J. Massyngberde Ford and David Aune who believe the book of Revelation was not written as a whole, but over a period of time (and possibly by different authors) and as a result parts of the work fall into the early category and parts of the work fall

³⁴ David Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor: To the End of the Third Century after Christ, Volume 1*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 1422.

³⁵ Tacitus, *Hist.* 3.46.

³⁶ Early and late dates are generally identified with the reigns of emperors. The early date is associated with that of Nero whereas the later date is associated with the reign of Domitian.

into the later category.³⁷ The evidence for determining a date for the book of Revelation is also divided into two parts, one part being external evidence and the other being internal evidence. Most of the external evidence for a late date for the book of Revelation hinders on the work of the early Church Father Irenaeus who wrote around 180 C.E.³⁸ Irenaeus notes, “But if it had been necessary to announce his name plainly at the present time, it would have been spoken by him who saw the apocalypse. For [he or it] was not seen long ago but almost in our own time, at the end of the reign of Domitian.” A debate among scholars involves the syntax of Greek being used, for what the subject of the verb “seen” is not clear. It could refer to the revelation that John had written, or it could be referring John himself as living into the reign of Domitian.³⁹ Though it seems unlikely, one possible way to use Irenaeus for an early date would be that he is referring to brief period of time when Domitian had full consular authority, *imperio consulari*, in 70 C.E.⁴⁰

Another issue with using Irenaeus as a source for dating is that it is unclear if Irenaeus is stating a known fact of the early church or if he is stating his own opinion. Based on the fact that Irenaeus wrote against heretics of the early Church, he could very well be attempting to fortify his own views by noting the works he was using came from the apostles themselves it seems to be the latter. However as noted earlier there are several issues with the authorship of the book of Revelation and much of the evidence demonstrates that the apostle John did *not* write it to begin with. Perhaps the greatest issue with using Irenaeus to date the book of Revelation is that he incorrectly notes dates elsewhere such as how long Jesus lived and how long his ministry was.

Irenaeus writes that Jesus reached an age of over 40 if not closer to the age of 50 and that his

³⁷ Ford sees chapters 4-11 as possibly being written very early even before 60 C.E., 12-22 perhaps being written between 60-70 C.E. and 1-3 being added by an unknown writer during an unspecified period of time; though she qualifies the statement that it would not have been written before 60 C.E., see Ford 50-56. Aune holds a similar view in that parts of it were written or orally transmitted in the 60’s, but that the final edition was completed towards the end of the reign of Domitian in 96 C.E. or even during the early reign of Trajan, see Aune lvii-lviii.

³⁸ Irenaeus, *Adv haer.* 5.30.3.

³⁹ For the complexities of the Greek in regards to Irenaeus’ statement, see Aune, lvii-lx.

⁴⁰ Tacitus, *Hist.* 4.39.

ministry lasted for around fifteen years.⁴¹ As noted above, other early Christian writers seem to outright accept Irenaeus' view with unfounded bias that the book of Revelation was written during the time of Domitian by John the Apostle and they do not offer any other independent evidence or views to support or corroborate Irenaeus'. As a result their views fall victim to the issues surrounding Irenaeus' own views and as a whole there is no external evidence that can with any great assurance be used to date the book of Revelation.

Internal evidence is also problematic but does lead to some tantalizing historical evidence in regards to dating the book of Revelation. Since the seven churches that John was writing to were real, historical churches, it helps to start there. Though they offer little in regards to evidence as to when the book of Revelation should be dated, there is a possible clue that can be pulled from the text. In Revelation chapter 3, John writes to the Church at Laodicea and in verse 17 notes, "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." Though it could be a spiritual metaphor, historically it may be in reference to the fact that Laodicea was destroyed by an earthquake in 60 C.E., but refused an imperial subsidy to help rebuild. The Roman historian Tacitus notes, "One of the famous cities of Asia, Laodicea, was that same year overthrown by an earthquake, and, without any relief from us, recovered itself by its own resources."⁴² Though speculative, if John was not yet exiled to Patmos at this point then it would seem likely that he would have been aware of this event, particularly if he was living in Asia at the time.

⁴¹ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 2.22.5. No scholar holds that Jesus' ministry lasted 15 years and it is understood that he was in his late 20's or early 30's when he was executed. Luke 3:1 notes that Jesus was baptized and started his ministry during the fifteenth year of the Emperor Tiberius, which would be approximately 29 C.E. Verse 23 notes that Jesus is about thirty years of age when his ministry starts.

⁴² Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.27.1. See also Magie, 1421. Magie notes that the early church historian Eusebius dates this event to 64 C.E., but notes that Tacitus' date of 60 is probably the more accurate of the two.

Another piece of internal evidence is based on the seven headed beast found in the book of Revelation 17. John notes that the seven heads of the beast are symbolic for both seven hills and seven kings.⁴³ Revelation 17:10 states, “There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time.” If the list of kings is understood literally, the list seems to support an early date due to difficulties in using this list to arrive at a later date during Domitian’s reign. In a literal interpretation, to arrive at Domitian’s reign the list of emperors would have to either begin with Caligula who became emperor in 37 C.E., or omit Galba, Otho and Vitellius all of whom ruled briefly during a period of civil war following Nero’s death.⁴⁴ Though John does not explicitly state a starting point for the list, it seems odd that he would not start with either Julius Caesar or Augustus and if he did not it also seems odd that he would not inform his readers that he was starting his list with an emperor like Caligula. A survey of other ancient writers, notably Roman historians, note that when they were compiling a list of Roman emperors or writing about them, they would begin a list with either Julius Caesar or Augustus. Suetonius begins his *Lives of the Caesars* with Julius Caesar and Tacitus begins *Annals* with Augustus. Both Dio Chrysostom and Josephus refer to Augustus as the “second Caesar” or the “second emperor of the Romans.”⁴⁵ In the religious text known as the Sibylline Oracles there is a list of eighteen Roman emperors and the list begins

⁴³ See Ford, 289. Ford notes a chart by Edward Seigman who looks at various emperors from Caesar down to Hadrian with various configurations. For those scholars that see John as referring to seven emperors, the biggest challenge is where to start the list and who to include in it; one major issue being the Year of the Four Emperors (68C.E. – 69C.E.), which leaves scholars to wonder if the interim emperors should be included or not. For an alternate view, see Steve Gregg, ed. *Revelation Four Views: A Parallel Commentary*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 412 which notes that John might be referring to the Roman procurators over Judah under Claudius and Nero starting with Cuspius Fadus and ending with Gessius Florus who ruled up to the start of the Jewish War.

⁴⁴ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis & Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 64. Collins is one of the few scholars that starts the list with Caligula noting that, “Caligula would have been a natural starting point, given the close affinities between Revelation and contemporary Jewish anti-Roman literature and the probably Jewish origin of John.” Collins notes her reason for starting with Caligula are that other historical works about Roman emperors are of a different genre or of a different literary form and interest, yet she admits that 4 Ezra, a religious work like the book of Revelation starts its symbolic list with Julius Caesar, see 60.

⁴⁵ Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 34.7; Josephus *Ant.* 18.32.

with Julius Caesar and ends with Marcus Aurelius. To arrive at Marcus Aurelius, the author of the Sibylline Oracles has included the short reigns of Galba, Otho and Vitellius which indicates that though their reigns were short, they were recognized at least in this case, as legitimate emperors. Another religious text is 4 Ezra that also includes a symbolic list of emperors in the form of an eagle with twelve wings and three heads, starts with Julius Caesar and also includes Galba, Otho and Vitellius.⁴⁶

Despite the opposition by some scholars such as Collins, the amount of historical evidence we do have about emperor lists, both from historians and religious writers, seems to provide a precedent that the starting point was in fact either Julius Caesar or Augustus. This is further evidenced that we have no writings to prove otherwise and though John is a unique writer in and of himself, there is nothing to demonstrate that he would deviate from what other contemporary writers were doing when it came to compiling a list of emperors.

Another possible interpretation for the seven kings is that it is consistent with the use of the number seven which occurs fifty three times throughout the book of Revelation and should therefore be interpreted symbolically.⁴⁷ As attractive as this is, the details that John does provide seem to indicate that he is referring to actual kings or in his case, emperors. John is not the first author to note seven kings as the traditional materials covering the history of Rome; when it was ruled by an archaic monarchy, note that there were seven kings.⁴⁸ Though there were probably more, it seems unlikely that ancient historians were using them symbolically but instead were

⁴⁶ 4 Ezra 11:13-17; 12:14-15.

⁴⁷ Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns Pub., 1977), 317. Mounce suggests that John is not interested in tabulation as much as understanding seven to signify the power of the Roman Empire as a whole. He also suggests that John might be referring to empires, Egypt, Nineveh, Babylon, Persia and Greece with Rome being the present empire to be followed by a Christian empire, but he is quick to point out that the Greek word being used is universally translated as “king” and not “kingdom.” Also see G. K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*. (Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 1999), 874.

⁴⁸ Livy, *Hist.* 1; Tacitus, *Hist.* 3.72; Pliny *Hist. nat.* 34.139.

writing about whom they regarded as actual, historical people. It's important to remember that John writes to seven churches as well, and these are seven, historical churches.

With these things considered, this thesis proposes that the book of Revelation was written during the period of June 68 – 69 C.E. after the death of Nero and probably during the reign of Galba. John notes that five kings have already fallen and historically this would make sense to include Nero in the first five. Nero's death threw the Roman Empire into a state of chaos, largely marked by a series of civil wars as well as continuing wars abroad that were taking place during his reign, such as the Jewish Revolt which began in 66 C.E. From a historical point of view it would appear that the reign of Nero, specifically the end of his reign by his suicide coupled with the Jewish Revolt prompted John to believe that the "end of the age" was upon him and to begin warning the churches that he was familiar with. At this time, Galba would have been emperor and would have been approximately 70 years old, an advanced age for people living in the ancient world. It is perhaps with this knowledge as well as the on-going wars that John probably would have been assured that there would be another emperor shortly and that in all likelihood his reign would be short as well. (Otho who only ruled for only 3 months followed Galba.) John makes no other statement in regards to what would happen next and it would have been difficult if not impossible to predicate that Vitellius and Vespasian (who was currently fighting the Jewish Revolt) would have met in combat with Vespasian being the victor.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Josephus, *J.W.* 3.8.9 399-408. Josephus does make a prediction that Vespasian will be emperor, but this is only after he is captured by Vespasian who intends to deliver him to Nero. Also see Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Vespasian 5.

CHAPTER 3

THE SEVEN CHURCHES, OPPOSITION AND SOCIAL ISSUES

The Seven Churches

Why John chose to write to the seven, specific churches that he did is a matter of speculation. There were other churches in the Roman province Asia; Colossae, Hierapolis and Troas are among the ones that we are aware of, but no doubt there were probably other churches as well. A convenient answer would be that John is using the model of Paul who also wrote to seven churches.⁵⁰ Another possibility is that John is being consistent and is maintaining the use of the number seven.⁵¹ If this is true, John might have been well known throughout all of Asia and served other churches there as well. Because the number seven is used throughout the book of Revelation, John could be employing it symbolically with the intention that he was writing to all Christian churches just as the 4th century Church Father Victorinus noted.⁵² However, based on the fact that John is familiar with specific issues in each church, it appears that he is writing to seven, literal churches and whether or not these issues are occurring in other churches might be of no consequence to him; though based on population and importance of the seven cities it seem unlikely that he would assume his overall message would remain only at those seven specific churches.⁵³

⁵⁰ Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Thessalonica (modern Thessaloniki), Philippi, Colossae, and Galatia. Galatia is a region, but Paul seems to be writing to a specific church there, perhaps the first church in the region.

⁵¹ The number seven is found throughout the Bible. It is used fifty-three times in Revelation and is used specifically to structure major portions of Revelation. Among the major structures are seven letters, seven seals, seven trumpets and seven bowls.

⁵² Victorinus, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* 1:7. "...but what he says to one, he says to all."

⁵³ The importance of each city is fairly easy to understand historically based on if it was an important business, administrative, or religious center, but determining ancient populations is problematic at best. Many ancient cities were small in size and were often walled leading to the issue of population density. Aune notes that Ephesus might have had a population of 40,000, but this might have only been males and excluded women, children and slaves. If included, the population might have been at least 200,000, see Aune, 136-137. For a study specific to Christian missions, see Rodney Stark, *Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome*. (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), specifically 34-61. Stark assumes that a population of around 30,000 would be a reasonable minimum for city size.

Social Issues

What are the motives that drove John to write the book of Revelation? What is the reason and purpose? Was it a crisis? There is a historiographical trend to set the book of Revelation exclusively against the social backdrop and trappings of the province of Asia under Roman rule. This thesis challenges that exclusivity, though John is obviously familiar with society in Asia. The issue that many scholars miss or fail to acknowledge is that if John was in fact a Palestinian Jew, he might not have grown up in Asia, but instead brought with him or imported ideologies from the area he grew up in; in this case his ideologies would include Jewish apocalypticism. If John was importing the ideologies around Judea, namely the ideology with the temple cult being sinful, and is bringing them to Asia, then the book of Revelation would reflect those ideologies. Therefore, to place all the weight and evidence such as the imperial cult in Asia on to the book of Revelation, allows for a misinterpretation of what John is writing about overall as well as the symbols he is using. For a more accurate interpretation of the book of Revelation, one needs to use the lens or filter of Jewish apocalypticism as a guide to understand the overall motif that John is writing in and to help understand John's possible hermeneutical approach.

This suggested approach does however acknowledge that it might seem that the world or certainly the Roman Empire was coming to an end by the mid to late 60's, the time period this thesis proposes that John of Patmos wrote the book of Revelation. In 62, Rome had suffered a defeat on the Eastern front against the Parthians. In 64, a massive fire broke out in the city of Rome, which Nero blamed on the Christians.⁵⁴ According to Christian tradition, Nero executed

⁵⁴ Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.38-44. Tacitus notes that Nero blamed the fire on Christians and had them torn apart, crucified or burned at the stake.

both the disciples Peter and Paul.⁵⁵ By 66, a series of rebellions broke out; in Judea in 66, Gaul in 68 and in Germania in 69. In 68, even Rome itself was in civil war after the death of Nero. These events may certainly have added to John's sense of urgency to write such a work and are probably themselves circumstantial evidence as to when John was writing, but would they have been the main focus of the book of Revelation, or even simply the focus of the Whore of Babylon?⁵⁶ This thesis will demonstrate that the main focus of the book of Revelation and specifically the portions of the text that deal with the Whore of Babylon, is not the Roman Empire.

Roman Opposition

It is important to look at the opposition to Jesus and his followers in the New Testament as this reveals an overall motif in which John was writing the book of Revelation. Who (or what) is the main opposition to the Christians?⁵⁷ If Rome is the major opposition to Christianity in the New Testament, then identifying the Whore of Babylon as Rome is consistent with the overall picture that John is presenting. However, if one can identify certain facets or sects within Judaism as the main opposition, then the identification of the Whore of Babylon as Rome is unlikely.

Though an argument from silence, the first issue to contend with is that Rome is hardly mentioned at all in the New Testament and when it is, it is often not in a negative context that

⁵⁵ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.25.5.

⁵⁶ The events in the 60's C.E. appear to be additional, albeit circumstantial evidence in support of an early date for the book of Revelation. During Domitian's reign there were not the plethora of crises that existed in the 60's C.E. It would be difficult to defend the position that Domitian's reign was understood as either the "end of the world" or the end of the Roman Empire.

⁵⁷ I'm using the term Christian to mean those, whether Jewish or Gentile that believed that Jesus was the messiah and followed his teaching and the teachings of his disciples. I would qualify this statement to note that with the possible exception of the Gospel of Luke and Acts, the writers of the New Testament were Jewish and saw themselves as such. Jesus and John the Baptist would have been unfamiliar with the term Christian, but I'm including them in this definition as well for ease of understanding.

would be evidence as a major opposition to early Christians.⁵⁸ An example of this would be in regards to taxes paid to the Roman Empire. The issue of taxes should not be taken lightly and was often a major point of contention between the Romans and those they ruled, including those living in Judea. Under Greek rule, Judeans as a whole paid tax in the form of tribute; additional taxes such as tithes to the Temple were paid by individuals in various forms. However, when Judea fell under Roman rule, Rome superimposed taxes onto tithes as well other taxes. As a consequence, there was a “double tax,” which might have amounted to around forty percent of one’s income. Understandably this was often difficult to pay and the rise of banditry among locals rose dramatically under Roman rule and was a possible reason for an ongoing series of revolts.⁵⁹

Aside from their functional uses, coins also had a strong ideological use. A single coinage system across the whole Empire was a fundamental statement of unity, and in the case of conquered regions, a statement of subjugation. Nor were coins particularly subtle in their messages. The images stamped onto coins on their front (obverse) and back (reverse) sides were carefully chosen. The obverse of Roman Imperial coins typically portrayed the Emperor or some member of his family in carefully stylized forms. Until the third century CE, the reverse most often reflected local messages, particularly those of cities responsible for the minting of a particular coin issue. In a world with limited literacy, these coins spreading across the Empire provided a highly effective means of propaganda.

⁵⁸I’m using the term Rome to mean any facet of the Roman Empire, such as the city of Rome or various provinces that were under Roman rule and are generally regarded as part of the Roman Empire. This definition also includes individuals or smaller groups such as soldiers, governors, prefects and the like.

⁵⁹Richard Horsley, *Bandits, Prophets & Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus*. (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 48-87. Horsley examines at length the taxation of Judea and the causes it had, namely on the peasantry. As a result, many turned to banditry and as a consequence revolts were frequent in Judea. Also see Josephus, *J.W.* 6.6.2; 7.6.6.

In the Gospel of Matthew chapter 22, Jesus is asked by the Pharisees if it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not. He is given a denarius and examines it. (The coin Jesus would have been given could have belonged to any number of issues, but probably would have had "Caesar," i.e. Tiberius or Augustus, on the front.) There probably would not have been a better opportunity for Jesus to issue a proclamation against Rome, but he does not. Instead he says, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." As a consequence this does two things. One, it shows that Jesus was not a member of the Zealots, a more violent sect that sought out physical aggression towards Romans and Jews that did not believe as they did.⁶⁰ Secondly, it also demonstrates that Jesus was not a member of the Sadducees or ruling class who would have had close dealings with Rome.

Other bits of evidence as to the lack of Roman opposition include Acts 21, where the apostle Paul was saved by Roman soldiers after it is revealed to them that he is the target of an assassination plot.⁶¹ Early in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 8, a Roman centurion approaches Jesus and asks him to heal a servant. Jesus agrees and offers to come to the centurion's house, which in a show of deference the centurion declines noting that as a military man, Jesus simply needs to give an order and the servant would be healed. Matthew notes Jesus' response is startling, "When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith."⁶² The depth of this cut cannot be ignored for Jesus is able to insert an explicit statement against the temple cult. Jesus should have told the centurion to go the Temple and pray to God and offer sacrifice, but Jesus did not

⁶⁰ Gaston, 89.

⁶¹ At this point, Paul is known to hold Roman citizenship, though scholars debate on how he obtained this. Until Roman citizenship is revealed, Paul and his companion Silas were at one point beaten and thrown into jail after they helped a slave girl who was being used for profit as a fortune teller. They were brought in front of Roman magistrates and were presented as Jews that were causing trouble, see Acts 16:16-24.

⁶² Matt. 8:10.

continuing, “I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (the eschatological kingdom). But the subjects of the kingdom (the present kingdom) will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”⁶³ As opposed to seeking out a priest or going to the Temple, “Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would.” And his servant was healed at that moment.”⁶⁴ This further negates the need for the Temple and more specifically, those that over see it.

As first noted, perhaps the most telling case against Roman opposition is that it is barely found within the New Testament. There are possible undercurrents found within the New Testament, such as Jesus telling Roman soldiers to not intimidate or falsely accuse people and to be satisfied with their wages.⁶⁵ This seems to suggest a rift between Romans and people they ruled, in this case in Judea. There is also the possible risk of speaking out, verbally and in writing, against Rome and this may be one reason why there is little opposition noted in the New Testament, but it is largely circumstantial. The issue of crucifixion is a possible point of contention and the Gospels present Roman soldiers mocking Jesus at his crucifixion.⁶⁶ In counter to this argument, throughout the letters attributed to Paul, he seems to present the crucifixion as a “victory” and a device which brings about salvation.⁶⁷ However if John grew up reading and hearing the Jewish texts and listening to disciples of Jesus or John the Baptist, it seems unlikely that he would speak out as a whole against Rome. Why? Simply put, Rome does not fit into early Christians’ overall theological worldview. Instead, their concern lay with Jerusalem and most

⁶³ Matt. 8:11,12.

⁶⁴ Matt. 8:13.

⁶⁵ Luke 3:14.

⁶⁶ Mark 15:16 and parallels.

⁶⁷ N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.), specifically pages 151-153.

likely they would see Rome, being the dominant empire at the time, similar to the Babylonian empire as the vehicle of God's wrath against unfaithful Jews.

CHAPTER 4

THE IMPERIAL CULT, THE TEMPLE AND THE TEMPLE CULT

The Imperial Cult

One common feature used to identify the Whore of Babylon with Rome is emperor worship, or the imperial cult. As shown above, many scholars use emperor worship in an attempt to either demonstrate that Revelation was written during the time of Domitian or that the Whore of Babylon is Rome's religious system.⁶⁸ Certainly with one of the themes being the persecution of those that did not worship the emperor, it allows for a date of Domitian, but it hardly solidifies or establishes it. In regards to Domitian, recent scholarly work has challenged the view that he was megalomaniac who persecuted Christians throughout the Roman world. Leonard Thompson argues that Domitian's critics -- Pliny, Tacitus, Suetonius and Dio Cassius were biased against him and wrote about him in a negative light due to political reasons during the reign of Trajan.⁶⁹

An issue facing scholars is summed up by S. R. F. Price who states that, "there is no extended contemporary discussion of imperial ritual in the provinces."⁷⁰ However, there are some assumptions and conclusions that can be drawn based on the historical and archaeological material that is available. The existence of temples to Roman emperors in at least some of the seven cities in the book of Revelation is certain.⁷¹ The imperial cult ritual consisted of sacrifices

⁶⁸ Collins, 71.

⁶⁹ Leonard Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 101-15. Also see Beale, 13. Beale notes that while there was no official policy to worship Domitian as a living god, the title was expected and therefore there is some basis to the fact that Domitian might have been a megalomaniac of sorts and not just the subject of politically motivated bias. For an in depth look at Domitian see, Brian Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*. (New York: Routledge, 1992).

⁷⁰ S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 252-264. There is evidence for the emperor cult during or before the reign of Domitian in four of the seven cities mentioned in Revelation 2-3, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, and Laodicea. In 27 B.C.E, Ephesus and Pergamum have temples built and dedicated to Augustus. Ephesus also had a temple dedicated to Julius Caesar that was commissioned by Augustus in 29 B.C.E.; see Dio Cassius *Hist.* 51.20.6-8. Domitian had a temple in Ephesus ca. 82-84 C.E. Smyrna had a temple dedicated to Tiberius; also see Tacitus *Ann.* 4.15 and 4.56. Evidence for a

and hymns and was probably preceded by processions and ended with banquets.⁷² It seems likely that one would find an image of the emperor in the temple.⁷³ Lastly, and perhaps the best evidence against both a late date and Roman opposition is that there is no evidence of forced sacrifice to the emperor in the first century C.E.⁷⁴

The reality of the imperial cult is that it seems to be part of a beneficiary system to give stability to the empire and as a sign of the status quo of the *Pax Romana*. The imperial cult had more to do with social order and hierarchy as well as being concerned with defining and establishing relationships of power. Roman citizens living in the provinces needed to construct identities that demonstrated their superiority over non-citizens and would therefore follow the precedent set forth by Rome.⁷⁵ In addition to Roman citizens, it was the provincial elites among them that recognized the benefit of setting up an imperial cult and that the integration of such a cult would allow them access to the imperial system as a whole.⁷⁶

Additionally, there is no evidence for an empire-wide, unified persecution of Christians, particularly under the reign of Domitian, or any emperor.⁷⁷ Candida Moss, a leading expert on early Christianity notes that the "Age of Martyrs," a period covering roughly 300 years before the Emperor Constantine, is a fiction in that there is no evidence that there was a sustained effort by the Romans to persecute Christians. Instead, these stories were exaggerations; highly stylized rewritings of Jewish, Greek, and Roman noble death traditions; and even forgeries designed to

temple to Domitian in Laodicea is entirely numismatic but in conjunction with its wealth it seems likely that one existed there as well *ca.* 84 C.E.; which is around the time the temple dedicated to him appears in Ephesus.

⁷² Price, 208, 210-211.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 188-191.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 221. Price notes four references to sacrifice to the emperor in the martyr acts: *Acta Pionii* 8; Eusebius *Mart. Pal.* 1.1, 1.54; and Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 7.15. Also see, page 126 in which Price notes, "There is no parallel, so far as I know, for such an expression of conflict between the imperial cult and Christianity in any pre-Constantinian document".

⁷⁵ Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome: Vol. 1, A History*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 361-362.

⁷⁶ Athanasios Rizakis, "Urban Elites in the Roman East: Enhancing Regional Positions and Social Superiority." *A Companion to Roman Religion*, edited by Jorg Rupke, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 317-330.

⁷⁷ G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?" *Past and Present* 26 (1963).

marginalize heretics, inspire the faithful, and fund churches.⁷⁸ Because religion and the state were often intertwined in Roman culture not paying homage to the imperial cult may have caused oppression or even ostracism,⁷⁹ it is difficult to justify this as the description that John uses to describe the Whore of Babylon who is “drunk on the blood of the saints.”⁸⁰ It is also important to note that the major themes in the seven letters focus on internal situations and that only three passages deal with external issues (2:8-11, 13; 3:8-10) such as persecution. Furthermore, only the passages in 2:8-11, written to the church at Smyrna, mention ‘tribulation’ specifically, but it does not say what this tribulation is, if it comes from an outside source and if it does, what or who is causing it. John does go on to note that there are problems with people who blaspheme them and that they are “those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not...” He notes this accusation again about “those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not” to the church at Philadelphia, but the church there is noted as persevering nonetheless. The only verse that notes anyone being killed is found in 2:13 which mentions a man named Antipas being killed, but John does not say when this happened, who killed him, or what the motive was for doing so.

An important observation is that John observes that the Whore of Babylon is riding a beast. What John might be doing is using this as either a parody, or as an instantly recognizable symbol referring to the *Magna Mater* or Great Mother. John of Patmos could be employing the rhetorical device of *ekphrasis*, which is a detailed description of a work of art.⁸¹ The goddess known as the Great Mother was used and known in early history, going back as far as 6,000 B.C.

⁷⁸ Candida Moss, *The Myth of Persecution: How the Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013).

⁷⁹ This could be a potential reason why John was exiled to Patmos, though there is no historical precedent for it.

⁸⁰ For a counterview, see Donald L. Jones, “Christianity and the Roman Imperial Cult,” *ANRW* 2.23.2 (1034). Jones sees the imperial cult as significant and as a result there were persecutions associated with it.

⁸¹ David Aune, 923.

in Phrygia in Asia. The goddess reached Greece by the sixth century B.C. and she arrived in Rome in around 180 B.C. where as Cybele of Pessinus, she becomes the first officially consecrated deity by Rome from the East.⁸² Statues depicting her sometimes show her riding on a lion.⁸³

Aune notes a sestertius with the image of the Roman emperor Vespasian on one side, and the goddess Roma on the other.⁸⁴ An obvious interpretation of the Whore of Babylon would in fact be that it is representative of Rome in the form of the goddess Roma. However, Aune is quick to point out that this interpretation is restrictive, and by the second century, there were two major approaches to the use of *ekphrasis* in ancient literature. One approach focuses on the necessity of understanding and interpreting the work itself, the other focuses on the hidden meanings conveyed by the picture or work of art, which are usually uncovered through an allegorical mode of interpretation; one where the meaning is obvious and a second where the meaning must be carefully explained.⁸⁵ If the symbol of the Whore of Babylon was obvious to John's audience, then an explanation would not be needed and probably would not be given as it would have been collectively understood to mean Rome and John's vision would have continued from there. However, John goes into a lengthy description that continues into chapter 18 as well. As will be demonstrated, John's description uses Biblical allusions from the prophetic books and other Jewish texts to describe the Whore of Babylon.⁸⁶

Aune's interpretation of the Whore of Babylon being Rome shows some of the perils mentioned in the introduction; that to ignore Biblical allusions, symbols and motifs and interpret

⁸² Robert Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 28-30. For the account of Cybele coming to Rome see Livy, *Hist.* 24.10.4-11.8.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁸⁴ Aune, 920.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 923-924.

⁸⁶ For a detailed description, see below.

a passage from the Bible almost exclusively with non-Biblical and historical sources often leads to a misinterpretation of what the author meant. For example, Aune uses the sestertius for interpretation of the Whore as well as the seven hills, which the Whore sits on.⁸⁷ He then points out that in Revelation 17:5, the Whore has the word mystery written on her forehead noting that this could be in reference to the three secret names of Rome.⁸⁸ Aune does note that in verse four, the Whore is holding a golden cup “filled with the abominations and the impurities of her fornication” and is quick to point out that this is an allusion to Jeremiah 28:7 which states that “Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord’s hand....” which Aune notes is a metaphor for the sin of Babylon and in turn the sins of the Roman Empire. Aune holds the presupposition that Rome is Babylon, but fails to address what sins Rome might have with Israel’s god.

What Aune fails to note is that there is another Biblical allusion to whores holding golden cups, one that is better suited to explain 17:4. I would point out that John’s description alludes to the theme of whores in Ezekiel chapter 23 when he makes a metaphor of two sisters, Oholah and Oholibah. Oholah is noted as being Samaria and Oholibah is Jerusalem; both cities end up prostituting themselves to powerful kingdoms and both end up stripped and killed; first Samaria and then Jerusalem. It is noted that Oholibah is given the cup of her now dead sister; in it is horror and desolation.⁸⁹ In the following chapter, Aune does examine the destruction of the Whore and he does include Biblical allusions to it, but his conclusion like Bauckham’s is that the Whore of Babylon is Rome.⁹⁰ This identification has several problems, the first being historical since Revelation 17:16 states that the beast and the ten kings hate the Whore and as a result strip her, kill her and burn her. By implication then, this sets up Rome destroying Rome or its

⁸⁷ See below.

⁸⁸ Pliny, *Hist. nat.* 28.4.18; Plutarch, *Quaest. Rom.* 61. The names are Flora, Roma and Amor. Amor is Roma spelled backwards and has been found in a graffito in Pompey in the form of a square palindrome.

⁸⁹ Ezekiel 23:31-34

⁹⁰ Aune, 961-1012.

economic or religious system; something that historically did not happen.⁹¹ Rome did see conflict during the Year of the Four Emperors (68-69 C.E.), which resulted in the destruction of the temple to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, however it would be difficult to demonstrate this as the key element in which John of Patmos was writing or, if being exiled he would have been aware of the situation.⁹² Two, it largely ignores Biblical allusions to the destruction of Jerusalem that will be looked at in detail below. Lastly, it fails to acknowledge that historically Rome did in fact destroy a great city that was an economic and religious center to many people. In 70 C.E., Rome conquered Jerusalem.

The Temple and the Temple Cult

If opposition to Rome is not found explicitly in the New Testament, than what opposition is found? Is it opposition to the Jews? The answer is no, because we must remember that the early Christians are in reality a sect of Judaism and its early adherents were Jewish; therefore the answer needs to be more focused. For this thesis, the answer is not only the Temple but also the cult whose authority is based on it. As noted above with Jesus and the Roman centurion, there are subtle statements that when glossed over or read in isolation, one misses the eschatological meaning and veracity of them. As will be demonstrated below, even functions such as baptism are very much an eschatological device that is employed specifically against Jerusalem, its temple and its cult.

The importance of the temple at Jerusalem cannot be understated. It was a symbol of Judaism, the site of pilgrimages and a place where adherents offered sacrifice and sent their taxes. The book of Ezra notes that by the second year after returning from Babylonian captivity, the Israelites started construction on a second temple in Jerusalem since the Babylonian Empire had

⁹¹ The Visigoths in 410 C.E. under the command of Alaric conquered Western Rome, which would include the city of Rome.

⁹² Tacitus, *Hist.* 4.

destroyed the first one; this starts the period collectively known as Second Temple Judaism.⁹³ It was held in such high regard by the majority of Jews that when Herod proposed to renovate it, it sent panic throughout the majority of Jews. So much so, that Herod had to first assemble all the components needed for renovation before reconstruction could begin.⁹⁴ However, even with the majority of Jews in support of the temple at Jerusalem, I noted above that there were to our current knowledge, three other temples as well; one in Elephantine in Upper Egypt, another on Mount Gerizim and one in Leontopolis in Egypt. The temple at Leontopolis, near the delta of the Nile River in Egypt, failed to gain any majority recognition. According to Josephus in *Antiquities of the Jews*, it was petitioned to be built by Onias on the basis that the prophet Isaiah had prophesized that an altar to God was to be built in Egypt, but elsewhere he notes that Onias built the temple specifically to contend with the one in Jerusalem because he had been banished from Jerusalem for failing on various accounts as a high priest there.⁹⁵ These further attest the importance of the temple at Jerusalem, but the thing to take away is that there were other temples built and their construction is an early testimony to problems some Jews had with the temple at Jerusalem, but the erection of temples outside Jerusalem is not the only testimony of opposition towards it.

In *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus notes a Jewish sect called the Essenes. They might be considered a dissident sect in that they have removed themselves from Jerusalem as a whole

⁹³ Ezra 5:12. Ezra 5 is important to this thesis, because it offers an insight that will become a motif as to why the Babylonians destroyed the first temple. It contains a letter written to the current king of Persia, Darius the Great, and notes the reason for destruction, "But because our fathers provoked the God of heaven to wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this temple and carried the people away to Babylon." Cyrus the Great of Persia allowed the Israelites under the leadership of Zerubbabel to return to their homeland in 538 B.C.E. after he conquered the Babylonians. In the first year they set up an altar and as noted above, by the second year construction on a new temple begins.

⁹⁴ Josephus, *Ant.* 15.380-425. Reconstruction took a year and half and all the materials required had to be brought to the site before construction could begin; apparently to help ease the fears and anxiety of the populace. When it was completed the sacrifices offered there could not be counted, but Josephus notes 300 bulls among the sacrificed animals.

⁹⁵ Isaiah 19:19, Josephus, *J.W.* 7.431.

and offer sacrifices on their own, not at the temple. Josephus notes that they do this because “they have more pure lustrations of their own.”⁹⁶ Josephus unfortunately does not elaborate on this, but it is important to note that the Essenes are not forgoing sacrifice, but they are not allowing it to be performed through the normal channels, i.e. the temple cult. The Community at Qumran, whether they were the Essenes or another dissident Jewish sect altogether, also removed themselves from Jerusalem as well. We are fortunate to have, at least in part, some of their writings, which are collectively known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. The reason for their decision to not take part in the Temple or associate with the temple cult is laid out in their writings. A document titled *The Community Rule* speaks of the establishment of a Council of the Community consisting of twelve men and three priests from Israel. Upon election, they were to remove themselves from “the habitation of unjust men.”⁹⁷ Another writing, the *Damascus Document* notes that those who join the community are not to enter the Temple and are to separate from a group of people noted as the “sons of the Pit.” “None of those brought into the Covenant shall enter the Temple to light His altar in vain...they shall separate from the sons of the Pit and shall keep away from the unclean riches of wickedness acquired by vow or anathema for from the Temple treasury....”⁹⁸

Opposition to the Temple, specifically because of the temple cult, also appears in religious texts as well, and the Temple is absent from the future, eschatological kingdom in some apocalyptic tracts; this is the case in the book of Revelation, and also in the book of Enoch, written in the first or second century B.C.E. Aside from the Old Testament, the Book of Enoch was a major source of influence on the New Testament; the motifs of an eschatological kingdom

⁹⁶ Josephus, *Ant.* 5.18,19. It is debated if they wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls and for this thesis I will note the group that authored the Dead Sea Scrolls as the Community at Qumran, for more see below.

⁹⁷ 1QS 8:12,13.

⁹⁸ CD 6:13-17.

and a messiah are found within. If not directly quoted, it is heavily alluded to by all of the authors of the New Testament, including John of Patmos who uses it as a source on over fifty occasions including unrighteousness on Earth and a New Jerusalem, i.e. eschatological kingdom.⁹⁹ In Enoch 89, we find the author using animals as symbols to represent groups of peoples.¹⁰⁰ One symbol is that of sheep, though the sheep are further sub-divided by different shepherds. One group of sheep decides to rebuild the Temple (symbolized by a tower), but the bread is polluted and impure and as a result, they are handed over to their shepherds for destruction; they are dispersed and destroyed by beasts. As a result of their destruction, birds of prey devour the dead bodies.¹⁰¹ The consequence of this is that the tower they built, now noted as an old house, is removed by God and replaced with a new house. This is a theme that John of Patmos concludes the book of Revelation with in chapter 21, which reveals New Jerusalem. An interesting point to note is that the author of Enoch does not include an actual temple (or tower) being constructed in the new house.

John of Patmos carries this idea forward with his vision of the New Jerusalem; in Revelation 21:2, 22 “Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband... But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.” In both Enoch and the book of Revelation, the eschatological kingdom, New Jerusalem in the case of Revelation, do not include a temple structure. Enoch does not make mention as to why, but John of Patmos points out that God and the Lamb are now the temple. The idea of the Temple being a temporary structure and the idea of

⁹⁹ R. H. Charles, *The Book of Enoch*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1893).

¹⁰⁰ James H. Charlesworth, ed. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature & Testaments*. (Garden City, NY: Double Day & Co., 1983), 5. Oxen symbolize the patriarchs, sheep symbolize Israel, beasts and birds of prey symbolize oppressors, a great horned sheep is a rising Jewish leader and a white bull with great horns symbolizes the Jewish messiah.

¹⁰¹ Enoch 90:2-4. This is a striking parallel to Matthew 24:28 which is part of the Olivet Discourse and notes birds of prey coming upon a carcass.

the messiah taking the place of the Temple are two motifs that John of Patmos was probably exposed to and is therefore including in his vision.¹⁰² Again, we see a focal point of Jewish ideology being the Temple and the temple cult; there is little if any mention of an outside group of people or structure such as the city of Rome and Romans. Why? Because neither of them is a motif carried throughout the corpus of Jewish writings. Where is the epicenter of this motif or is John of Patmos constructing it in a vacuum? The answer is found in the corpus of Jewish writings, in the prophetic books in the Old Testament, the writings of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the traditions of Jewish figures such as John the Baptist and Jesus.

¹⁰² Col. 2:16,17 “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.” Also of importance, John 2:19-21 “Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” But He was speaking of the temple of His body.”

CHAPTER 5

JEWISH WRITINGS, THE COMMUNITY AT QUMRAN AND JOHN THE BAPTIST

Jewish Writings

As has been demonstrated above and will be further examined, John of Patmos uses the collective writings of the Old Testament, though he never directly quotes any of them; instead he draws from Jewish motifs, symbols and allusions to craft his own vision. The writings he draws from, mostly prophetic writings, note that Jerusalem and by extension the Temple are to be the object of the wrath of God; in the prophets' case this is due to being unfaithful and breaking the covenant they held. There are other writings that note a similar charge and though John of Patmos doesn't quote them directly, it is likely that the themes of a sinful priesthood and an apostate laity represents a view that was held at least in part by some Jews. It is not unreasonable that this view may have also affected John of Patmos, as well as other Christians and quite possibly John the Baptist and Jesus as well. Other writings are an important insight into the possible thought process of some Jews and how they viewed things such as Jerusalem, the temple and why the wrath of God was or would be brought about. Texts such as these allow a historian a window into the "mentality" of what was happening during the time in which those texts were written.

The Community at Qumran

The Community at Qumran was a group of Jews that retreated to the wilderness northwest of the Dead Sea near a village known today as Qumran, probably around the time of the Hasmonean Revolt in 166 B.C.E. for reasons that were probably related to them being in support of the Zadokite priesthood as opposed to the Hasmonean line.¹⁰³ In 1947 a young

¹⁰³ For general information see Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 488-496. The exact identity of the community at Qumran is debated among scholars. Most agree

shepherd initially discovered this community's writings, which include most of the writings of the Old Testament except the book of Esther. In addition to scrolls of the Old Testament, several other writings would be found that were unique to them including writings such as *The War Scroll* and *Community Rule*. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls offers a unique opportunity into the beliefs of another Jewish sect before and during the time of John of Patmos. It follows that their views on Jerusalem offer an important insight into the minds of other Jews in both first centuries.

Unique writings aside, the community of Qumran would apply an eisegetical methodology known as a *peshet* to various books of the Bible.¹⁰⁴ The word *peshet* (פֶּשֶׁט) is used in the Bible almost exclusively in the book of Daniel (aside from one verse in Ecclesiastes 8:1) and means interpretation.¹⁰⁵ It is used throughout the book of Daniel as Daniel interprets (peshet) dreams; in the Dead Sea Scrolls, *peshetim* (plural of peshet) are a form of written eisegetical methodology, though eisegetical interpretations as a whole are not unique to them.¹⁰⁶ In a peshet, a biblical verse is listed and then is immediately followed by an interpretation (peshet) that would have expressed a view relevant to the interpreter and his intended audience.

they were a Jewish sect called the Essenes and that Qumran went through four phases not including an initial phase around the Hasmonean Revolt of 166 B.C.E. Phase one generally starts around the rule of John Hyrcanus and phase four ends abruptly in 68 C.E. when the Romans destroyed the settlement during the Jewish Revolt. For an in depth look into the settlement at Qumran, see Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). For an alternate view as to the identification of the community at Qumran, see Lawrence Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994), Schiffman sees the community at Qumran as a group of Sadducees that fled Jerusalem around the time of the Hasmonean Revolt.

¹⁰⁴ An interpretation, that expresses the interpreter's own ideas or bias rather than the meaning of the text.

¹⁰⁵ Adele Berlin and Marc Brettler, eds. *The Jewish Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University, 2004), 1839-1840. Though peshet is literally translated as interpretation, the interpretation is not considered a personal opinion or a plausible solution to an exegetical problem. Instead biblically and especially within the context of Second Temple Judaism, it implies that the interpreter was divinely authorized or had divine authority to make the interpretation.

¹⁰⁶ Targums, תַּרְגּוּם, which means translation, would often be translations from Hebrew into Aramaic. Often they would include short Midrashim or homiletic interpretations of the Bible.

The pesher of the book of Habakkuk, denoted as 1QpHab among the Dead Sea Scrolls, contains an allusion to the Romans sacking Jerusalem. Without interpretation, a reading of the book of Habakkuk has the prophet Habakkuk crying out to God for the injustices and sins of the land of Israel and Judah. God answers Habakkuk telling him that shortly the Babylonians will come and conquer the area and through them God will punish the wicked.¹⁰⁷ In the pesher of Habakkuk, the Babylonians are interpreted as the Kittim and it is noted that the Kittim are the Romans. Kittim (כִּיִּיִם) is a word that is used at different points in the Bible to denote various things,¹⁰⁸ however Mediterranean islands appears to be the most common translation for Kittim until the Old Testament was translated into Greek starting around the third century B.C.E.¹⁰⁹ When translators were translating the book of Daniel into Greek, they translated Kittim into Ῥωμαῖοι, or Romans.¹¹⁰ Habakkuk 1:6 reads, “For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans (Babylonians), a bitter and hasty nation which marches through the breadth of the earth.” In the pesher, the interpreter writes, “Its interpretation concerns the Kittim (Romans) who are swift and powerful in battle, to slay man [with the edge of the sword] in the kingdom of the Kittim.”¹¹¹ Habakkuk 2:8 continues with, “Since you pillaged many countries, the rest of the peoples will pillage you.” The pesher interpretation here is startling proclamation against Jerusalem as it reads, “The interpretation concerns the last priests of Jerusalem who will accumulate riches and loot from plundering the peoples. However in the last days their riches and their loot will fall into the hands of the army of the Kittim (Romans).” This interpretation sheds light on a few things, the first being that the community at Qumran viewed the current priests in the Temple as corrupt,

¹⁰⁷ The actual date of the writing of Habakkuk is debated, but most scholars agree that it was written in regards to the Babylonians conquering the area in 586 B.C.E.

¹⁰⁸ Originally it appears as the name of the great grandson of Noah, Genesis 10:4. Later it was used to describe Mediterranean islands, Jer. 2:10 and Ezekiel 27:6. Josephus uses it to identify Cyprus specifically, *Ant.* 1.6.1

¹⁰⁹ *Letter of Aristeas*. This translation is commonly referred to as the LXX.

¹¹⁰ Dan. 11:30.

¹¹¹ Translation by Lawrence Schiffman, see *Texts and Traditions: A Source Reader for the Study of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism*. (Hoboken: Ktav Publishing House, 1998), 354-356.

and that because they were connected with the Temple and by extension Jerusalem, that Jerusalem was to be destroyed because of their corruption. However, since Babylon was no longer an empire, Rome is inserted into the interpretation as the army, like Babylon that would destroy the city. In turn, just as Jerusalem had fallen to the Babylonians in the past because of their sins, the Community at Qumran viewed Jerusalem as eventually falling to the Romans because of their sins

John the Baptist

In regards to sources on John the Baptist it is unfortunate that we have little that can be traced back with much confidence to John the Baptist himself, with the possible exception of what we find in the Gospels. We must assume that much of what John the Baptist said was not written down but instead was transmitted orally, and therefore has been imperfectly preserved. It is quite possible that what he did say was similar to what Jesus' preaching and therefore John the Baptist's message reverberates throughout the Gospels and other writings within the New Testament. John the Baptist remains an important and popular Jewish figure to study due to his connection with Jesus and his eschatological preaching.¹¹²

It is possible that John of Patmos might have been a disciple of John the Baptist or grew up with first or second generation followers of his. This idea is explored by the scholar J. Massyngberde Ford, that parts of the book of Revelation emanate from the circle of John the Baptist and reflect his own and therefore his disciples' expectation of events that must happen prior to not only the messiah coming but also prior to the end of the current age.¹¹³ The book of Acts preserves a possible connection between John of Patmos and John the Baptist, by way of

¹¹² Josephus not only mentioned John the Baptist, he also stressed his popularity in Palestine, *Ant.* 18.116-119. Luke 1:36 claims he was a cousin of Jesus, and all the Gospels agree that he baptized Jesus. On the eschatological nature of his preaching, see below.

¹¹³ J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 50-55.

Asia, specifically Ephesus. Acts 19:1-3 states, “And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” So they said to him, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” And he said to them, “Into what then were you baptized?” So they said, “Into John’s baptism.”¹¹⁴ Though this does not prove that John of Patmos was one of them, the fact that the church at Ephesus has a connection to John the Baptist possibly made John of Patmos and his prophecy more acceptable to them.

The Gospel of John notes that John the Baptist received a revelation from God, “When you see the Spirit descend and rest on someone, he is the one who is to baptize with a holy Spirit.”¹¹⁵ Ford notes that there are four themes that in all of the New Testament are unique to both the sections of the Gospels that concern John the Baptist and to the book of Revelation. These themes are the Lamb of God, the title “He that cometh,” the concept of baptism by fire and the direct application of the figure of the bridegroom to Jesus. Other themes that connect the book of Revelation to John the Baptist are the wrath of God, a tree as a metaphor for leaders of the people, and the idea of an adulterous generation. Jesus also drew on the theme of an adulterous generation as well.¹¹⁶

One of the few statements purportedly spoken by John the Baptist is found in Matthew 3:1- 3, 8-12, and it is worth noting parts of it:

¹¹⁴ Daniel Dapaah, *The Relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth, A Critical Study*. (New York: University Press of America. 2005), 49. Dapaah notes that John the Baptist’s baptism was both eschatological and messianic. This could reveal that those at Ephesus were well versed in both the end of the age they were living in and the expectation of a messiah. See more below.

¹¹⁵ John 1:33.

¹¹⁶ Matt. 12:39; 16:4; Mark 8:38. Jesus also notes the present generation being the generation that would be witness to the end of the age, see Matthew 24:34 and parallels. For an in depth look, see below.

“In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”... But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as *our* father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.¹¹⁷ His winnowing fan *is* in his hand, and he will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather his wheat into the barn; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Examining this passage, three key issues emerged, two of which are timing and object(s) of wrath and the third being the idea of God or a messianic type figure delivering the wrath. John the Baptist believes that the Kingdom of God is near, “at hand.” It is even quite possible that he expected to be living when it arrived. Secondly, he notes a coming wrath and there are several things of worth to note in this passage, the first being audience. John is directing his statement of wrath toward other Jewish sects; in this case it is to the Pharisees and Sadducees as opposed to a pagan or Roman group. He further notes timing and wrath by stating that “the ax is laid to the root of the trees” and that trees that do not bear good fruit are “cut down and thrown into the fire.” In regards to John the Baptist’s prophetic mission, he appears to see himself as a forerunner to an apocalyptic figure who will bring wrath, symbolically noted by separating wheat from chaff with the chaff being burned up. What this passage notes is that earlier on, in what might be considered a pre-Christian, Jewish theology, when the Kingdom of God is imminent, there is to be a wrath which John the Baptist directs towards other Jews, and that there is to be a apocalyptic type figure involved in both of those.¹¹⁸ This is an early and important motif that sets up immediacy and wrath towards other Jews who are viewed as unrighteous and therefore objects of God’s

¹¹⁷ See also Enoch 91:8,11.

¹¹⁸ Clarke Rothschild, *Baptist Traditions and Q*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 190. (Tubingen, Germany, 2005), 192. Clarke notes, “In this passage John predicts one who is powerful, if not Yahweh himself, whose arrival is imminent and whose work will include vindication of the righteous and condemnation of the unrighteous in a cosmic scale judgment.”

wrath.¹¹⁹ We can compare the idea of fleeing the coming wrath with Jesus' warning to his disciples to flee Jerusalem.¹²⁰

Another key issue is one of baptism, which John the Baptist is using as an eschatological device. We don't often connect baptism with eschatology, but it appears to be an early step that one would have done to be ready for the coming kingdom, a kingdom that was to come about eschatologically. Many associate baptism with a public pronouncement of faith, symbolically demonstrating that one is now a member of the Christian community. But for John the Baptist and with his belief that the Kingdom of God is at hand, his baptism is used symbolically in preparation for it. In his mind, one must repent in preparation of the coming kingdom, be clean.¹²¹ His baptism is not a declaration that one has joined a specific community; it is a declaration that one is ready for the eschatological Kingdom of God. We read that many come from Judea and Jerusalem specifically to take part in his baptism in the Jordan River,¹²² and as a consequence these people are bypassing the Temple and its functions as a way to be made clean and subverting the temple cult that performs such functions. It is a clarion call that the Temple and the cult that runs it no longer has any authority or power, they will not be needed in the coming eschatological Kingdom of God, something new is on the horizon.

Similar to baptism being performed as a subtle statement against the Temple, Mark 7:15 offers an interesting statement by Jesus, "There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man." One can take this statement as a statement only about purity, but in doing so one misses the eschatological implications of it. The setup behind this statement is that Jesus' disciples are

¹¹⁹ Matt.10:23 notes timing for the arrival of the apocalyptic Son of Man, stating that the apostles won't be able to reach all of the cities in Israel before he arrives.

¹²⁰ Matt. 24:16 and Mark 13:14.

¹²¹ Mark 1:4.

¹²² Mark 1:5.

eating bread without having washed their hands, something that according to Mark some Pharisees and scribes are quick to object to. Isaiah 1:11-15 notes that sacrifice and other functions of the temple have little bearing on the god of Israel when those performing them are impure, unclean or in a state of sin themselves:

“To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me?” says the Lord. “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats. “When you come to appear before me, who has required this from your hand, to trample my courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. your New Moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they are a trouble to me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.”

What was it then that they should do if sacrifice was not the way to become clean? Isaiah continues (1:16), “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.”

Historically, John the Baptist is not the only prophet from the first century to speak out against the Temple. Both Josephus and the book of Acts speak of a prophet known simply as the “Egyptian” bringing a force of several thousand against Jerusalem around 55 C.E.¹²³ We do not know what ideology might have spurred him to do this, Josephus notes that he is a false prophet and a pretender, but we are told that he came from the wilderness like John the Baptist and that he went to the Mount of Olives to make his statement against Jerusalem like Jesus did in the Olivet Discourse. He ultimately is forced to flee back to the wilderness when Roman soldiers are dispatched from Jerusalem and kill or take captive several of his men.

¹²³ Josephus, *J.W.* 2.261-263; Acts 21:38. Josephus states that he had around 30,000 men with him, Acts notes 4,000.

CHAPTER 6

PARABLES AND THE PARABLE OF THE TENANTS

Parables

Jesus, like John the Baptist also makes allusions and references (as well as direct statements) towards the Temple and Jerusalem being sacked; largely with the method of making statements against the ruling elite. In the case of Jesus, it is largely done in the form of parables, of which the New Testament attributes forty-six of to him. A parable is a story with a lesson usually full of symbols and imagery that is transmitted orally at first, but we find in the Old Testament occasionally parables being acted out instead of being told.¹²⁴

Scholar Richard Bauckham explores the influence of the gospels on the book of Revelation in his work *The Climax of Prophecy*, noting that the gospels and specifically the parables of Jesus remain the only undisputed example from the first century of prophetic utterances made by Jesus in the first person. As a result, for scholars investigating the creative activity of Christian prophets, they are an invaluable source of information.¹²⁵ Bauckham notes that in using the gospels and the parables, there are some assumptions that must be made, many of which are not easily demonstrable. These assumptions include that the book of Revelation is typical of early Christian prophecy and that this, being a later work, is representative of earlier prophets such as John the Baptist and Jesus. The relationship between early prophetic statements and the book of Revelation is of interest in that John of Patmos might have known of these traditions from independent works other than the gospels; Bauckham notes the differences at times in Greek usage between the gospels and the book of Revelation.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Jeremiah 13:1-14, 19:1-5, 32:1-44, Ezekiel 4:1-17, Isaiah 20:1-6.

¹²⁵ Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 92-117.

¹²⁶ Rev. 3:5. *cf.* Matt. 10:32 and Luke 12:8.

Bauckham focuses largely on parables that he calls *parousia* parables, that is parables that note the coming of the Lord or of an apocalyptic figure such as the Son of Man.¹²⁷ There is also the tendency to ‘deparabolize’ the parables, that is when the application of the parable breaks down the literary structure of the parable.¹²⁸ Deparabolization might also be understood as an allegorization of a parable. Deparabolization is best seen in Luke’s version of the parable of the Watching Servants (Luke 12:35-40) and in Mark’s version of the parable of the Doorkeeper (Mark 13:33-37), both of which are in a more allegorical form that would have been understood by the original audience. Nonetheless the parables, in their original form or in their deparabolized form set up metaphors that become common among early Christians and as a result are often used as allusions by later writers such as Paul and John of Patmos. This is perhaps best seen in the use of a metaphorical thief arriving at an unknown time. In the Gospels this is seen in the parable of the Watchful Servants in Luke 12:35-40 and repeated as part of the conclusion to the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24:43-44. In an early epistle, Paul uses the metaphor of a thief arriving at an unknown time as found in 1 Thessalonians 5:2,4. This is also used in 2 Peter 3:10 as well, the author of that epistle noting that the Day of the Lord is like the thief arriving at an unknown time.

The idea of using metaphors and allusions that originate back to people, namely Jesus, is not unique to John of Patmos and is demonstrated that they were commonly used. Bauckham sums up five points that help us understand the original audience of the book of Revelation. One, the *parousia* parables were widely used and familiar in the early church. Two, they were

¹²⁷ Bauckham focuses largely on the three parables of the Watching Servants, the Thief and the Servant in Authority found in Luke 12:35-40; 42-48, but notes Matt 24:43-44 which is the conclusion of the Olivet Discourse as well. Bauckham notes passages which are probable allusions in Revelation from the Gospels as being, Rev 3:5c cf. Matt. 10:32/Luke 12:8; Rev. 3:21 cf. Matt. 19:28/Luke 22:28-30; Rev. 1:3 cf. Luke 11:28; Rev. 1:7 cf. Matt. 24:30, Rev. 11:2 cf. Luke 21:24; Rev. 13:10 cf. Matt. 26:52; Rev. 1:7 cf. Matt. 10:38, Rev. 19:9 cf. Matt. 22:1-4.

¹²⁸ Bauckham, 99.

collected and associated from a very early stage. Three, because of their extensive usage and amenable subject matter, parables like the Thief could be deparabolized either as a simile or metaphor and would be absorbed into ordinary Christian discourse. Four, independent usage would coexist with continued popularity of parables. Lastly, the *Sitz im Leben* of the tradition of parables in the church is evidently the kind of eschatological model which the epistles exemplify, starting perhaps with 1 Thessalonians 5 and even going to a later second-century church text the *Didache*.¹²⁹

I would add a few insights to Baukham's five points. We will see that parables themselves often incorporate allusions and metaphors pulled from earlier works, largely from the Old Testament and in many cases from the prophetic books. As noted above, these could be enacted parables or presented in the form of an allegory; told with symbols and metaphors that the original audience would have been familiar with. This is important to note the overall themes and motifs that are represented when using allusions from other texts. This is vitally important when one looks at parables from the Gospels and the book of Revelation. With this background, it's important to explore specific parables and how they relate to the overall ideology that John of Patmos held as he wrote the book of Revelation.

The Parable of the Tenants

Jesus' proclamations against the Temple and Jerusalem are perhaps best seen in the parable known as the parable of the Tenants, which is found in all three Synoptic Gospels as well as the Gospel of Thomas.¹³⁰ While in the city of Jerusalem, Jesus tells a parable of a man who plants a vineyard (along with a wall, winepress and watchtower in Matthew and Mark's version), rents it to some tenants and then goes away on a journey. When the harvest comes, the man

¹²⁹ *Didache* 16.

¹³⁰ Mark 12:1-12; Matt. 21:33-46; Luke 20:9-19; Thomas 65.

sends a servant to collect the fruit but the tenants beat him; they kill another servant sent later. Finally the man sends his son with the belief that the tenants will respect him since he is the son of the vineyard owner, but instead the tenants kill the son in hope that they will actually inherit the vineyard. The owner comes, kills the tenants and then passes on the vineyard to others. The parable ends with the ruling elite understanding that the parable was directed towards them.¹³¹ As noted above, a statement against them would be a statement against Jerusalem and the Temple as well.

This conclusion could easily be drawn by the people that heard it as well because Jesus' parable was alluding back to Isaiah 5 and Psalm 80.¹³² Psalm 80 notes that Israel is a vine that is cut down by and burned because her god has left them;¹³³ Isaiah 5 however is more specific. In the beginning of Isaiah 5, it is the god of Israel that makes a vineyard, along with a wall, winepress and watchtower. He then charges the "dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah" to look after the vineyard. When no good fruit is found there; Israel's god turns the area into a wasteland and destroys it. That alone would be enough to clearly show that Jesus was making a statement against not only the elite, but also against Jerusalem and by extension the Temple, similar to Psalm 80. But when we continue in Isaiah 5 down to verses 26 - 30, we come to the conclusion that the means by which Israel's god will destroy Israel herself is through the armies of distant nations.¹³⁴ In those verses, Israel's god raises a signal and the foreign nations come like lions to attack and carry off Israel. Isaiah was no doubt referring to the Babylonians who

¹³¹ The version in Matthew is perhaps most explicit noting in verse 45, "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them."

¹³² N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 498.

¹³³ Psalm 80 could have been a theological foundation for John the Baptist if one views him (and his movement) as eschatological in nature. It might also then by extension be that for Jesus too. It is difficult to not read what John says, "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" in Matthew 3:10 and Luke 3:9 and not directly see Psalm 80:16, "Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire...."

¹³⁴ Wright, 348. Wright only goes to verse 7 which does include the statement of destruction (v. 5), but in doing so he fails to note that it is foreign nations that are to bring about destruction (v.26-30).

would sack Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E., but it would have been difficult for the audience listening to Jesus to not understand that the armies of distant nations would have been from the Roman Empire.

For a different view, scholar Craig Keener thinks that Jesus is alluding to 2 Samuel 12:1-7.¹³⁵ Keener notes that Jesus is drawing from those verses where Nathan is telling David about a rich land owner taking the only lamb from a poor land owner to serve to a guest, as opposed to simply serving one of the many that he himself possesses. Keener fails to make an eschatological connection here, and a purported connection between 2 Samuel 12:1-7 and the parable of the Tenants lacks the specific allusions and veracity of Isaiah 5 and Psalms 80. If Jesus is referring to 2 Samuel 12, it could very well be that Jesus is only and exclusively making a statement against the ruling elite, and not against Jerusalem and the Temple. But when we use the story of the vineyard from Isaiah and Psalms, the idea of a vineyard clearly refers to Israel¹³⁶ and there is a wrath coming upon the land as a whole, not on a small, select group.

This eschatological interpretation is further attested when the parable of the Tenants concludes with Jesus quoting Psalm 118:22-3: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes." In concluding with Psalm 118, Jesus might very well be using this as a double allusion in reference to Isaiah 8:13-14, which note it is Israel's god that becomes a stone that Israel stumbles over, falls, becomes ensnared by and is taken.¹³⁷ If this is what Jesus is saying, not only would it be a hint at his claim of being the messiah but again it also hints at the inhabitants of Jerusalem being destroyed. The force of this conclusion is made even more effective when it is coupled with the statement of John the Baptist

¹³⁵ Craig Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 285.

¹³⁶ See also Ezekiel 17:6 and Hosea 9:10.

¹³⁷ Wright, 396. Wright goes into greater detail including Isaiah 28:16 and Zechariah 4:7-10 but those are of little eschatological merit and are out of the scope of this paper.

in Matthew 3, where John notes that god or a messianic figure will be one of the components for the wrath and the end.

There is another parable which alludes to the destruction of Jerusalem in the Gospels, what Bart Ehrman calls an “enacted parable.”¹³⁸ Around the time of Passover, Jesus enters Jerusalem and notices the buying and selling of goods and proceeds to cause a disturbance by overturning tables and whipping people.¹³⁹ While doing so, the Gospels note that Jesus paraphrases Jeremiah 7:11 that the Temple complex has become a den of robbers. This could very well be a commentary on economics or a social commentary such as the rich versus the poor. However, similar to the parable of the Tenants which alludes to Isaiah 5, if it isn’t read in its entirety the eschatological theme is missed. In Jeremiah 7, the prophet Jeremiah warns Israel that if they don’t return to their god, his wrath will be upon them. Jeremiah notes two things, the first being that they should visit an area known as Shiloh. In the Bible, Shiloh was the original gathering place for the Israelites and was where the original tabernacle which housed the Ark of the Covenant was located.¹⁴⁰ However it fell to the Philistines as noted in 1 Samuel 4 and as a consequence the Ark of the Covenant was removed and it never returned to Shiloh again. This would be similar to saying that the presence of god had left Jerusalem and likewise was not to return. Also found in Jeremiah 7 is the fate of Ephraim which is an allusion to a foreign nation overtaking Israel; Ephraim was conquered by the Assyrians in 720 B.C. and become one of the Lost Tribes of Israel. Additionally, some people that heard Jesus making reference to Jeremiah 7

¹³⁸ Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press), 237.

¹³⁹ See Matt. 21:12-13, Mark 11:15-17, Luke 19:45-46, John 2:13-16.

¹⁴⁰ Joshua 18:1.

and connected Ephraim to it in context might have also gone further and coupled it with Hosea 5 which also passes judgment not only on Ephraim, but also on Judah as well.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Interestingly, in Hosea 5, Israel's god is described as a lion tearing and carrying off Israel; in Isaiah 5 referenced in the Parable of the Tenants, the foreign nations that come to destroy Israel are described as lions.

CHAPTER 7

THE BOOK OF JUBILEES, THE SEVEN WOES, THE OLIVET DISCOURSE AND BIRDS OF PREY

The Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 19) is perhaps the most direct statement given by Jesus against Jerusalem and the Temple and it will be explored in detail with its connection to the Whore of Babylon below. Since the Olivet Discourse is so direct, in any study of eschatology, the Olivet Discourse cannot be dismissed. Before examining it at length, it is important to examine what might have affected the Olivet Discourse, similarly to what might have affected and influenced John of Patmos as he wrote the book of Revelation. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus notes several events that must happen, several “birth pangs” that must come about before the end. These are largely general events, such as war and famine and it is difficult to know with any certainty if Jesus himself is alluding to an earlier, specific work outside of the Old Testament, but if he was he might be drawing from the book of Jubilees, a work that was written between 125 B.C.E. – 50 B.C.E. (Fragments of the text were discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls.)¹⁴² Even if he was not directly influenced by it, the book of Jubilees gives us a look at the overall idea of there being a wicked generation and that that generation was to go through a series of tribulations.

The book of Jubilees is more or less a retelling of events found in the book of Genesis, however, Jubilees 23 notes a “Messianic Age” of sorts to come after Abraham has died and the generations of the earth continue to multiply in which ultimately a wicked generation comes about. In verse 13, all the events that are to preclude the Messianic Age are listed with verse 14 noting that they are to fall on an evil generation; in the Olivet Discourse Jesus notes many of the

¹⁴² James Charlesworth, ed. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature & Testaments*. (Garden City, NY: Double Day & Co., 1983), 35-142; 4Qm16Jub and 4Qm17Jub.

same events listed. To parallel these, verse 13 begins with, “For calamity follows on calamity, and wound on wound, and tribulation on tribulation...” and similarly Jesus begins the Olivet Discourse noting, “But you are going to hear of wars and rumors of wars. See, do not be terrified; for all things must happen, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom...”¹⁴³ The book of Jubilees continues in verse 13 noting, “...and evil tidings on evil tidings, and illness on illness, and all evil judgments such as these, one with another, illness and overthrow, and snow and frost and ice, and fever, and chills, and torpor...” The Olivet Discourse continues in verses 10-12, “And then many will be ensnared, and they will deliver up one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will be raised and will cause many to err. And because lawlessness shall have been multiplied, the love of many will grow cold.” Though illness and a direct correlation to a cold temperature such as frost and ice are missing, it is striking to see that Jesus notes that men’s love will grow cold. Jubilees 23:13 continues noting, “...and famine...” which Jesus also notes, in Matthew 24:7b “and there will be famines...” The book of Jubilees 23:13 ends with “...and death, and sword, and captivity, and all kinds of calamities and pains.” Jesus notes in Matthew 24:9a, “Then they will deliver you up to affliction, and will kill you...” Though not an exact match, being “delivered” almost implies capture and being put to death, particularly in war, would mean being killed by a sword.¹⁴⁴ Verse 14 of Jubilees 23 tells to whom these events will happen: “And all these shall come on an evil generation, which transgresses on the earth: their works are uncleanness and fornication, and

¹⁴³ Matt. 24:6,7a. I’m using Matthew’s version of the Olivet Discourse due to wording and composition, but this is similarly found in the parallels as well.

¹⁴⁴ See Josephus’ *J.W.* 6. 8-9 for an account of Jerusalem’s overthrow by the Romans and some of the inhabitants being captured and led away.

pollution and abominations.”¹⁴⁵ Similarly, the Olivet Discourse closes with, “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place.”¹⁴⁶

The Seven Woes

Prior to giving the Olivet Discourse to his disciples, Jesus is in Jerusalem speaking to a crowd and is giving a speech that is known as the “Seven Woes.”¹⁴⁷ The speech is aimed against the Pharisees and the teachers of the law and Jesus’ accusation in summary is not only one of refusing to listen to righteous men and subsequently killing them, but also being hypocritical in that they are not practicing what they were preaching to others. It ends with Jesus noting that Jerusalem spills the blood of prophets and that though Jesus longed to protect Jerusalem, ultimately she will be left desolate.¹⁴⁸ There’s an interesting statement and a meaningful simile found in the Seven Woes. Jesus notes that to make a cup and plate clean, one needs to wash the inside of these objects and that the Pharisees (and no doubt others) are like whitewashed tombs – pretty on the outside but full of dead bones on the inside.¹⁴⁹ In keeping with the metric that it is not possible to separate the elites of Jerusalem from Jerusalem and the Temple, what Jesus is implying is that although the Temple had been cleansed and rededicated, the presence or glory of God had failed to return and inhabit it.¹⁵⁰ Additionally, those in charge of the Temple and overseeing it are corrupt and wicked. The timeframe that Jesus notes that these woes are going to

¹⁴⁵ Also see Rom. 1:18-32 which bears a resemblance to Jubilees 23:13, 14.

¹⁴⁶ Matt. 24:34. Elsewhere in the synoptic Gospels, Jesus notes that the generation he is living in is evil and adulterous (Matt. 12:39) and faithless and perverse (Matt. 17:17 and parallels.)

¹⁴⁷ Matt. 23, Mark 12, Luke 20. Also see Brent Kinman, “Parousia, Jesus’ “A-Triumphal” Entry, and the Fate of Jerusalem,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 118, No 2 (1999). Kinman notes that in Luke 19, Jesus is not welcomed in to Jerusalem the way a king should be, namely because the elite people such as the priests do not come to greet him and as a result this in turn is an act against God and leads to the subsequent downfall of Jerusalem. It adds to the conversation and is something of note, but I do not believe that this alone is what leads to Jerusalem’s downfall.

¹⁴⁸ Matt. 23:37 and Luke 13:34 has Jesus declaring he has longed to gather the Israelites under his wings like a hen protecting her chicks. Also see 2 Baruch 41:3-4 which notes Israelites that return to righteousness seek safety under God’s wings.

¹⁴⁹ Matt. 23:27.

¹⁵⁰ The rededication of the temple is found in 1 Maccabees 4-6 and gives us the story of Hanukkah.

fall is upon “this generation”. It is after this speech of Seven Woes, that Jesus and the disciples leave Jerusalem, and the disciples ask several questions, namely when were the events of the Seven Woes going to happen?

For the setting of the discourse, the Mount of Olives in which the discourse is being told is probably more than a coincidence.¹⁵¹ The book of Zechariah chapter 14 has armies gathered up against Jerusalem, but Israel’s god stands on the Mount of Olives and passes judgment on those nations that opposed Israel – and by extension those that opposed Israel’s god and his “saints” or holy ones. The setting here provides a paradoxical retelling of the story of Israel’s struggle, the coming of their god and of judgment and wrath.

By consequence, Jesus is saying that Jerusalem is going to have a struggle and he (as either Israel’s god or an agent of his) is going to pass some kind of judgment.¹⁵² The story in Zechariah 14 seems to be understood and prompts Jesus’ disciples to ask additional questions; “when will this be, what will be a sign when this is about to take place?”¹⁵³ If the disciples understood Jesus’ allusion to Zechariah 14 correctly, then they understood that Jerusalem will at some point be under attack, but will ultimately be redeemed and “saved” by their god. However, Jesus’ Olivet Discourse has refashioned the story found in Zechariah 14 with a change to include the question of who is “true” Israel and who is “false” Israel. With the Olivet Discourse there seems to be a paradigm shift in roles, the disciples and early Christians are the remnant and therefore they are “true” Israel and therefore not only is Israel/Jerusalem/the Temple/the elites not true Israel but they are now “wicked” Israel and therefore subject to their god’s wrath.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ The Mount of Olives faces Jerusalem and is located approximately halfway between Jerusalem and Bethany where Jesus and his disciples are spending the night.

¹⁵² N. T. Wright, 344-45.

¹⁵³ Luke 21:7.

¹⁵⁴ The idea of a remnant of Israel is found in many of the historical books in the Old Testament, such as 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, and is a motif throughout most of the books of the prophets – being a major motif in Isaiah and Jeremiah. Paul touches on the remnant theme as well, see Romans chapters 9 and 11 specifically. See Mark A.

This question is answered with a subtle warning by Jesus that at a certain point, the disciples and others in Judea are to flee from Jerusalem. In Matthew 24:15-16 Jesus warns, “So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel--let the reader understand--then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”

The idea of fleeing Jerusalem during a time of crisis is noted in other texts as well. In Daniel 12:10-11 there is set up in the Temple, the abomination that desolates and the author of the book 1 Maccabees applies this to Antiochus Epiphanes setting up a statue in the Temple.¹⁵⁵ In 1 Maccabees a Jewish priest named Mattathias was lamenting what is happening in the Temple but is asked by a Greek officer to sacrifice as well. Mattathias refuses stating that he will be faithful to his god but a Jew approaches to make a sacrifice to the abomination. As a result, Mattathias kills the Jew as well as the Greek officer and tears down the part of temple. What happens next is as follows: “Then Mattathias cried out in the city with a loud voice, saying: ‘Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!’ And he and his sons fled to the hills and left all that they had in the city.”¹⁵⁶ The thrust of this is Jesus warning that there is going to be an apostasy in Jerusalem and that those that understand it, similar to Mattathias, are to flee and be recognized as the faithful remnant of Israel, i.e. ‘true’ Israel.

The connection of Jerusalem to the Whore of Babylon in the book of Revelation is strong here. There is only one city that Israelites were warned to flee from by their prophets and that is the historical city of Babylon. The book of Isaiah notes, “Go out from Babylon, flee from

Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel: A Reconsideration of the Theology of Pre-Christian Judaism*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 621-637.

¹⁵⁵ 1 Maccabees 1:54-64.

¹⁵⁶ 1 Maccabees 2:7-28.

Chaldea..." and "Depart, depart, and go out from there!"¹⁵⁷ Zechariah notes, "Up, escape to Zion from Babylon."¹⁵⁸ Perhaps the strongest connection to Jesus' warning to flee is found in Jeremiah, "Flee from Babylon, and go out of the land..." and "Flee from Babylon! Run for your lives! Do not be destroyed because of her sins. It is time for the Lord's vengeance; he will pay her what she deserves." Jeremiah's warning ends noting that the historical city of Babylon is to be destroyed by God because of her sin.¹⁵⁹ In the book of Revelation, John of Patmos warns his readers to flee Babylon, "And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues."¹⁶⁰ Only now, John is noting that Jerusalem has become like the historical city of Babylon and that faithful Jews are to flee Jerusalem as they once fled from the historical city of Babylon.

The Olivet Discourse continues with Jesus telling the disciples that they will be delivered to both pagan leaders and Jewish leaders. This is a reference back to Micah 7:2-10 which speaks of judgment coming upon the wicked in Israel while the righteous of Israel wait out the hardships patiently and are saved by their god.¹⁶¹ However, with Jesus telling this to his disciples, it becomes clearer that they represent the "true" Israel and that the wicked of Israel/Jerusalem will be destroyed. In Jesus' version, Israel and specifically Jerusalem will be destroyed literally by an opposing army. In essence, Jesus is taking a prophetic story line or tradition and retelling it to focus on his own work or views that he and his followers are the righteous of Israel, the remnant to be saved and those that dwell within Jerusalem represent wicked Israel.

The beginning of Revelation chapter 6 is the opening of seals and contains the "four horseman of the apocalypse." Chapter 6 is an overall polemic and John of Patmos uses the Olivet

¹⁵⁷ Isaiah 48:20a; 52:11a.

¹⁵⁸ Zechariah 2:7.

¹⁵⁹ Jeremiah 51:6.

¹⁶⁰ Rev.18:4.

¹⁶¹ See also Matt. 10:16-23.

Discourse as an allusion.¹⁶² The Olivet Discourse begins in Matthew 24:6 and notes that there will be rumors of wars. Similarly, Revelation 6 opens with a white horse and a rider that carries both a bow and a crown as he goes out to conquer. This could be viewed as a rumor of war in that unlike the other three horsemen, it is unclear if this horse will be a friend or foe.¹⁶³ When we reach the first part of Matthew 24:7, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom...” we can fruitfully compare this to Revelation 6:4: “Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other.” The second part of Matthew 24:7 in the Olivet Discourse notes famines as does verses 5 and 6 of Revelation 6. The remaining part of verse 24:7 notes earthquakes and Revelation 6:12 mentions a great earthquake.¹⁶⁴

The Olivet Discourse in Matthew continues by mentioning persecutions in verses 9-13 and Revelation 6 notes persecutions as well in verses 9-11. Matthew 24:29 contains “cosmic changes”, as does Revelation 6:12-14. This is “prophetic language” that is often associated with the Day of the Lord in the Old Testament; Matthew 24:29 has Jesus quoting Isaiah 13:10 directly; Revelation 6:12-14 draws from Isaiah 34:3-4 among others.¹⁶⁵ With these parallels, it is difficult to ignore John of Patmos making allusions to the Olivet Discourse in chapter 6, and by consequence it reflects to the sacking of Jerusalem. Revelation 6 ends in verse 17: “For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” It is important to note Luke’s version of the

¹⁶² Also see Steve Gregg, *Revelation: Four Views: A Parallel Commentary*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), The early date commentary on Revelation 6 makes no mention of the Olivet Discourse but instead focuses some on Luke 19. The bulk of that commentary focuses on Josephus’ book *Jewish War*.

¹⁶³ Beale, 375. It is helpful that Beale focuses almost all of his commentary on Revelation 6 towards the four horsemen, which do appear in one form or another in the other parts of the Bible; see Zechariah 6:1-8. However, in doing so he fails to form a link between it and the Olivet Discourse, despite him acknowledging a resemblance; see 373.

¹⁶⁴ See also Rev. 16:18.

¹⁶⁵ For prophetic language showing cosmic changes, see also Isaiah 24:1-6, 19-23; 34:4; Ezekiel 32:6-8; Joel 2:10, 30-31; 3:15-16; and Habakkuk 3:6-11; Amos 8:8-9, Jeremiah 4:23-28 and Psalms 68:7-8. Also see Testament of Moses 10:3-6 and 4 Ezra 5:4-8 for later apocalyptic works using this motif as well.

Olivet Discourse that states, "...There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles."¹⁶⁶

These are a few allusions John of Patmos draws on from the Olivet Discourse, but they are not the only ones.¹⁶⁷ There is a running polemic throughout Revelation that draws from the Olivet Discourse and in doing so one can almost read the Olivet Discourse as an abridged version of Revelation, or Revelation as a fleshed out version of the Olivet Discourse. Another allusion the author of Revelation draws on is found in the Seven Woes speech (see above); this too alludes to Jerusalem being one of the focal points in Revelation and makes Jerusalem out to be Babylon. In the Seven Woes speech we read,

"I am sending to you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, so that upon you might fall *all the righteous blood shed upon the earth*, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. I tell you the truth; all this will come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you,... Look, your house is left to you desolate."¹⁶⁸

Note that Jesus is saying that all the blood shed upon the earth is being charged against not only a wicked generation, but also against the city of Jerusalem. In regards to Babylon, Revelation 18:24 reads, "In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth." Additionally see Luke 13:33, "In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day--for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!"

¹⁶⁶ Luke 21:23-24. Also recall John the Baptist's warning of the coming wrath in Matt. 3:7 and Luke 3:7.

¹⁶⁷ Matt. 24:14; Great Tribulation, Rev. 14:6; abomination that causes desolation, Matt. 24:15, *cf.* Rev. 13; faithful to flee from the city, Matt. 24:15; Rev. 18:4; false prophets performing signs to deceive, Matt. 24:24; Rev. 13:12-15; coming of the Son of Man on a cloud and in judgment in the form of a harvest, Matt. 24:30-32; Rev. 14:14-20; trumpet sound at the end; Matt. 24:31; Rev. 11:15; gathering of birds of prey to feed on the dead, Matt. 24:28; Rev. 19:17; predictions that both would soon be fulfilled, Matt. 24:34; Rev. 1:3; 22:6,10,12,20. *cf.* Rev. 22:10 with Dan. 8:26.

¹⁶⁸ Matt. 23:35-38.

Birds of Prey

One verse in the Olivet Discourse which appears to be a statement against Jerusalem and perhaps the most direct reference to Rome by Jesus is found in Matthew 24:28 which states, “For wherever the dead body is, the eagles will be gathered together.”¹⁶⁹ Matthew 24:28 would probably have had a dual meaning for the disciples for it appears to be both an allusion to Ezekiel 39 and an allusion to the Roman army. The allusion to Ezekiel 39 is subtle but important, and like the paradoxical retelling of the story of Zechariah 14, Jesus is going to retell Ezekiel 39. Ezekiel 39 (and 38) speaks of Israel’s god being against Gog¹⁷⁰ and other kingdoms or tribes because they are against Israel. Since they are opposed to Israel, they are destroyed by God’s wrath, and as a result the world will know Israel’s god. Ezekiel 39:4 reads, “You shall fall upon the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples who are with you; I will give you to birds of prey of every sort and to the beasts of the field to be devoured.” Verse 17 notes, “And as for you, son of man, thus says the Lord God, ‘Speak to every sort of bird and to every beast of the field: “Assemble yourselves and come; gather together from all sides to my sacrificial meal which I am sacrificing for you, a great sacrificial meal on the mountains of Israel, that you may eat flesh and drink blood.”’ The retelling is that in Jesus’ version due to wickedness, Jerusalem, the Temple and the elite are going to be a “sacrificial” meal. This is similarly found in Revelation 19:17-18 which states, “And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, “Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh

¹⁶⁹ Also see Luke 17:37. This appears to be an allusion to Enoch 90:2-4.

¹⁷⁰ Gog is a rather vague name, first appearing as the grandson of Joel in 1 Chronicles 5:4 and is sometimes linked with Magog in such places as Revelation 20. In Ezekiel 38 Gog appears to be an individual, but he is then grouped with other kingdoms or tribes, later to be killed but then buried in a region called the Valley of Hamon Gog, see Ezekiel 39:11. Magog is also sometimes an individual such as Noah’s grandson.

of all people, free and slave, small and great." In many commentaries, this is a statement against Rome or the Roman Empire in general, or it is worldwide wickedness.¹⁷¹

Scholar G. K. Beale sees it more or less as a future army as opposed to being Jerusalem that will be destroyed.¹⁷² His view however encounters several problems. First, it ignores a connection between the Olivet Discourse and Revelation. If Beale believes it takes place in the future, by this he means a future to the current day, it is then difficult to explain the events in the Olivet Discourse that clearly point to Jerusalem being sacked in 70 C.E. There are more allusions found here and they are relevant because they have to do with punishments against Israel if she was unfaithful or broke a covenant with her god. In Deuteronomy 28 there is a list of blessings and curses that depend on Israel being faithful and obeying god which ultimately ends with, "The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; ... And your dead body shall be food for all birds of the air, and for the beasts of the earth; and there shall be no one to frighten them away."¹⁷³ Perhaps more relevant is Jeremiah's statement against the Israelites that don't keep their covenant with God, "And the men who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant which they made before me...I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their lives. Their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth."¹⁷⁴ Lastly, a possible the literal meaning of this would might have been apparent to anyone who was familiar with Roman legionary standards, which often bore golden eagles.

To Jesus and John of Patmos, Jerusalem had two issues. One, it had broken its covenant with its god and two as a result had become wicked. Therefore in accordance with Deuteronomy

¹⁷¹ K.L. Barker & J.R. Kohlenberger III, ed., *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary Vol II: New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 110.

¹⁷² G.K. Beale, 965-971.

¹⁷³ Deut. 28:25, 26. Also see Lev. 26 for blessings and curses.

¹⁷⁴ Jer. 34:18-20.

and Jeremiah the apostates of Israel were to be slain and become a feast for birds. In a similar fashion, like the hypocritical Pharisees mentioned in the Seven Woes, they had become a white washed tomb, or in this case a lifeless dead body - therefore eagles would gather.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ This is based on the Greek word *aetos* which is sometimes translated as vultures given the context of feeding on carrion. NASB and NRSV are two popular translations that translate *aetos* as vultures.

CHAPTER 8

THE WHORE, BABYLON AND THE BEAST

There are several things in the Olivet Discourse noting that Jerusalem is to be sacked by Rome but also linking it to the ancient foe of Israel, Babylon. This linking of Israel to Babylon is further alluded to when we look at the book of Revelation, specifically the image of the Whore found in chapters 17 and 18. Many scholars see her as a reference to Rome or some future unknown entity, but this chapter intends to show that she is a reference to the city of Jerusalem. That Rome is the entity destroying Jerusalem is largely agreed upon by most scholars (see below); what is not agreed upon is who is the Whore, and what is Babylon?

To begin, it should be noted that prostitution in prophetic literature refers to covenant unfaithfulness towards a people or city.¹⁷⁶ John of Patmos points to Jerusalem being an overarching theme of Revelation by drawing from Ezekiel 16. Ezekiel 16 is about Jerusalem being unfaithful to God and as Ezekiel notes, Jerusalem became a prostitute and that metaphor is what we find in the book of Revelation chapter 17 and 18. In Ezekiel 16, Jerusalem is adorned by her god and enters into a covenant with him, but eventually becomes a prostitute with the other nations of the world. Similarly, the prostitute in Revelation 17 is heavily adorned and is noted as being “the great Whore ... with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication.”¹⁷⁷ In Ezekiel, Jerusalem is punished for becoming a prostitute by having her ‘lovers’ turn on her, strip

¹⁷⁶ Ezek. 16:15, 17, 28, 35, 41; 23:1–21, 44; Isa. 1:21; 57:3; Jer. 2:20; 3:1; 13:27; Hos. 2:2–5; 4:12, 15, 18; 5:4; 9:1; Mic. 1:7. As for cities, there are only two others in the Bible, which are called Whores and those are Tyre and Nineveh because Tyre and Nineveh had both been in covenant with Israel’s god at one point. Tyre’s king made a covenant with Solomon and assisted in the building of the first Temple, see 1 Kings 5:1–12; 9:13 and Amos 1:9; Nineveh had a covenant with Israel’s god after the prophet Jonah visits them, see Jonah 3:5–10. Also see Beale, 850, “Perhaps part of the reason that Tyre and Nineveh are the only two cities outside Israel referred to as Whores in the OT is that at one time they were in a covenant relationship with God and subsequently became faithless toward God by returning to idol worship ...”

¹⁷⁷ Rev. 17:1–5.

her naked and kill her. This is the fate of the Whore of Babylon in Revelation 17; she is stripped and killed.¹⁷⁸

A description of the Whore in Revelation 17:4 notes that she holds a golden cup that is full of abominations and impurities. There is another whore found in the Old Testament that holds a cup; this description alludes to the whores in Ezekiel 23 when he makes a metaphor of two sisters, Oholah and Oholibah. Oholah is noted as being Samaria and Oholibah is Jerusalem; both cities end up prostituting themselves to powerful kingdoms and both end up stripped and killed; first Samaria and then Jerusalem. It is noted that Oholibah is given the cup of her now dead sister; in it is horror and desolation.¹⁷⁹ As has been noted, the portrayal of the Whore's desolation is sketched according to the outlines of the prophecy of Jerusalem's judgment by her god in Ezek. 23:25-29, 47: "your survivors will be devoured by the fire ... they will also strip you of your clothes ... and they will deal with you in hatred ... and leave you naked and bare. And the nakedness of your harlotries will be uncovered ... they will burn their houses with fire." Likewise, Ezekiel 16:37-41 prophesies against faithless Israel: "I will gather together all your lovers with whom you have consorted ... they will break down your house of harlotry...and they will leave you naked ... they will burn your houses with fire."¹⁸⁰ At the end of chapter 17, the identity of the prostitute is noted as: "The woman whom you saw is the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth." In Revelation 11:8 the great city is linked with Jerusalem, "Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified." The term, "the great city" is also found in Revelation

¹⁷⁸ In Rev. 17 the Whore of Babylon is killed with fire as opposed to being put to the sword in Ezekiel 16. This might not be an error on the part of John of Patmos who might have been referencing the punishment found in Leviticus 21:9 which states that a priest's daughter who becomes a prostitute was to be burned to death. See also Jubilees 20:4.

¹⁷⁹ Ezekiel 23:31-34.

¹⁸⁰ This theme is supported by other Old Testament descriptions of Israel's coming judgment, which note that their god "will strip her naked and ... make her desolate," see Hos. 2:3; Jer. 10:25; 41:22, Mic. 3:3.

16:19 which reads, “And the great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell”. This image of the great city being split into three parts is found in Ezekiel 5. In it god has Ezekiel divide his hair into three parts as a depiction of coming judgment upon Jerusalem, again another allusion to Jerusalem.

For Jews, particularly in antiquity, the historical Babylon was a source of deep bitterness and held a symbolic status as a traditional archenemy of both the Jews and God. Babylon is used to symbolize Rome in later Jewish sources such as 4 Ezra, 2 Apocalypse of Baruch and the Sibylline Oracles.¹⁸¹ This is what one would expect since Rome literally conquered Jerusalem in 70 C.E. just as the Babylonian Empire had done in 586 B.C. There are two problems however in using those post-70 C.E. sources as guides in interpreting how John is using the name Babylon. For one, with an early date of before 70 C.E., Rome had not yet conquered Jerusalem.¹⁸² It also presupposes that John holds a primary view that is antagonistic towards Rome and therefore Rome is the explicit focus of the book of Revelation, specifically employed as the Whore of Babylon.

The Beast

As for identifying the Beast, the entity that destroys the Whore, namely in Revelation 17 and 18, the scholarly consensus is that it is the Roman Empire.¹⁸³ The Beast is first noted in chapter 13 as having ten horns and seven heads; a similar description is found later in chapters 17 and 18. Here John of Patmos is drawing from the book of Daniel, specifically chapter 7 which involves Daniel interpreting a dream of King Belshazzar. In the dream, there are four beasts

¹⁸¹ 4 Ezra 3:1-2, 28-31; 2 Apocalypse of Baruch 10:1-3; 11:1; 67:7; Sibylline Oracles 5:143, 159.

¹⁸² It would seem obvious to many that Rome would be able to conquer Jerusalem, however this was in no way a guarantee. Jewish forces were able to defeat superior Roman forces from Syria and the siege of Jerusalem saw Rome having several setbacks and many difficulties throughout the campaign. The siege of Jerusalem itself lasted for several years and to fully route the Jewish forces Rome would have to lay siege to nearby Masada until 73 C.E.

¹⁸³ Bauckham, 384-452.

which represent kingdoms, but the fourth one has seven heads and ten horns just as the beast in Revelation. The four beasts are kingdoms according to Daniel who notes that the fourth beast will be more powerful than the previous ones.¹⁸⁴ John of Patmos is clearly drawing from Daniel; 7:4-7 as the source for the seven heads and 7:7-8, 20, and 24 as the source for the 10 horns. Daniel identifies the horns with kings as does Revelation 17:12 as John of Patmos links his work to the book of Daniel by revealing how he believes Daniel's prophecy will unfold.¹⁸⁵

In Revelation 17:9, the seven heads are seven hills or mountains, which the Whore is sitting on, giving this verse both a more literal meaning and a metaphorical one in identifying the beast as the Roman Empire. As noted above many scholars see the seven hills as referring to the city of Rome since it was often noted as a city on seven hills in the ancient world.¹⁸⁶ Being the capital city of the Roman Empire would have been where authority over Jerusalem would have come from while Israel was a province of the Roman Empire. (However, since the Whore sits on the seven mountains, it could be another allusion to Jerusalem.)¹⁸⁷ Occasionally the Beast and the Whore are thought to be a mix of some sort, either literal or allegorical.¹⁸⁸

Beale sees the Beast and the Whore together as being a world system that covers everything from economics to theology, with the conclusion they are both ultimately the Roman Empire, but this view holds several problems.¹⁸⁹ In commenting on Revelation 13, which is the first place in Revelation to note a beast, and Beale notes that it is representative of the Roman

¹⁸⁴ Often these four beasts are considered to be Babylon, Persia, Greece and lastly Rome, see Berlin, 1655-1656.

¹⁸⁵ John of Patmos might have further believed that his vision is an expansion or fulfillment of Daniel's when we examine the instructions that are given to the two authors in regards to their visions. In Dan. 8:28, Daniel is told, "The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but *seal up* the vision for it concerns the *distant future*." In Rev. 22:9, we read, "Then he told me, 'Do *not seal up* the words of the prophecy of this book, because the *time is near*.'"

¹⁸⁶ In ancient times Rome was referred to as a 'city of seven hills'. See, Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.782-83; *Georgics* 2.535; Martial, *Epigrams* 6.64; Cicero, *Ad Atticum* 6.5.

¹⁸⁷ See 1 Enoch 24 and 25. During an apocalyptic vision, Enoch encounters seven mountains and is told they represent the place of God's earthly rule.

¹⁸⁸ See Ford, 286. Ford sees it as a political alliance between the Whore and the Beast, but still notes that the two are two separate and distinct entities with the Beast being the Roman Empire and the Whore being Jerusalem.

¹⁸⁹ See Beale, 847-926.

Empire.¹⁹⁰ If one holds this view, then one must argue for a different identity of the Whore for several reasons.¹⁹¹ First is the fact that the Beast hates the Whore and utterly destroys her; for though Rome had experienced several civil wars, at no point did Rome utterly destroy itself in the process nor did it seem a hatred of Rome was the motivation for the civil wars. And as has been noted above, the description of the Whore and the title of “whore” almost always apply to Jerusalem, not to a foreign power. Another concern to note is that it does not fit for the Roman Empire to be seated on the Roman Empire as we see the Whore is seated on the Beast in 17:7.

Scholar Richard Bauckham shares a similar view in that he sees Revelation 18 as an economic critique of Rome.¹⁹² Bauckham does note that John is using the Old Testament, specifically the books of the prophets, to link the Whore to Babylon, but he fails to utilize the symbolism of a Whore to link it to Jerusalem. Instead Bauckham focuses on the city of Tyre as an economic center and sees this as the connection to the Old Testament and to the book of Revelation. He continues with a lengthy list and examination of goods that would be exported and imported and notes that an economic collapse of these would lead to the down fall of Babylon in the book of Revelation, who he considers to be Rome. Like Beale though, Bauckham misses other details, and he fails to make a connection that the prophets from the Old Testament that John of Patmos is drawing from are concerned about Jerusalem being a Whore due to her being unfaithful to their god. The issue of concern is not one of economics, but one of theology. Both scholars make no connection to other works, namely those found within the New Testament that are considered eschatological in nature, such as the Olivet Discourse. Had they, they would see the object of wrath is the city of Jerusalem for reasons of her unfaithfulness. It is

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 682-730.

¹⁹¹ See above. David Aune has similar problems involving his interpretation as well that have already been addressed in a similar fashion.

¹⁹² Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, (Edinburgh, Scotland:T&T Clark Ltd, 1993), 338-384.

unlikely that John of Patmos would have such a departure from writings and teachings that he most likely grew up hearing and reading, and therefore prophesizing.

As noted above, there are two ways to interpret the seven hills that the Whore sits on, historically and symbolically. It's important to stress that whichever method one chooses, the Whore is sitting on the hills and is a separate entity from them. Most ancient historians will immediately identify the seven hills with the seven hills that Rome sits on.¹⁹³ The seven hills of Rome were well known to ancient people and was widely used in both the first century B.C. and first century C.E. as a metaphor for Rome.¹⁹⁴ One can speculate that John's readers might not have known of the metaphor, but it seems unlikely due to its common usage among ancient writers; in fact, that the seven hills are listed on an inscription from Corinth on the base of a statue.¹⁹⁵

Another possible interpretation is John might be using a metaphor of seven hills found in the apocalyptic book 1 Enoch. There are two versions of Enoch's apocalyptic vision of seven mountains, 1 Enoch 18:6-8 and 24:1-25:3. In Enoch 18:8, the middle mountain is said to be like a throne to the Lord and in 1 Enoch 24:3-25:3 the seven mountains collectively form a throne where the Lord will sit when he comes to visit the earth. Whether the original readers understood or were aware of this metaphor is also speculative, but John might have employed it symbolically so the readers would have further understood he was referring to Jerusalem which would make sense if John is identifying the Whore as the temple cult in Jerusalem. The metaphor

¹⁹³ These are the Capitol, Aventine, Caelian, Esquiline, Quirinal, Viminal and Palatine, but there are variations of the list.

¹⁹⁴ David Aune, *World Biblical Commentary: Revelation 17-22*. Vol. 52C. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998). 944. Many Roman writers used the metaphor; Juvenal *Satires* 9.130; Horace *Carmen saeculare* 5; Ovid *Trista* 1.5.69; Pliny *Hist. nat.* 3.66-67; Stabo *Geo.* 5.3.7. Virgil mentions the seven hills and further states they are surrounded by a single wall *Aeneid* 6.783; *Georgics* 2.535.

¹⁹⁵ Aune, 945. The statue is missing but probably depicted the goddess Roma on the seven hills and therefore had the hills listed below. It was probably erected in the first half of the second century C.E., but this seems to support the idea that the metaphor was well known at an earlier date.

implying Rome is most likely what John was referring to do its popularity and the message that the temple cult was being supported by Rome. This idea is further supported by the fact that John goes on to note that the seven hills are also seven kings (see above). John also makes it known in chapter 19, that the Beast has a separate fate from that of the Whore; a further complication to those that see the Beast and the Whore being one in the same, or the Whore being representative of Rome or an aspect of Rome such as religion or economics. Chapter 19 concludes that the Beast is destroyed as well, but only after the Beast has destroyed the Whore.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ Rev. 19:17-21.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

In both of the first centuries, groups of Jews from the community at Qumran to the early Christians were displeased with what had become of the Temple and the people charged with overseeing and maintaining it. There were several different ways in dealing with these frustrations; from isolating one's self from it (the community at Qumran) to attempting to reform it (Jesus and his earliest followers – perhaps the early teachings of John the Baptist). When these ways failed to bring about the desired change, the literate of these groups began looking at sacred works and texts (or even writing new ones) to show that in the end, they would be vindicated and that God would act on their behalf. They sometimes took an eisegetic approach to interpreting the texts; they took them, drew allusions to them and where necessary, changed those meaning(s) to fit what they were presently experiencing; or they just wrote an original corpus of texts to demonstrate their beliefs. The “judgment of Israel” motif should not come as a surprise to anyone since the texts these groups referred to, what became known as the Old Testament, were full with prophetic judgments against Israel.¹⁹⁷ Therefore, it would seem likely that a dissident Jewish group would use or mimic this precedent.

No longer was the literal, historical Babylon their enemy; instead Jerusalem had become Babylon by breaking their covenants with their god. As their prophets had stated earlier, Jerusalem was a whore, she did at many points “prostitute” herself to foreign powers. It was not difficult for them to read in the Old Testament that disobedience to God led to foreign powers overthrowing Jerusalem/Israel, and since the Roman Empire was the empire that was dominating

¹⁹⁷ Notable examples are, Isaiah 1:2-3; 2:6-3:26; 9:2-21; 2:1-14; 28:1-4; 29:1-30; 48:1-6; Jeremiah 1:14-16; 2:1-3:5; 4:5-6:30; 7:30-9:26; 10:17-22; 12:1-13; 13:1-12; 15:1-9; 16:1-17:4; Ezekiel 4:1-7:27; 11:10-11; 12:1-28; 14:12-23; 18:30; 21:8-32; 24:1-14, Hosea 2:9-13; 4:1-5:15; 6:4-11; 7:11-13; 8:1-10:15; 13:1-3; Joel 1:1-2:11; Amos 2:6-3:15; 4:1-13; 5:1-3,18-17; 6:1-14; 8:9-14; 9:1-10; Micah 1:2-16; 2:3-5; 3:11-12; 6:9-16 Zephaniah 1:4-2:2; Malachi 3:1-5.

them, it would make logical sense for them to use Rome as the vehicle of God's wrath.¹⁹⁸ To the community at Qumran and the early Christians, disobedience and sin seemed to be stemming from Jerusalem and the Temple.

It was within this overall ideology that John of Patmos was writing. John of Patmos was a first-century Jew who believed that he was living in the end of the age as foretold by writings and oral traditions he read and heard. John of Patmos was writing what he knew and he was writing to warn churches that they needed to hold fast because the end was upon them. The end would be noted by the destruction of Jerusalem, who through her sin had metaphorically become Babylon (or more specifically its whore) and was the enemy to the remnant of faithful Jews, i.e. those that believed that Jesus was the messiah, just as the historical city of Babylon was the enemy to historical Israel. Scholars tend to look at the book of Revelation in isolation, or interpret it exclusively through social and historical issues. Though this certainly supplies a backdrop for writing the book of Revelation, it fails to understand and apply the motifs and symbolic framework that John of Patmos is working within. In an attempt to identify the "who" or the "what" as the Whore of Babylon, scholars ignore the "why." By addressing all three of these questions, it should come as no surprise that John of Patmos is creatively using Biblical motifs, allusions and symbols to criticize the evil and "whorish" unfaithfulness of Jerusalem, just like many others before him did as well.

¹⁹⁸ Again see Leviticus 26 for national curses.

APPENDIX

ROMAN EMPERORS AND THEIR REIGNS

AUGUSTUS	January 27 B.C.E - August 14 C.E.
TIBERIUS	September 14 - March 37 C.E.
CALIGULA	March 37 - January 41 C.E.
CLAUDIUS	January 41 - October 54 C.E.
NERO	October 54 - June 68 C.E.
GALBA	June 68 - January 69 C.E.
OTHO	January 69 - April 69 C.E.
VITELLIUS	April 69 - December 69 C.E.
VESPASIAN	July 69 - June 79 C.E.
TITUS	June 79 - September 81 C.E.
DOMITIAN	September 81 - September 96 C.E.
NERVA	September 96 - January 98 C.E.
TRAJAN	January 98 - August 117 C.E.

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