The Book of Revelation and the Significance of AD70

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The Book of Revelation is unique among the New Testament writings in being dated in early tradition. Considering the large number of external testimonies to authorship, this fact alone is remarkable; though considering also how varied is the weight that can be attached to the testimonies to authorship, there is no good reason to suppose that this fact alone settles the issue. As always, the external testimony is only as strong as the internal and must be assessed critically. For what it is worth, however, the credit of this witness is good. Irenaeus, himself a native of Asia Minor, who claims to have known Polycarp who knew John, writes in c. 180+ with regard to the name of the Beast in Rev. 13:18:

*If it had been necessary that his name should be publicly proclaimed at the present season, it would have been uttered by him who saw the Apocalypse. For it was seen no such long time ago, but almost in our own generation, at the end of the reign of Domitian.*

This is twice quoted by Eusebius, who supplies us with the original Greek. The translation has been disputed by a number of scholars, on the ground that it means that he (John) was seen; but this is very dubious. One must assume that Irenaeus believed the Apocalypse to have come from c. 95, although unlike Eusebius he does not link it with Domitian's persecution nor specifically with his fourteenth year, of which Eusebius's Chronicle records: 'Persecution of Christians and under him the apostle John is banished to Patmos and sees his Apocalypse, as Irenaeus says.'

But before accepting this date at its face value one must recognize that Irenaeus is making three statements:

1.) that the author of the Apocalypse and of the fourth gospel are one and same person;
2.) that this person is the apostle John; and
3.) that the Apocalypse was seen at the end of Domitian’s reign.

There are few scholars who would accept all three statements, and many who would reject both the first two. Hort was able to accept the first two only because he rejected the third: 'It would be easier to believe that the Apocalypse was written by an unknown John than that both books belong alike to John's extreme old age.' We may leave the question of authorship till we come to the relation of Revelation to the other Johannine writings. But whatever the relationship, it is difficult to credit that a work so vigorous as the Apocalypse could really be the product of a nonagenarian, as John the son of Zebedee must by then have been, even if he were as much as ten years younger than Jesus. So if
Irenaeus' tradition on authorship is strong, his tradition on dating is weakened, and vice versa.

Even more difficult to attach to a Domitianic date is the tradition which Eusebius goes on to quote from Clement of Alexandria:

*When on the death of the tyrant he removed from the island of Patmos to Ephesus, he used to go off, when requested, to the neighboring districts of the Gentiles also, to appoint bishops in some places, to organize whole churches in others, in others again to appoint to an order some one of those who were indicated by the Spirit.*

To illustrate the last Clement then tells the tale of a young man whom John persuaded the local bishop to sponsor and bring up as his protégé. The story covers a number of years, over which this youth went to the bad, and it ends with the apostle going to visit him on horseback and then chasing him 'with all his might! All this is inconceivable after 96. Clement, however, nowhere mentions the name of 'the tyrant'. He could have been an earlier emperor: it is only Eusebius who identifies him with Domitian.

This is not of course to say that Eusebius was the source of this identification. Apart from quoting Irenaeus, he refers to 'the record of our ancient men' (i.e. in all probability the Memoirs of Hegesippus) for the tradition that 'the apostle John also took up his abode once more at Ephesus after his exile' under Domitian's successor Nerva. Moreover Victorinus, who antedates Eusebius, says that John was 'condemned to the mines in Patmos by Domitian Caesar' where he saw his Apocalypse, which he published after being released upon the death of the emperor.

Yet the identification is by no means solid. Clement's disciple Origen writes in his Commentary on Matthew that 'the emperor of the Romans, as tradition teaches, condemned John to the isle of Patmos', adding that John does not say who condemned him. This does not of course prove that Origen did not know, but the absence of a name is again to be noted, especially since Origen does name Herod as having beheaded John's brother James.

The fact that the condemnation is seen as the direct act of the emperor may link up with the tradition preserved earlier by Tertullian that John's banishment was from Rome, *where Peter suffered a death like his Master [i.e., crucifixion], where Paul was crowned with the death of John [the Baptist] [i.e., execution], where the apostle John, after being plunged in burning oil and suffering nothing, was banished to an island.*

This is the only association in ancient tradition of John with Rome. Jerome in quoting the passage interprets Tertullian to mean John's suffering, like that of Peter and Paul, occurred under Nero despite his own acceptance from Eusebius' Chronicle of the Domitianic date.

Epiphanius, a contemporary of Jerome's, whom Hort describes as 'a careless and confused writer but deeply read in early Christian literature', refers to John's banishment
and prophecy as having taken place under 'Claudius Caesar' - though he also seems to imply that Claudius was emperor in John's extreme old age! Whatever Epiphanius may have meant, it has been credibly argued that his source may have intended Nero, whose other name was Claudius (just as Claudius' other name was Nero). For what it is worth, both the tide to the Syriac version of Revelation and the History of John, the Son of Zebedee in Syriac say that it was Nero who banished John.

Hort, who surveys the evidence with scrupulous fairness, sums up as follows:

*We find Domitian and Nero both mentioned, as also an emperor not named. The matter is complicated by the manner in which St. John is brought to Rome, or his banishment referred to the personal act of the emperor. It is moreover peculiarly difficult to determine the relation of the legend of the boiling oil to the Roman tradition of a banishment from Rome. On the one hand the tradition as to Domitian is not unanimous; on the other it is the prevalent tradition, and it goes back to an author likely to be the recipient of a true tradition on the matter, who moreover connects it neither with Rome nor with an emperor's personal act. If external tradition alone could decide, there would be a clear preponderance for Domitian.*

Yet, despite this, Hort, together with Lightfoot and Westcott, none of whom can be accused of setting light to ancient tradition, still rejected a Domitianic date in favour of one between the death of Nero in 68 and the fall of Jerusalem in 70. It is indeed a little known fact that this was what Hort calls 'the general tendency of criticism' for most of the nineteenth century, and Peake cites the remarkable consensus of 'both advanced and conservative scholars' who backed it. Since then the pendulum has swung completely the other way. In his learned and exhaustive commentary Charles never even alludes to Hort's presentation of the case for an early dating, and in the course of my investigations I have not come across a single modern New Testament scholar who comes down in favor of it apart from Torrey, and now most recently and eccentrically J. Massyngberde Ford. Yet though the theologians may have forsaken it, the classicists have not. It was powerfully argued by Henderson, in his classic study of the reign of Nero, and he reaffirmed his belief in it many years later, commending and endorsing the strong statement of the same thesis by Edmundson which had appeared in the interval. It was also accepted by A. D. Momigliano in the Cambridge Ancient History and A. Weigall in his biographical study of Nero. It has also commended itself recently to the distinguished German jurist K. A. Eckhardt. It will not perhaps therefore be inappropriate to argue the question of date by examining again the strength of this case against those who have dismissed it, or more often ignored it.

In turning to the evidence supplied by the book itself, we may consider first the historical and geographical situation which occasioned its writing. This demands to be considered under two heads. First there is the situation presupposed by Rev. 1-3, together with the coda of Rev. 22:6-21; and secondly there is the situation presupposed by the main body of the book, the visions of Rev. 4:1;22:5. In the former the scene is set in Asia Minor; in the latter the focus, in so far as it is upon earth at all, is in Rome and to a lesser extent in Jerusalem.
In this the book of Revelation corresponds to what we observed in I Peter. There we argued that while the opening and closing verses were directed towards the recipients of the epistle in Asia Minor, the background for understanding the homiletic material which makes it up was to be located rather in Rome. In fact the parallels between these documents are instructive. Both are dominated by a political situation that calls for the symbolic pseudonym of 'Babylon' and by an eschatological situation that compels the hope that the consummation cannot now be long delayed (1 Peter 4-7; Rev. 1:7; 3:11; 22.6f.,12,20). Both also presuppose that persecution has gone a good deal further in Rome than in Asia. Yet there are differences too. The area of Asia Minor is different, northern in I Peter, western in Revelation; and the author of the latter clearly reveals an informed personal acquaintance with place and circumstance of which the author of the former shows no sign. Above all the whole situation is considerably further advanced. In I Peter the judgment is only now beginning with the household of God, even in Rome (Rev. 4:17); in Revelation Babylon is already gorged with the blood of the apostles and prophets and people of God (Rev. 16:6; etc.). In Asia Minor too things have clearly gone beyond the verbal abuse that in I Peter mainly characterized the attack on Christians - though still in Revelation the pressure for some consists of slander, with the suffering (confined to a symbolic ten days in jail) yet to come (Rev. 2:9f.); and in all the churches there is as yet but one martyr to record (Rev. 2:13). But what has decisively changed is the attitude to the state - from one of guarded reverence to one of open hostility. Yet there is nothing here so far to demand an interval of more than a few years the other side of that fiery ordeal which Peter had already recorded as starting (Rev. 4:12) and which we saw good reason to identify with the Neronian pogrom of 65.

A further instructive parallel is provided by the situation presupposed in Jude and II Peter, which we gave grounds for supposing to be addressed to Jewish Christians in some part of Asia Minor in 61-2. At that time indeed there was no hint of persecution, but there was plenty of evidence of insidious attack from gnosticizing, Judaizing heretics who were making false claims to leadership of the church and were scoffing at the Christian hope. We have already seen that the nearest parallels both for the gnosticizing tendencies and for the eschatological teaching in these epistles is not with second-century literature but with other New Testament writings to be dated in the late 50's and 60's - and with the book of Revelation. The themes in common with the last are sufficiently striking to merit more extended treatment.

In both, the false teachers are accused of the error of Balaam (Jude 11; 2 Peter 2:15; Rev.2:14), which in Revelation is closely associated with the teaching of the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6,15). In both Christians are described as being lured into immorality (II Peter 2.14, 18; 3.17; Rev.2.20), into contaminating their clothing (Jude 23; Rev. 3:4), and into disowning their Master (Jude 4; II Peter 2:1; Rev.2.1S). There is the same contrast between the true and false," (Jude 8; II Peter 1:2f., 16; Rev. 2:17,24). The heretical teachers are claiming to be shepherds and apostles of Christ's flock (Jude 11f ; Rev.2:2), and there is a similar appeal to remember the teaching of the true apostles (Jude 17; II Peter 1:12; 3.1f.; Rev. 3:3), who are the foundation of the church and of its faith (Jude 3; Rev.21:14). The eschatological symbolism too shows remarkable parallels, with the day of Christ being likened not only, as in the common Christian tradition, to the thief (II
Peter 3:10; Rev. 3:3; 16:15) but uniquely in these two documents to the morning star (II Peter 1:19; Rev. 2:28; 22:16). In both the existing heavens and earth disappear (II Peter 3:10; Rev.6:14; 16:20; 20:11) to be replaced by new (II Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:1); in both the fallen angels are chained in the depths of hell (Jude 6; II Peter 2:4; Rev.20:1-3, 7), and appeal is made to the theme of a thousand years (II Peter 3:8; Rev. 20:2-7).

All this could doubtless have come from almost any period, and if II Peter and Jude are not early the argument falls. Yet there is good reason to suppose that the Apocalypse too presupposes a time when the final separation of Christians and Jews had not yet taken place. For is it credible that the references in Rev. 2:9 and 3:9 to those who claim to be Jews but are not' could have been made in that form after 70? For the implication is that Christians are the real Jews, the fullness of the twelve tribes (Rev. 7:4-8; 21:12), and that if these Jews were genuinely the synagogue of Yahweh (as they claim) and not of Satan they would not be slandering 'my beloved people. Even by the time of the Epistle of Barnabas,35 which, unlike the book of Revelation, clearly presupposes the destruction of the temple (Rev. 16:1-4) and the irrevocable divide between 'them' and 'us' (cf. Rev. 13:1), such language is no longer possible. Hort makes this point in his commentary on Rev. 2:9, but I have not noticed anyone else who does- apart again from Torrey. If it is valid, it helps to confirm that the remainder of this language belongs, as we argued earlier, to this same period.

The most noticeable feature in the account of what has actually been suffered by the churches of Asia, or is immediately likely to be, is the absence of any clear reference to the imperial cult, which pervades the rest of the book. There is nothing in the warnings and encouragements given to the congregations that requires us to presuppose more than Jewish harassment, the action of local magistrates, and general pagan corruption. Even in Pergamon, which is stated to be 'Satan's throne' (Rev. 2:13), there is no compelling evidence that the allusion is to emperor-worship. In so far as Satan is characteristically for this writer 'the old serpent' (Rev. 12:9; 20:2), the allusion may well be to the snake-worship associated with the shrine of Asclepius, of which the city was a centre. Even if, as later commentators tend to argue, the reference is to the temple consecrated there to 'the divine Augustus and the goddess Roma', this had been founded in 29 BC 39 and does not of itself require a late date. Yet though emperor-worship can be read into the letters to the seven churches it is not demanded by them (in strong contrast with the visions that follow). Even if a gigantic statue of the Emperor Domitian was indeed erected in a temple at Ephesus, there is absolutely nothing in the letter to the Christians there to suggest that this was the issue they faced: their struggle was not with the state but with false apostles, the Nicolaitans, and loss of fervour within the church (Rev. 2:1-7). This is not, of course, to deny that for the seer the final battle with the 'beast' underlay everything else. But the development of emperor-worship in the province of Asia can not be used for determining the historical context into which the letters fit.

While on the subject of the letters to the churches, it will be appropriate to consider the objection often raised that they presuppose a state of affairs so far beyond that of Paul's time as to point to a later generation. This is one of those contentions that it is very difficult to handle. How much time is required for the Galatians 'so quickly' to have followed a different gospel (Gal. 1.6), or for the church of Ephesus to have lost its early love (Rev.2.4), or for the church of Laodicea to have grown lukewarm (Rev. 3:15f)? –
especially since what we can tell about the state of the last from the epistle to the Colossians (Col. 2:1; 4:13-16), our only other source, amounts to precisely nothing. It is obviously impossible to set any firm figure. Yet considering all that we know happened to the only well-documented church that of Corinth in the seven and a half years between late 49 and early 57, the ten and a half years from mid-58 (on our reckoning, the date of Colossians) to late 68 (the earliest date for the Apocalypse) could surely have seen quite as many changes in the Asian churches changes indeed which, according to Acts 20:29f and II Tim. 4:3f., Paul himself clearly foresaw, and of which the Petrine epistles have already given us more than a glimpse. And, as we have said, there is nothing to suggest that there is any great interval between where these last leave off and the letters of Rev. 1-3 begin.

One objection however can be dismissed, which is constantly repeated from one writer to another. This is that Polycarp in his epistle to the Philippians (11:3) states that his own church at Smyrna had not been founded till after the death of Paul- so that it could not therefore be addressed as it is in Rev. 2:8-11 as early as the late 60’s. But, as Lightfoot observed long ago, all that Polycarp actually says is that 'the Philippians were converted to the Gospel before the Smyrneans - a statement which entirely accords with the notices of the two churches in the New Testament'. It is astonishing that so much has continued to be built on so little.

A similar objection has sometimes been brought against a date in the 60’s from the fact that Laodicea, almost totally destroyed in the earthquake of 60-1, is addressed as an affluent church. But the city took pride in having rebuilt itself without waiting for help from imperial funds, and by the end of the decade might well have boasted, 'How well I have done! I have everything I want in the world' (Rev. 3:17). Ironically Moffatt holds that it is irrelevant to connect this with the reconstruction after the earthquake because by the goes 'the incident is too far back'! This is an instance of how arbitrary dating procedures so often are. In contrast Charles regards the letters to the churches as having been written 'at a much earlier date than the Book as a whole' and re-edited in the reign of Domitian. For their outlook, he says, is one in which Christians could still be expected to survive to the parousia ('Only hold fast to what you have, until I come', Rev. 2:25) and in which - a significant admission - 'there is not a single reference' to the imperial cult.

So much then for the situation in Asia Minor presupposed in the letters. But what of the rest of the book? For there clearly Christians have already suffered harrowing persecution, and emperor-worship is at the heart of the attack. Are we not here in the presence of something much later? Let us consider these two issues, of persecution and the cult, in turn.

One thing of which we may be certain is that the Apocalypse, unless the product of a perfervid and psychotic imagination, was written out of an intense experience of the Christian suffering at the hands of the imperial authorities, represented by the 'beast' of Babylon. That violent persecution has already taken place and cries aloud for vengeance is an inescapable inference from such texts as Rev. 6:9f; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20; 18:24; 19:2; and Rev. 20:4. They presuppose that the blood of apostles and prophets and countless Christians, including some 'who had been beheaded for the sake of God's word and their testimony to Jesus', had saturated the streets of the capital itself. This of course is not the
language of factual reporting; yet if something quite traumatic had not already occurred in Rome which was psychologically still very vivid, the vindictive reaction, portraying a bloodbath of universal proportions (Rev. 14:20), is scarcely credible. The sole question is what terrible events are here being evoked.

The impact of the Neronian terror, already cited from Tacitus and Clement, immediately comes to mind, and one is tempted to ask what further need we have of witnesses. Indeed Zahn, who holds that the book comes from thirty years later, still believes that 'the author refers to the Roman martyrs of the time of Nero, and especially to Peter and Paul' .53 But most of those who have argued for a Domitianic date take the reference to be to the persecution under that emperor. This is especially true of Sir William Ramsay, who painted a gruesome picture of what he called 'the Flavian persecution'. This, as he depicted it, was

not a temporary flaming forth of cruelty: it was a steady uniform application of a deliberately chosen and unvarying policy, a policy arrived at after careful consideration, and settled for the permanent future conduct of the entire administration. It was to be independent of circumstances and the inclination of individuals. The Christians were to be annihilated, as the Druids had been.

Unfortunately however the scene is one that is drawn largely from his own imagination playing upon the evidence of the Apocalypse already interpreted as Domitianic material. The primary sources present a rather different picture.

According to Eusebius, Domitian was the second after Nero to stir up persecution against Christians, and he quotes Melito of Sardis to the same effect. Yet while Eusebius speaks of the death and banishment of 'no small number of well-born and distinguished men at Rome', he does not mention the death of a single Christian. He records that 'Flavia Domitilla, the daughter of a sister of Flavius Clemens, who was one of the consuls of Rome at that time, was committed by way of punishment to the island of Pontia because of her testimony for Christ.' He also says that the descendants of Jude, on the ground that they were of the family of David, were brought before the Emperor; but he 'in no way condemned them, but despised them as men of no account, let them go free, and by an injunction caused the persecution against the church to cease'.

The facts of the case of Domitilla and Clemens are by no means clear. Domitilla was probably a Christian, Clemens possibly a sympathizer. But there is now widespread agreement among historians that, while Domitian may indeed have had an axe to grind against 'atheism' and Jewish manners', his action against prominent individuals in Rome was motivated by reasons of state rather than by any odium against the church. In Reicke's words, 'Domitian's purpose was domination of the Roman aristocracy, not an attack upon the Christian faith'. In fact recent studies have been strongly in the direction of showing that 'the evidence for a widespread Christian persecution under Domitian is late [and] probably exaggerated'. M In his later book Henderson concludes:

*All that is left as authority for the 'squall of persecution' under the Flavian Emperor is too remote to be of value. . . . Let who will credit the talk of a general persecution of Christianity under Domitian.]*
It is not in fact till Orosius, a Christian historian of the fifth century, that we hear tell of 'the cruelest persecution throughout the whole world'. Tertullian is far more restrained:

*Domitian also with a share of Nero's cruelty had tried on one occasion to do the same as Nero. But being, as I imagine, possessed of some intelligence, he very soon ceased, and even recalled those whom he had banished.*

When this limited and selective purge, in which no Christian was for certain put to death, is compared with the massacre of Christians under Nero in what two early and entirely independent witnesses-- speak of as 'immense multitudes', it is astonishing that commentators should have been led by Irenaeus, who himself does not even mention a persecution, to prefer a Domitianic context for the book of Revelation.

But, of course, it is not simply the state of persecution but the relation of Christians to the imperial religion that has led to this preference.

Here again we may start with Tertullian. Earlier in the same passage of his Apology he refers pagans to their own records ('commentarios vestros') for the fact that Nero was the first to attack Christianity at Rome 'with the utmost ferocity of the imperial sword'. Elsewhere, in a discussion concerned to show that from an early date Christianity was no obscure provincial sect but attracted the attention of the imperial authorities, he makes the point that the sole decree of Nero ('institutum Neronianum') not rescinded on his death was one against Christians. The only other reference to any such legal act occurs in the passage of Sulpicius Severus which we have already had occasion to quote:

Thus a beginning was made of violent persecution of Christians. Mterwards laws were enacted and the religion was forbidden. Edicts were publicly pub. lished: 'No one must profess Christianity'.

This evidence is otherwise unsupported and has generally been treated with scepticism. Speaking of Tertullian's 'institutum Neronianum', Sherwin-White says, 'Though this theory might explain persecution at Rome it fails to explain it in the provinces.' But then it is not required to explain it in the provinces. The only hint in Revelation of any such executive decree is in 'Babylon' itself, and it is difficult to believe that something of the kind does not lie behind the language of Rev. 13:14-17. There, speaking of the second, subordinate beast, the seer says:

*It . . . made them erect an image in honor of the beast that had been wounded by the sword and yet lived. It was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that it could speak, and could cause all who would not worship the image to be put to death. Moreover, it caused everyone, great and small, rich and poor slave and free, to be branded with a mark on his right hand or forehead,' and no one was allowed to buy or sell unless he bore this beast's mark, either name or number.*

He then goes on to supply the reader with the clue to the identity of the beast 'that had been wounded by the sword and yet lived':

*Here is the key; and anyone who has intelligence may work out the number of the beast.*
The number represents a man's name, and the numerical value of its letters is six hundred and sixty-six (Rev. 13:18).

Though there can be no final certainty, far the most widely accepted solution to the conundrum is that the figure represents the sum of the letters in Hebrew (or Aramaic) (the language evidently in which this barbarous Graecist thought) of the name 'Neron Caesar'. The reference to Nero, who killed himself by his own sword, is further confirmed by the fact (strangely ignored by the commentators) that Suetonius cites a parallel puzzle based on the aggregate of the letters in Greek (1005), as current in Nero's own lifetime:

**Count the numerical values Of the letters in Nero's name, And in 'murdered his own mother': You will find that their sum is the same.**

This strongly suggests that Rev. 13:18 is the Christian version of a familiar game. Further, for the naming of Nero as 'the beast' there is the interesting parallel, quoted by Edmundson, from Philostratus' Apollonius of Tyana. Apollonius is represented as saying on his arrival in Rome at this time:

*In my travels, which have been wider than ever man yet accomplished, I have seen many, many wild beasts of Arabia and India; but this beast, that is commonly called a Tyrant, I know not how many heads it has, nor if it be crooked of claw, and armed with horrible fangs. However, they say it is a civil beast, and inhabits the midst of cities; but to this extent it is more savage than the beasts of mountain and forest, that whereas lions and panthers can sometimes by flattery be tamed and change their disposition, stroking and petting this beast does but instigate it to surpass itself in ferocity and devour at large. And of wild beasts you cannot say that they were ever known to eat their own mothers, but Nero has gorged himself on this diet.*

Yet, though few doubt that the primary reference of 'the beast' in Revelation is to Nero, there is still a reluctance to date from his time the decree to worship the emperor or his statue (Rev. 13.4, 12,15; 14.g-11; 15.2; 16.2; 19.20; 20-4). The growth of the imperial cultus is again something which it is almost impossible to date with confidence. The first hard evidence that this was required of Christians is not indeed until the reign of Trajan; but by then it is treated as a stock test of loyalty. As Pliny puts it in his afore-mentioned letter to the Emperor, 'At my dictation they invoked the gods and did reverence with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose along with the statues of the gods.' In some form however the claim to divine honors and the setting up of the emperor's statue in provincial temples goes back as far as Augustus. Caligula indeed was actually threatening in 40 to have his image imposed upon the temple at Jerusalem - a blasphemy averted only by his timely death. According to Tacitus, a statue of Nero was in 55 set up in Rome of the same size as that of Mars the Avenger and in the same shrine- 'thas', in Reicke's words, 'introducing the emperor cult into the city of Rome'. It is certainly true that Domitian ordered himself to be called 'our Lord and our God' (dominus ac deus noster). 'But', as Bruce solitarily reminds us, 'there is no record that this precipitated a clash between him and the Christians.' The book of Revelation would fit into what we know or his reign. But the dogmatism of so many commentators that such developments could not have occurred till then is misplaced (and unargued). Peake sticks to the facts when he says, 'It is possible that the demand for some
act of worship of the emperor was introduced in Domitian's reign as a test for the detection of Christians.' Beyond that we cannot go. The purple passages in which E. Stauffer reconstructs the scene by which John (in his view the apostle) was confronted in Ephesus under Domitian are, alas, highly imaginative if not wholly imaginary. They are marked by turns of phrase which constantly slur the evidence and at points force and distort it. When a great scholar is driven to such lengths one may suspect that his case is weak. He has his own elaborate interpretation of the cipher 666 as referring to Domitian, but offers no explanation of how he can possibly be the 'sixth king' who 'is now reigning' (Rev. 17:10). All one can say is that while the evidence from the imperial cultus does not rule out a Domitianic dating, it does not establish it either. The language of compulsory emperor-worship throughout the world on pain of death is in any case not meant to be taken literally. The role of the seer is to descry, not to describe. What he sees in his vision no more happened in the time of Domitian than in the time of Nero: he is projecting upon the end - the era of Nero redivivus - the inevitable outcome of a totalitarian tyranny.

This is perhaps the point to mention a tiny piece of evidence that Moffatt'3 goes so far as to call a 'water-mark of the Domitianic period'. In Rev. 6:6 a voice is heard saying, 'A whole day's wage [literally, a denarius] for a measure of flour, a whole day's wage for three measures of barley-meal. But spare the olive and the vine'. 'The immunity of wine', he says, 'may be a local allusion to Domitian's futile attempt (in AD 92) to check the cultivation of the vine in the Ionian provinces.' One is bound to confess that it does not immediately sound like it, and both Beckwith and Charles, though it suits their dating, reject it. The allusion is evidently to some situation of acute cereal shortage, and if one wants one that fits one could just as well look to the account which Josephus gives of the final stages of the siege of Jerusalem: 'Many clandestinely bartered their possessions for a single measure - of wheat, if they were rich, or barley, if they were poor' ;95 and later he tells96 of the sacred wine and oil being distributed and drunk. Almost certainly there is no specific reference to these events. But it does raise the question of what relation, if any, the Apocalypse bears to the situation obtaining at this time at the other end of the empire, in Jerusalem. And to this we may turn before coming back to the crucial passage for its dating which speaks of the sequence of Roman emperors in ch. 17.

In Rev. 11:1f the seer is told:

Go and measure the temple of God, the altar, and the number of the worshippers. But have nothing to do with the outer court of the temple; do not measure that; for it has been given over to the Gentiles, and they will trample the Holy City underfoot for forty-two months.

It is clear from what follows that this is the old temple of the earth city. The picture of its being trampled underfoot is taken like so much else in this book, from the Old Testament (Dan.8.10-14; Zech.12:3 [LXX]; Isa. 63:18; Ps.79:1) - as, we have argued it is in Luke 21:24. The period of forty-two months, or 1260 days, or three and a half years, is, of course, a stock time for the reign of evil, derived from Daniel (7:25; 12:7,11f), and is not to be taken as prediction before or after the event. Yet both here and in 12:6 and 14 (where for the same period the woman, the church or true Israel who gives birth to the Messiah, flees into the wilds to a place prepared for her by God' to be sustained out of the reach of the serpent), it looks as if the reference is to the flight from Jerusalem enjoined in the synoptic apocalypses. Here however we seem to be at a later stage, for the temple
area is already envisaged as under partial occupation. Yet if Jerusalem had actually been
destroyed, it is surely incredible that the worst judgment upon it should be that in a
violent earthquake (and not by enemy action) 'a tenth of the city fell' (Rev. 11:13) Rather,
we should expect as Moule has said, a description of the doom of the city 'where the Lord
was crucified' parallel to that other 'great city', also with its allegorical name of evil (cf.
Rev. 11:8 with, Rev. 18:10), where 'the blood of the prophets and God's people was
found (Rev. 18:24) If in the case of Jerusalem 'the smoke of her conflagration' (Rev. 18:9,
18), so vividly described by Josephus, had already been seen, It is astonishing that it
receives no mention.

It is indeed generally agreed that this passage must bespeak a pre-70 situation. But the
solution has been to date the oracle (or oracles) of Rev. 11 (like that of Rev. 12) earlier
than the book as a whole and to see them as originally Jewish rather than Christian.
Indeed it has been confidently maintained that the prophecy that the temple would
survive could not have been spoken by a Christian, who would have known that Jesus
had foretold its destruction. Following Wellhausen, Charles took 11.1f. to be an oracle by
a Zealot prophet predicting that though the city and the outer court of the temple would
fall, the sanctuary and the Zealots who occupied it would be preserved.104 But there is
nothing in the passage that predicts the survival of the temple. True, there is to be a sort
of temporary ring-fence within which the two prophets, fulfilling the roles of Elijah and
Moses, can utter in safety a final call to repentance. But to interpret the command to
'measure' the temple as a promise of preservation is to ignore the Old Testament
background of the imagery. Often indeed the measuring-line and plummet are symbols
rather of judgment and destruction (cf. II Kings 21:13; Isa.34:11; Lam. 2:8; Amos 7:7-9).
But the background here is clearly Ezek. 40-45, where the point of the action laid upon
the prophet is not preservation but purification - 'to teach my people to distinguish the
sacred from the profane' (Ezek. 44:23) : 'So tell the Israelites, man, about this temple, its
appearance and its proportions, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities', iniquities
which include, above all, the failure to remove the corpses of their kings (Ezek. 43:7-10).
But the testimony of the two witnesses of Revelation ends in failure: their corpses are left
unburied in the streets; and it is only by God's resurrection of them to heaven that their
enemies are scared into homage (11:7-13). There would appear to be nothing here out of
line with the saying of Jesus after the transfiguration (where Moses and Elijah also appear
as witnesses) that, though the promised Elijah had Indeed been sent to the Jews prior to
the end 'to set everything right', 'they have worked their will upon him, as the scriptures
say' (Mark 9:11-13). There seems therefore no reason why the oracle should not have
been uttered by a Christian prophet as the doom of the city drew nigh to predict that,
despite God's care for his people, the final offer of repentance would inevitably be
spurned by the representatives of 'the Jerusalem of today', which the seer, like Paul,
contrasts with 'the heavenly Jerusalem' (Gal.1:4:25f; cf Rev. 21:2f).

The resort of commentators to treating anything that will not fit a Domitianic date as the
incorporation of earlier material, though (for reasons they do not explain) without
subsequent modification, is invoked still more arbitrarily in the passage to which we must
now return in Rev. 17, which is crucial for any more precise determination of the date of
the book.

The central verses are Rev. 17:9-11, which supply 'the clue for those who can interpret it'
to the vision of the scarlet woman, whose name is Babylon, 'the great city that holds sway
over the kings of the earth':

_The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They represent also seven kings
(or emperors), of whom five have already fallen, one is now reigning, and the other has
yet to come; and when he does come is only to last for a little while. As for the beast that
once was alive and IS alive no longer, he is an eighth - and yet is one of the seven, and
he is going to perdition._

Much ink has been spilt over this passage, but the issues are succinctly summed up in
Beckwith's note on the subject: On the assumption that the words have a reference to
Roman history, there are two questions to dispose of in advance: (i) With whom does the
list of the emperors’ begin? and (ii) Are the three emperor’s of 68-69 between Nero and
Vespasian (Galba, Otho and Vitellius), who lasted only a few months each, to be
included in the count?

The first question is theoretically in doubt but may be settled quite quickly. Though the
Roman empire (following upon the republic) is normally regarded as starting with
Augustus, Julius Caesar, who claimed the title 'imperator', was emperor de facto and is
included in Suetonius' Lives of the Twelve Caesars. More importantly, from our point of
view, the comparable lists of kings in Orac. Sib.5:12 and II Esd.12:15 (where the second
reigns the longest and must be Augustus) begin with Caesar. The same appears to be true
of the calculation in the Epistle of Barnabas (4:4), where the tenth king is probably
Vespasian, starting from Caesar. But in Revelation it is clear that the first king must be
Augustus. Otherwise Nero would be the sixth; and if one thing is certain it is that Nero is
dead and not 'now reigning'.

The second question can also, I believe, be resolved with reasonable certainty. The sole
ground ever given for excluding the three emperors of 68-69 is that Suetonius is
interpreted as speaking disparagingly of them as 'rebellious princes' who constituted a
kind of "interregnum. Yet Suetonius himself includes them in his Lives of the Twelve
Caesars, and neither Tacitus nor Josephus has any hesitation in putting them on a par with
the rest. More significantly they are included without reservation in the catalogue already
referred to in Orac. Sib.5:35 and also in II Esd. 12:20f

'It requires then', as Beckwith says, 'a certain degree of arbitrariness to avoid making the
sixth king either Nero or Galba' - and, as we have seen, Nero may be ruled out without
any arbitrariness. Now Galba reigned from June 68 to January 69. 'The other' who 'has
yet to come' and 'when he does come is only to last for a little while' would then be Otho
(who reigned from January to April 69). The only way to get round this would be to
discount the three short-lived emperors, regard the sixth as Vespasian (69-79), the
seventh who lasted only a little while as Titus (79-81), and see Domitian (81-96) as the
'eighth who is also one of the seven', i.e. Nero redivivus. Yet even Charles, though
supporting a Domitianic date, is convinced that 'Domitian cannot be identified with Nero
redivivus. Not a single phrase descriptive of the latter can be rightly applied to Domitian.'
Moreover the statement, 'one', namely the sixth, now reigning', becomes meaningless
mystification - unless it is intended to look like prophecy by a deliberate antedating of the
real time of writing.
There have been various ways in which scholars have sought to evade what seems the obvious conclusion.

I. The commonest is to say that the passage was indeed written under Galba (or, by discounting the three; under Vespasian) but as been incorporated in the later work. This is the line taken, for instance, by Peake, who says: 'Rev. 17:10 was probably written under Vespasian and Rev. 17:11 under Titus. But there are touches which carry us down to the reign of Domitian'. Why the whole was not properly taken in hand and revised in the light of events (or non-events) no one explains. As Kummel says:

None of these hypotheses can make clear why an author would have added to or inserted into a later writing an early writing of his own, without correcting it, so that by this route we have no access to a solution of the literary problem of Revelation.

2. Another way has been to deny that the count of emperors starts at the beginning. Thus Strobel begins with Caligula on the grounds that he was the first to 'fall' (by violent death) and was also the first emperor to begin to reign in the post-messianic, or Christian age, and, by omitting the three of 68-69, he succeeds in making Domitian the sixth. Reicke, following Allo, argues that Nero is the first (and sum) of the evil emperors, but this yields Domitian as the sixth only by treating Otho and Vitellius as one. And, if the knowledge is so vital to the calculation, why is Nero merely called 'one of the seven' and not the first (or even 'the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega' of evil)? A weakness of this alternative in any form is that all the comparable extra-canonical counts, Jewish or Christian, start at the beginning.

3. The third way, which seems to be gaining in favor with recent commentators and is at least more straightforward, is to give up the whole business of trying to trace any reference to specific emperors at all and view the whole thing as purely symbolic. The sixth king is then the last but one before the end-time, whoever he may happen to be. But this way of cutting the knot does less than justice to two factors.

The first is that, as virtually all agree, there must be a reference to Nero redivivus in the beast that 'once was alive and is alive no longer but has yet to ascend out of the abyss before going to perdition' - and he is distinctly said to be one of the seven, even though mysteriously he is to return as an eighth. He is linked too with the beast that 'appeared to have received a death-blow, but the mortal wound was healed' (Rev. 13:3), that 'had been wounded by the sword and yet lived' (Rev. 13:14). This, as we have seen, almost certainly refers to Nero's death by his own sword, and the cipher which gives his identity is specifically said to represent a man's name (Rev. 13:18). It therefore becomes difficult to deny that there is some historical reference, and one which was intended to be well understood.

Now we know from both Tacitus and Suetonius that the belief that Nero was not really dead but would come back circulated within a very short time. There have been elaborate attempts to trace stages in the development of this myth, to show that at first it presupposed that he was physically alive and in hiding, later that he was dead but would return from the underworld. It is then argued that Rev. 17:8, in saying that he would
'ascend out of the abyss', reveals a late, non-historical form of it, which, supposedly, could not have arisen till the time of Domitian. This surely is to misunderstand the psychology of such expectation. There are some characters in history (Frederick Barbarossa and Hitler are other examples) who have been so feared or hated in their lifetimes that men cannot really believe that they have seen the last of them. At one level of their minds they know that they are dead, yet at another they cannot accept it. In what form these characters will reappear depends not on the passage of time but on the pattern of credulity. It did not take long for Herod to think that Jesus might be John the Baptist risen from the dead, and there is no ground for supposing that Christians, who shared the same ambiguity about whether Nero was really dead (contrast Rev. 13:3,12 and 14 with Rev. 17:8 and 11), should not very soon have envisaged him emerging from the abyss - which for this author is in any case primarily the abode of evil rather than the place of the departed. So we may conclude not only that the reference to Nero is quite specific but that the expectation of his return may have early historical associations. Indeed there are other passages, to which we shall be coming back, which could reflect the entirely mundane fears that Nero would return to wreak his vengeance on Rome at the head of a Parthian host.

The other factor which a purely symbolic, non-historical interpretation of Rev. 17 ignores is the parallel already mentioned with this kind of calculation to be found elsewhere in Jewish and Christian apocalyptic. In Orac. Sib. 5.1-50, each of the Roman emperors up to and including Hadrian is listed under the thinnest of disguises. There is a similar passage in Ep. Barn. 4:4 where there are ten kings, including three under one, whom Lightfoot, I believe rightly, sees as referring to 'the association with himself by Vespasian of his two sons Titus and Domitian in the exercise of supreme power'. But whatever the interpretation it is evident that some specific allusion is intended. Similarly in 2 Esd. 11 we read of the vision of an eagle with twelve wings and three heads, the interpretation of which follows in Rev. 12:10-34. Again, it is palpably clear that particular historical references are intended. The three heads are once more the Flavian dynasty, whose identity this time is not in doubt:

*As for the greatest head, which you saw disappear, it signifies one of the kings who will die in his bed, but in great agony. The two that survived will be destroyed by the sword; one of them will fall by the sword of the other, who will himself all by the sword in the last days (Rev. 12:26-8).*

The historical perspective of 2 Esdras is provided by 12:17f:

*As for the voice which you heard speaking from the middle of the eagle's body, and not from its heads, this is what it means: In the midst of the time of that kingdom great conflicts will arise, which will bring the empire into danger of falling; and yet it will not fall then, but will be restored to its original strength.*

Here the troubles following the death of Nero lie well in the past, and Domitian, whose evil reign is vividly depicted in Rev. 11:36-12:1, is dead. The central vision of II Esdras 3-14 dates itself (and there is no good reason to doubt it) in the year 100, 'in the thirtieth year after the fall of Jerusalem' (3:1), and the contrast with the perspective of Revelation could hardly be greater. In this book, as in I and II Baruch, the Epistle of Barnabas and
the Sibylline Oracles, there are unmistakable allusions to the destruction of Jerusalem. In Revelation there are none at all - in fact just the opposite. And whereas in II Esdras the tally of kings to date is twelve, and in the Epistle of Barnabas ten, in Revelation the sixth is still reigning. Yet we are asked to believe by those 'who hold to a Domitianic date that Revelation and II Esdras are virtually contemporary.

The contortions to which the commentators have been driven in the interpretation of ch. 17 are I am convinced self-imposed by the 'discrepancy', as Beckwith calls it, between the clear statement that the sixth king is now living and what Torrey called their 'stubborn conviction' that the book cannot be earlier than the time of Domitian. Drop this conviction and the evidence falls into place. With it too disappears the need for the aspersions which scholars have not hesitated to rain upon the head of the unfortunate author or his editor. Thus, Perrin says bluntly:

_The conditions implied by the book as a whole simply do not fit. Either the author is reusing an earlier text or he does not know his emperors._

Charles excuses him by introducing a particularly crass reviser, whom he describes summarily as:

_profoundly stupid and ignorant, a narrow fanatic and celibate, not quite loyal to his trust as editor; an arch-heretic, though, owing to his stupidity, probably an unconscious one._

Yet to be compelled, in the words of a recent commentator, to write off as the interpolation of an imbecile anything which is inconsistent with one's own interpretation' scarcely inspires confidence.

So, if we drop the Domitianic hypothesis as itself the cause of confusion, can we come to any positive conclusion with regard to the dating of the book?

The simplest hypothesis is to take literally the indication of Rev. 17:10 that Galba is on the throne and to put the book late in 68, some six months after the suicide of Nero, when, with the public collapse of the structure of authority, the imminent end of 'Babylon' and all it stood for might plausibly have seemed in sight. This case is strongly argued by Henderson writing as a Roman historian. Apart from its fitting Rev. 17:10f. (and he fails to see any reason why Galba, Otho and Vitellius should not be counted - especially Galba), he believes (a) that Rev. 9:14-16 and Rev. 16:12 with their reference to hordes coming from the east across the Euphrates, reflect the early expectation Nero's return with the host of the king of Parthia, whose frontier with the Roman empire was formed by that river; (b) that Rev. 11:2 (where the approaches to the temple area are in heathen hands) and Rev. 20:9 (where the hosts of Gog and Magog 'lay siege to the camp of God's people and the city that he loves') suit the current situation in Judaea; (c) that Rev. 17.16f. clearly imply internecine strife and civil war, which had 'an excellent basis of probability in the general outlook at the end of AD 68, but no such basis at all under Vespasian or Domitian'; and (d) that in Rev. 18:17f. the account of the burning of Rome, while 'the sea captains and voyagers, the sailors and those who traded by sea, stood at a distance and cried out as they saw the smoke of her conflagration', is based on memories of the fire of Rome some four years earlier.
Before however settling for this date it is perhaps worth bringing into the picture an ingeniously argued variation upon it. Edmundson puts forward a reconstruction which he claims not only does better justice to the internal evidence but succeeds also in turning the external evidence to positive account. This, it will be remembered, said that John was banished by Domitian and restored by Nerva. Now in December 69 Vespasian was acclaimed emperor. But for the first half of 70 he was occupied in Alexandria, while his elder son Titus was engaged upon the siege of Jerusalem. His younger son, Domitian, the sole representative of the family in Rome, accepted the name of Caesar and the imperial residence and was invested with full consular authority (consulare imperium), his name being placed at the head of all dispatches and edicts. As Josephus puts it, he was ruler until his father should come, and for over six months, with the backing of the army chief Mucianus, his writ ran. In Edmundson's words,

*Though but a boy of eighteen his head became filled with ambitious ideas, and he began, says Suetonius, to use his power in so arbitrary a manner as to give proof of what he was to become later. To such an extent was this the case that Dion Cassius tells us that Vespasian wrote to him from Alexandria 'I am much obliged to you, my son, for letting me still be emperor and for not having yet deposed me.'*

In the repressive measures required after the chaos to restore law and order Edmundson suggests that the sort of inflammatory language used by the Christian prophet John could well have led, as Tertullian's tradition says, to his narrowly escaping death and to deportation from Rome, early in 70, through a sentence passed in Domitian's name. In June Domitian left Rome, and shortly afterwards Vespasian arrived, determined to conduct himself with great moderation and clemency. The following year he took as his colleague in the consulship M. Cocceius Nerva, a lawyer and future emperor. Edmundson goes on:

*Nerva held office during the first nundinum of 71AD, and it is permissible to believe that in accordance with tradition one of the sentences quashed by him was that which sent John to Patmos. If by an order of Nerva he were now released, his exile would have lasted almost exactly one year.*

So he was banished by Domitian and restored by Nerva, as the tradition says - but in 70-71!

It is undoubtedly clever (though his interpretation of Domitian and Nerva is not original). But how then does Edmundson resolve the crucial calculation in Rev. 17:10 of the king now reigning being the sixth? He believes that the key to the understanding of this whole passage is that it deals simply with that period of Roman history which he calls 'the Neronian cycle' - for Nero is not simply one of the seven heads, he is the Beast itself. He takes the words 'five are fallen' to imply that

*in each of these five cases there was a violent death. Augustus and Tiberius could not be described as 'fallen', even had their reigns come within the Seer's purview. The five are Claudius, who adopted Nero as his son and heir, Nero himself, Galba, Otho and*
Vitellius. 'The one who is' signifies the man for the movement invested with imperial power, Domitian, the acting Emperor, who banished the Writer. 'The one not yet come' is the real Emperor Vespasian, who had not yet arrived at Rome to take into his hands the reins of government, and 'he will continue only for a short while,' for Nero - 'the beast that was, and is not, who is also an eighth, and is one of the seven' - will quickly return from the East whither he had fled, and once more seat himself on the throne. And 'his end is perdition,' for after his return will immediately follow the great struggle between Christ and Antichrist, when the latter will be overthrown and cast alive into the lake of fire.

The ten horns with their ten diadems of Rev. 13:1 he takes (as others have) to be governors of the chief provinces of the empire and he sees in the prediction of Rev. 17:12, that 'for one hour' they 'are to share with the beast the exercise of royal authority', the fearful battering of Rome in the events of 68-69:

They together with the beast will come to hate the whore; they will strip her naked and leave her desolate, they will batten on her flesh and burn her to ashes (Rev. 17:16).

The writer, says Edmundson,

had seen it with his own eyes - the storming and burning of the Capitol by the foreign mercenaries of Vitellius, and the subsequent capture and sacking of the city by the infuriated Flavian army under Mucianus and Antonius Primus on December 19 to 21, 69 AD. At no other time, certainly not in the end of Domitian's reign, was it possible to speak of Rome as fallen, or for the Seer to have raised his triumphant cry 'Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her' (Rev. 18:20).

To bear out the seer's description of the plight of Babylon in ch. 18 he sets the comments of Tacitus on the burning of the Capitol and the capture of the city by the Flavian troops:

From the foundation of the city to the hour the Roman republic had felt no calamity so deplorable, so shocking as that . . . . The city exhibited one entire scene of ferocity and abomination. . . . . Rivers of blood and heaps of bodies at the same time; and by the side of them harlots, and women that differed not from harlots - all that unbridled passion can suggest in the wantonness of peace - all the enormities that are committed when a city is sacked by its relentless foes - so that you could positively suppose that Rome was at one and the same time frantic with rage and dissolved in sensuality . . . .

Lamentation was heard from every quarter, and Rome was filled with cries of despair and the horrors or a city taken by storm.

As he says, it is tempting to believe that 'both writers are describing one and the same unique event'. He further suggests that the scenes of the kings assembled at Armageddon (Rev. 16:16) and of the hosts of Gog and Magog, countless as the sands of the sea, mustered for battle from the nations of the four quarters of the earth (Rev. 20:8), are inspired in part at least by the battles earlier in 69 in which the armies of Vitellius and Vespasian contended for the mastery of the empire.
On the one side were troops from Italy, Spain and Portugal, Gaul, the German Rhine frontier, even from far distant Batavia and Britain; on the other, legions from the Danube frontier, and behind these the armies of Syria, Judaea and Egypt, with auxiliaries from the furthest East, from the borderlands of the Euphrates and Tigris. The Seer is not describing these battles, but he saw the medley of troops from every nation under heaven actually fighting in the streets of Rome, and the scenes he witnessed still so freshly imprinted in his mind are vividly reflected in the imagery of his vision.

I have quoted Edmundson at some length because it is a case that has been almost entirely ignored. It has its weak spots like any other, but a number of his points are impressive. The sack and burning of Rome in 69 is a more convincing parallel than the fire of 64 and the proximity of the foreign troops to the temple area in Rev. 11:2 would suit the early months of 70 better even than 68. Above all the turning of the external evidence is clever - if not too clever. Yet to start the count of the emperors with Claudius is strained.

But, whatever the details of the events reflected, the Apocalypse is, I believe, intelligible only if, as Tertullian says, its author had himself been 'a partaker of the sufferings' (Rev. 1:9) in Rome during and after the Neronian persecution. In comparison with this, the precise dating (late 68 or early 70) is of secondary significance. There is in any case no need to suppose that all his visions, any more than those of the Old Testament prophets, came to him at once. Nevertheless there is, I suggest, much to be said for the hypothesis that in exile the seer was using his imagination, under the influence of scripture and the Spirit, to reflect upon the terrible events of the latter 60’s, both in Rome and in Jerusalem, and then dispatching his warning of what could lie ahead of them to those Asian churches whose spiritual state concerned him so intimately. As it turned out, it was Jerusalem that fell in the autumn of 70 and Babylon that survived. The universal martyrdom of the Christian church did not materialize; neither did the shortly promised Parousia. He himself was to be released before long, and he could well, as Clement's legend has it, have lived on to a ripe old age organizing the troublesome congregations of Asia Minor. But whether he was the same John of whom these and other stories are told, and what is his connection, if any, with the remaining Johannine writings, must be left to the next chapter.
The Significance of 70 AD

One of the oddest facts about the New Testament is that what on any showing would appear to be the single most datable and climactic event of the period - the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, and with it the collapse of institutional Judaism based on the temple - is never once mentioned as a past fact. It is, of course, predicted; and these predictions are in some cases at least assumed to be written or written u after the event. But the silence is nevertheless as significant as the silence for Sherlock Holmes of the dog that did not bark. S. G. F. Brandon made this oddness the key to his entire interpretation of the New Testament: everything from the gospel of Mark onwards was a studied rewriting of history to suppress the truth that Jesus and the earliest Christians were identified with the revolt that failed. But the sympathies of Jesus and the Palestinian church with the Zealot cause are entirely unproven and Brandon's views have won scant scholarly credence. Yet if the silence is not studied it is very remarkable. As James Moffatt said,

*We should expect . . . that an event like the fall of Jerusalem would have dinted some of the literature of e primitive church, almost as a victory at Salamis has marked the Persae. It might be supposed that such an epochmaking crisis would even furnish criteria for determining the dates of some f the NT writings. As a matter of fact, the catastrophe IS practically ignored in the extant Christian literature of the first century.*

Similarly C. F. D. Moule:

*It' hard to believe that a Judaistic type of Christianity which had itself been closed; involved in the cataclysm of the years leading up to AD 70 would not have shown the scan - or alternatively, would not have made capital out of this signal evidence That they, and non-Christian Judaism, were the true Israel. But in fact our traditions are silent.*

Explanations for this silence have of course been attempted. Yet. the simplest explanation of all, that 'perhaps, . . . there is extremely little in the New Testament later than AD 70 and that its events are not mentioned because the had not yet occurred seems to me to demand more attention than it has received in critical circles.

Bo Reicke begins a recent essay with the words:

*An amazing example of uncritical dogmatism in New Testament studies is the belief that the Synoptic Gospels should be dated after the Jewish War of AD 66-70 because they contain prophecies ex eventu of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the year 70.*

In fact this is too sweeping a statement, because the dominant consensus of scholarly opinion places Mark's gospel, If not before the beginning of the Jewish war, at any rate before the capture of the city. Indeed one of the arguments to be assessed is that which distinguishes between the evidence of Mark on the one hand and that of Matthew and Luke on the other. In what follows I shall start from the presumption of most contemporary scholars that Mark's version is the earliest and was used by Matthew and Luke. As will become clear, I am by no means satisfied with this as an overall explanation of the synoptic phenomena. I believe that one must be open to the possibility
that at points Matthew or Luke may represent the earliest form of the common tradition, which Mark also alters for editorial reasons. I shall therefore concentrate on the differences between the versions without prejudging their priority or dependence. The relative order of the synoptic gospels is in any case of secondary importance for assessing their absolute relation to the events of 70. Whatever their sequence, all or any could have been written before or after the fall of Jerusalem.

Let us then start by looking again at the discourse of Mark 13. It begins:

As he was leaving the temple, one of his disciples exclaimed, 'Look, Master, what huge stones! What fine buildings!' Jesus said to him, 'You see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.' When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives facing the temple he was questioned privately by Peter, James, John, and Andrew. 'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen? What will be the sign when the fulfillment of all this is at hand?' (Mark 13:1-4).

The first thing to notice is that the question is never answered. In fact no further reference is made in the chapter to the destruction of the temple. This supports the judgment of most critics that the discourse is an artificial construction out of diverse teachings of Jesus, with parallels in various parts of the gospel tradition, and linked somewhat arbitrarily by the evangelist to a subsequent question of interest to the church, such as Mark regularly poses by the device of a private enquiry by an inner group of disciples (cf Mk. 4:10; 7:17; 9:28). We need not stop to wrestle with the complex question of how much goes back to Jesus and how much is the creation of the community. That Jesus could have predicted the doom of Jerusalem and its sanctuary is no more inherently improbable than that another Jesus, the son of Ananias, should have done so in the autumn of 62. Even if, as most would suppose, the discourse represents the work of Christian prophecy reflecting upon the Old Testament and remembered sayings of Jesus in the light of the church's experiences, hopes and fears, the relevant question, What experiences, hopes and fears?

The mere fact again that there is no correlation between the initial question and Jesus' answer would suggest that the discourse is not being written retrospectively out of the known events of 70. Indeed the sole subsequent reference to the temple at all, and that only by implication, is in Mark 13:14-16:

But when you see 'the abomination of desolation' usurping a place which is not his (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judaea must take to the hills. If a man is on the roof, he must not come down into the house to fetch anything out; if in the field, he must not turn back for his cloak.

It is clear at least that 'the abomination of desolation' cannot itself refer to the destruction of the sanctuary in August 70 or to its desecration by Titus' soldiers in sacrificing to their standards. By that time it was far too late for anyone in Judaea to take to the hills, which had been in enemy hands since the end of 67. Moreover, the only tradition we have as to what Christians actually did, or were told to do, is that preserved by Eusebius apparently on the basis of the Memoirs of Hegesippus used also by Epiphanius. This says that they had been commanded by an oracle given 'before the war' to depart from the city, and that
so far from taking to the mountains of Judaea .. as Mark's instruction implies, they were to make for Pella, a Greek City of the Decapolis, which lay below sea level on the east side of the Jordan valley. It would appear then that this was not prophecy shaped by events and cannot therefore be dated to the period immediately before or during the war of 66-70.

What apparently the instruction is shaped by (whether in the mind of Jesus or that of a Christian prophet speaking in his name) is, rather, the archetypal Jewish resistance to the desecration of the temple sanctuary by an idolatrous image under Antiochus Epiphanes 168-167 BC. This was 'the abomination of desolation' set up on the altar' (1 Macc. 1.54) referred to by Daniel (Dan. 9:27 [LXX]; Dan. 11:31; 12:11) and it was in consequence of this and of the local enforcement of pagan rites that Mattathias and his sons 'took to the hills, leaving all their belongings in the town' (I Macc. 2:28). It is here that we should seek the clue to the pattern of Mark 13:14-16. Moreover the influence of the book of Daniel is so pervasive in this chapter that it is hard to credit that what is regularly there associated with the abomination of desolation, namely, the cessation of the daily offering in the temple (Dan. 8:13; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11) would not have been alluded to if this had by then occurred, as it did in August 70.

It is more likely that the reference to the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not (to stress Mark's deliberate lack; grammatical apposition) is, like Paul's reference to 'the lawless one or 'the enemy' who 'even takes his seat in the temple of God'. (II Thess. 2:1-12), traditional apocalyptic imagery for the incarnation of evil which had to be interpreted ('let the reader understand ; cf. Rev. 13:18) according to whatever shape Satan might currently take. It is indeed highly likely that such speculation was revived, as many have argued, by the proposal of the Emperor Gaius Caligula in 40 to set up his statue in the temple (which was averted only by his death). Paul was evidently still awaiting the fulfillment of such an expectation in 50-1 (to anticipate the date of II Thessalonians), where 'the restrainer' holding it back is probably to be interpreted as the Roman Empire embodied in its emperor (being a play perhaps on the name Claudius, 'he who shuts'). His expulsion of the Jews from Rome in 49 could be reflected in the phrase of 1 Thess. 2:16 about retribution having overtaken them ('with a view to the end'?). The only other datable incident to which 'the abomination' might conceivably refer in retrospect is the control of the temple not by the Romans but by the Zealots temporarily in 66 and permanently in 68, which Josephus speaks of in terms of its 'pollution'. This would be the very opposite of Brandon's thesis, with the Zealots filling the role of antichrist. But it does not explain the masculine singular (as a vaticinium ex eventu should require) and again it is too late for a pre-war flight, and perhaps for any.

One is forced to conclude that the reference in Mark 13:14 to 'the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not' is an extremely uncertain indicator of retrospective dating. G. R. Beasley-Murray24 ends a note on the history of the interpretation of this verse with the words:

*It would seem a just conclusion that the traditional language of the book of Daniel, the Jewish abhorrence of the idolatrous Roman ensigns, attested in the reaction to Pilate's desecration, and Jesus' insight into the situation resulting from his people's rejection of his message, supply a sufficient background for this saying.*
Marxsen, writing from a very different standpoint, regards the phrase as a vague reference to the forthcoming destruction of the temple and is forthright in saying: 'From Mark's point of view, a vaticinium ex eventu is an impossibility.'

With regard to Mark 13 as a whole the most obvious inference is that the warnings it contains were relevant to Christians as they were facing duress and persecution, alerting them to watchfulness against false alarms and pretenders' claims, promising them support under trial before Jewish courts and pagan governors, and assuring them of the rewards of steadfastness. Doubtless the phrasing has been influenced and pointed up by what Christians actually experienced, but as Reicke argues in the second half of his essay, there is nothing that cannot be paralleled from the period of church history covered by Acts (c. 30-62). As early as 50 Paul can say to the Thessalonians: 'You have fared like the congregations in Judaea, God's people Christ Jesus. You have been treated by your countrymen as they are treated by the Jews' (I Thess. 2:14). Unless the flight enjoined upon 'those who are in Judaea' is purely symbolic (of the church dissolution of Herod's from Judaism) - and with the detailed instructions that it may not be in winter (Mark 13.18). there is no reason to assume it is figurative any more than the very literal dissolution of God's temple - then the directions for it must surely belong to a time when there still were Christians in Judaea, free and able to flee. Finally we are in a period when it could still be said Without qualification on the solemn authority of Jesus: 'I tell you this present generation will live to see it all; (Mk. 13:30).

In fact there is, as we said, wide agreement among scholars that Mark 13 does fit better before the destruction of the temple it purports to prophesy. This is relevant as we turn now to Matthew and Luke. What will be significant are differences from Mark: otherwise the same presumption will continue to hold.

We will take Matthew first, since he is closest to the Markan tradition. But the first relevant passage in his gospel is not in fact in Markan material but in that which he has in common with Luke, the parable of the wedding feast (Matt. 22:1-10 = Luke 14:16-24), where Matthew inserts the following:

The others seized the servants, attacked them brutally and killed the. The king was furious; he sent troops to kill those murderers and set their town on fire (Matt. 22:6f).

There can be little doubt that these verses are secondary to the parable. They form part of an allegorical interpretation of the successive servants (Luke has one only) in terms of the prophets and apostles sent to Israel, as in the immediately preceding parable of the wicked husbandmen (Matt. 21:33-45). The introduction of a military expedition while the supper is getting cold is particularly appropriate. Luke has also allegorized the parable, to match the Jewish and Gentile missions of the church, by introducing two search parties, first to the streets and alleys of the city and then to the highways and hedgerows. The secondary character of all these features is now further established by their absence from the same parable in the Gospel of Thomas (64). This version also supports the supposition, which we should independently deduce from his usage elsewhere (Matt. 18:23; 25:34, 40), that it is Matthew who has brought in the figure of the king as the
subject of the story: Luke and Thomas both simply have 'a man'. It is therefore as certain as anything can be in this field that the crucial verse, 'The king was furious; he sent troops to kill those murderers and set their town on fire', is an addition, probably by the evangelist. The sole question is, When was it added and does it reflect in retrospect the destruction of Jerusalem (to which it must obviously allude)?

It has to be admitted that this is the single verse in the New Testament that most looks like a retrospective prophecy of the events of 70, and it has almost universally been so taken. It is the only passage which mentions the destruction of Jerusalem by fire. Yet, as K. H. Rengstorf has argued, the wording of Matt. 22:7 represents a fixed description of ancient expeditions of punishment and is such an established topos of Near Eastern, Old Testament and rabbinic literature that it is precarious to infer that it must reflect a particular occurrence. He concludes that it has no relevance for the dating of the first gospel. And this conclusion is borne out in a further study by Sigfred Pedersen, who believes that this and the preceding parable of the wicked husbandmen are fundamentally shaped by material from the Old Testament, especially Jeremiah. The most he will say is that if Matthew is writing after 70, then we must see this as a contributory occasion for the addition (which of course no one would deny).

Moreover, if Matt. 22:7 did reflect the happenings of 70 one might expect that it would make a distinction that features in other post eventum 'visions', namely, that while the walls of the city were thrown down, it was the temple that perished by fire. Thus the Jewish apocalypse II Baruch clearly reflects the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans, though it purports to be the announcement to the prophet Baruch of a coming Chaldean invasion. It recognizes that the city and the temple suffered separate fates:

We have overthrown the wall of Zion and we have burnt the place32 of the mighty God (2 Baruch 7:1).

They delivered . . . to the enemy the overthrown wall, and plundered the house, and burnt the temple (2 Baruch 80:3).

If one really wants to see what ex eventu prophecy looks like, one should turn to the so-called Sibylline Oracles (Sibylline Oracles 4:125-7):

And a Roman leader shall come to Syria, who shall burn down Solyma's [Jerusalem's] temple with fire, and therewith slay many men, and shall waste the great land of the Jews with its broad way.

It is precisely such detail that one does not get in the New Testament.

Finally, in Matthew's parable the king clearly stands for God. In the war of 66-70 the king who sent the armies to quell the rebels was Nero, followed by Vespasian. Reicke says:

*The picture of God sending his armies to punish all guests not willing to follow his invitation was in no way applicable to the war started by Nero to punish the leaders of rebellion against Roman supremacy.*
He argues indeed that there is every reason to assume that the final redactor of the parable would have altered the reference if he had been writing after 70. This, I believe, is putting it too strongly, since undoubtedly Christians came to see the destruction of Jerusalem as God's retribution on Israel, whoever the human agent. Yet the correspondence does not seem close enough to require composition in the light of the event.

Nevertheless, the conclusion must, I think, stand that on the basis of Matt. 22:7 alone it is impossible to make a firm judgment. It could reflect 70. On the other hand, it need not. One must decide on the evidence of the distinctive features in Matthew's apocalypse in chapter 24.

The first observation to be made is how few these are. As K. Stendhal says, 'He does not have any more explicit references than Mark to the Jewish War or the withdrawing of the Christians from Jerusalem'. Apart from minor verbal variations he follows the tradition common to Mark, with only the following differences of any significance:

1. In Matt. 24:3, the purpose of the discourse is broadened to answer the disciples not merely on the date of the destruction of the temple ('Tell us, when will this happen?') but on the theme to which the chapter (and the one following) is really addressed: 'And what will be the signal for your coming and the end of the age?' It is significant, however, that the former question does not drop out, as might be expected (especially since Matthew, has no more answer to it than Mark) if at the time of writing it now related to the past whilst the parousia was still awaited.

2. In Matt. 24:9-14, the prophecies of persecutions ahead found in Mark 13:9-12 are omitted, being placed by Matthew in Jesus' mission charge to the disciples during the Galilean ministry (Matt 10:17-21). Whatever the motives for this, the effect is to see the predictions fulfilled earlier rather than later, and evidently they are not intended by Matthew to have any reference to the sufferings of the Jewish war. In their place Matthew has warnings against division and defection within the church, which are presumably relevant to the state of his own community but have no bearing on the question of date.

3. In Matt. 24:15, the cryptic reference to 'the abomination of desolation' is specifically attributed to the prophet Daniel. Despite the lack of article, '(the) holy place' must mean the temple (evidently intended by Mark's allusion), and the choice of phrase may again reflect the scriptural background already referred to:

   How long will impiety cause desolation, and both the holy place and the fairest of all lands be given over to be trodden down? (Dan. 8:13)

Yet none of Matthew's changes affects the sense or makes the application more specific (in fact the neuter participle does the opposite; Again he does not mention the reference in Daniel to the cessation of the daily sacrifices. If Matthew intended the reader to 'understand' in the prediction events lying by then in the past he has certainly given him no help. Moreover, as Zahn said long ago, in view (Matthew's appeal to conditions in Jerusalem 'to this day' (Matt. 27:8; cf. Matt. 28:15), one would have expected him of all people to draw attention to the present devastation of the site.

4. In Matt. 24:20, there occurs the only other change in the decisive paragraph about
Judaea, with the addition of the words in italics:

*Pray that it may not be winter when you have to make your escape, or Sabbath.*

'When you have to make your escape' merely specifies what must be meant in Mark. The reference to the Sabbath could again contain an allusion back to the fact that when the faithful of Judaea took to the hills after the original 'abomination of desolation' their first encounter with the enemy was on the Sabbath and because of scruples which they later abandoned they were massacred without resistance (1 Macc. 2:29-41). But it is more likely to refer to the obstacles to movement on the Sabbath for Jewish Christians who were strict observers of the law. In any case it bespeaks, a primitive Palestinian milieu and a community-discipline stricter than that recommended in Matthew's own church (cf. Matt. 12.1-14). It is certainly not a addition that argues for a situation after 70. Indeed it is one of those points of difference where, unless one is committed to over all Markan priority, it looks as though Mark has omitted an element in the tradition no longer relevant for the Gentile church.

5. Matthew's material without parallel in the Markan tradition (Matt. 24:26-28; 24:37-25:46) has no reference to the fall of Jerusalem but like the additional signs of the parousia in Matt. 24:30f, solely to 'the Consummation of the age'. Yet his version of the 'Q' material in Matt. 24:26, "they tell you, "He is there in the wilderness", do not go out', clearly shows that in his mind the scene is still in Judaea (In the Lukan parallel in Luke 17:23 it could be anywhere). It is significant therefore that in 24:29 'the distress of those days' (i.e., on the assumption of ex eventu' prophecy, the Judaean war) is to be followed 'immediately' by the coming of the Son of Man, whereas in Mark 13:24, is promised vaguely 'in those days, after that distress.

This makes it extraordinarily difficult to believe that Matthew could deliberately be writing for the interval between the Jewish war and the parousia. So conscious was Harnack of this difficulty that he insisted that the interval could not be extended more than five years (or ten at the very most), thus dating Matthew c. 70-75. He would rather believe that Matthew wrote before the fall of Jerusalem than stretch the meaning of Ev8lwI; further. It seems a curious exercise to stretch it at all! Even E. J. Goodspeed, who put Luke at 90, said of Matthew, 'A book containing such a statement can hardly have been written very long after AD 70' (though his elastic was prepared to extend to 80). The only other way of taking this verse retrospectively is to say that 'the coming of the Son of Man', though not 'the consummation of the age', did occur with the fall of Jerusalem. But it is a fairly desperate expedient to seek to distinguish these two (joined by Matthew by a single article in Matt. 24:3) in face of the usage of the rest of the New Testament.

Finally, Matthew retains unaltered Jesus' solemn pronouncement, 'The present generation will live to see it all' (Matt. 24:34), preserving also (as the equivalent of Mark 9:1) the saying, 'There are some standing here who will not taste of death before they have seen the Son of Man coming in his kingdom' (Matt. 16:28). Most notoriously of all, he has, alongside the apocalyptic material from the Markan tradition which he sets in his mission charge, the promise, 'Before you have gone through all the towns of Israel the Son of Man will have come' (Mark 10:23). If, on the usual reckoning, the evangelist is writing some 50-60 years after the death of Jesus, it is surely incredible that there are no traces of
attempts to explain away or cover up such obviously by then unfulfillable predictions. One would equally expect modifications to prophecies after the non-event.

Indeed, I think that it needs to be asked much more pressingly than it is why warnings and predictions relating to the crisis in Judaea should have been produced or reproduced in such profusion after the events to which they referred. Just as Jesus' parables were reapplied to the life of the church and to the parousia when their original setting in the crisis of his ministry was no longer relevant, so one might suppose that instructions given, or prompted up, for earlier situations would, if remembered at all afterwards, have become related more timelessly to the End. Alternatively, if subsequent occasion required, they might have been brought out and subjected to recalculation (the way that Jeremiah's unfulfilled prediction of the seventy years' duration of the exile is reapplied 'on reflect upon' m Dan. 9:1-27). But the period of composition commonly assigned to both Matthew and Luke (80-90) was, as far as we know, marked by no crisis for the church that would reawaken the relevance of apocalyptic. I fail to see any motive for preserving, let alone inventing, prophecies long after the dust had settled in Judaea, unless it be to present Jesus as a prognosticator of uncanny accuracy (in which case the evangelists have defeated the exercise by including palpably unfulfilled predictions). It would seem much more likely, as the form critics have taught us to expect, that these sayings, like the rest, were adapted to the use of the church when and as they were relevant to its immediate needs.

There is one other passage common to Matthew and Luke which it will be convenient to mention briefly before turning to Luke. This refers to the murder of Zechariah 'between the sanctuary and the altar'. In Matthew (Matt. 23:35), but not Luke 11:51), he is called 'son of Berachiah', and this has been held to contain an allusion to the murder by two Zealots 'in the midst of the temple of a certain Zacharias son of Baris (v.1., Beriscaeus) in 67-68. But the Identification rests on a rather remote resemblance of names, and this Zacharias, not being a priest, would have been unlikely to have been between the sanctuary and the altar.' On Jesus' lips it makes entirely good sense to interpret the reference, with the Gospel according to the Hebrews, as being to the murder of Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest (II Chron. 24:20-22), whom Matthew, like some of the rabbis has evidently confused with Zechariah son of Berechiah, the prophet (Zech. 1:1). In any case it is far too uncertain a piece of evidence to carry any weight by itself.

Finally, then, we turn to Luke. His parallel to the Markan apocalypse must be taken closely with another earlier passage relating to Jerusalem and it will be convenient to set them out together.

(Luke 19:41-44) When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, “If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. “For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.”
(Luke 21:20-24) “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. “Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled. “Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land and wrath to this people; and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

The latter passage replaces, and at some points echoes, that in Mark 13:14-20, beginning’ But when you see "the abomination of desolatation" . . . . Its relation to it must be considered shortly. But the first let us look at what Luke himself actually says.

At first sight it seems clearly to be composed (or at any rate pointed up_ in the light of the siege of 68-70. For here indeed is the greater specification we expect but fail to find in Matthew. The details, says Kummel, 'correspond exactly to the descriptions which contemporary accounts offer of the action of Titus against Jerusalem.

Yet this is far from indisputable. In an articles written now thirty years ago but strangely neglected, Dodd argued strongly and circumstantially that no such inference could be drawn.

_These operations are no more than the regular commonplaces of ancient warfare. In Josephus's account of the Roman capture of Jerusalem there are some features which are more distinctive; such as the fantastic faction-fighting which continued all through the siege, the horrors of pestilence and famine (including cannibalism), and finally the conflagration in which the Temple and a large part of the city perished. It is these that caught the imagination of Josephus, and, we may suppose, of any other witness of these events. Nothing is said of them here. On the other hand, among all the barbarities which Josephus reports, he does not say that the conquerors dashed children to the ground_.

Dodd then proceeds to show in detail how all the language used by Luke or his source is drawn not from recent events but from a mind soaked in the Septuagint. So far as any historical event has colored the picture, it is not Titus's capture of Jerusalem in AD 70, but Nebuchadnezzar's capture in 586 BC. There is no single trait of the forecast which cannot be documented directly out of the Old Testament.

It has justly been said that if this article had appeared in the Journal of Theological Studies rather than the Journal of Roman Studies New Testament scholars would have taken more notice of it. It is still ignored in Kummel's extensive bibliography, and no recognition is given to the case it argues. Interestingly, it had no influence on Reicke's article cited above, which independently reaches much the same position.

But the absence of any clear reference to 70 does not settle the question of what Luke is doing in relation to the Markan material. Indeed on this Dodd and Reicke come to opposite conclusions. Reicke, with the majority of critics, thinks that Luke 21:20-24 is an
editing of Mark: Dodd holds that it is independent tradition into

which the evangelist has simply inserted verbatim two phrases from Mark: 'Then those who are in Judaea must take to the hills' (21:22a) and 'Alas for women who are with child in those days or who have children at the breast!' (21.23a). The latter alternative seems to me the more probable, if only because the introduction of Judaea' in 21.21a upsets the reference of ??????, which must be to Jerusalem. But, whether or not this was material which Luke had prior to his use of the Markan tradition, he has clearly now united the two. Is the effect of their combinations to suggest or to require a latter date?

Luke has preferred to concentrate on the destruction of the city rather than the temple, the last reference, veiled or unveiled, to the sanctuary having disappeared, despite his retention of the opening question about the fate of the temple buildings (Lk. 21:5-7). The answer therefore is even less precise, though there is now a definite reference to devastation and not simply to desecration. Reicke indeed argues that by replacing Mark's 'abomination of desolation standing where he ought not' with Jerusalem surrounded by armies' Luke actually makes it more certain that he is not writing after the event.

If the gospel of Luke is supposed to have been composed after the historical siege of Jerusalem in AD 70, the evangelist must be accused of incredible confusion when he spoke of flight during that siege, although the Christians were known to have left Judaea some time before the war even began in AD 66.

The last clause goes beyond the evidence, for Luke may not have known It. Nevertheless the point stands against a vaticinium ex eventu. Things did not in fact turn out like that. Indeed they could not, for there was no escaping one the city had been encircled.

But the saying about getting out and not going back in which in Luke 21:21 is applied to the city, has probably nothing in origin to do with a siege. In Mark and Matthew it relates to a man's house as in the closely parallel saying which Luke himself preserves in Lk. 17:31.

On that day the man who is on the roof and his belongings in the house must not come down to pick them up; he, too, who is in the fields must not go back.

As when Mattathias and his sons 'took to the hills, leaving all their belongings behind in the town', the context seems more likely to be local harassment than a military siege. If, as is entirely possible, Jesus himself did utter some such urgent exhortations to vigilance and rapid response, they were almost certainly independent of any programme of future events. If subsequently they were incorporated by the church into instructions for Christians in Judaea and combined with other words of his about the desolation of the city, this does not mean that they were edited after or even during the war. In fact there is nothing that requires them to be restricted to the events of the latter 60S. The 'wars and rumors of wars' between nations and kingdoms (Mark 13:7f and pars) have no obvious reference to Vespasian's campaign against the Jewish extremists. In Luke this is 'wars and insurrections' (Lk. 21:9). The latter word appears here to have the same meaning as ??????, which is used by Luke 23:19, 25), as by Mark 15:7), of the Barabbas incident, and in the context (cf. Luke 21:8) seems to refer to risings led by messianic pretenders, such as he also records from the 40’s and 50’s in Acts 5:36f; Acts 21:38). There is no
ground for assuming that he is alluding specifically to the Jewish revolt of 66-70, let alone writing after it.

None of this in itself decides the issue of when the synoptic gospels were written. In fact, despite the arguments he puts forward, Dodd (followed by Gaston and Houston) thinks that Luke and Matthew were composed after 70. Reicke, although regarding Luke 21 as secondary to Mark, concludes that 'Matthew, Mark and Luke wrote their Gospels before the war began'. That issue must be considered in due course on its own merits. The one conclusion we can draw so far is to agree with Reicke's opening statement that it is indeed 'an amazing example of uncrirical dogmatism' that 'the synoptic gospels should be dated after the Jewish War of AD 66-70 because they contain prophecies ex eventu of the destruction of Jerusalem'. Indeed on these grounds alone one might reverse the burden of proof, and reissue Torrey's challenge, which he contended was never taken up:

It is perhaps conceivable that one evangelist writing after the year 70 might fail to allude to the destruction of the temple by the Roman armies (every reader of the Hebrew Bible knew that the Prophets had definitely predicted that foreign armies would surround the city and destroy it), but that three (or four) should thus fail is quite incredible. On the contrary, what is shown is that all four Gospels were written before the year 70. And indeed, there is no evidence of any sort that will bear examination tending to show that any of the Gospels were written later than about the middle of the century. The challenge to scholars to produce such evidence is hereby presented.

But before we can even consider that piece of bravado it is necessary to establish some sort of scale of measurement by which the progress of affairs in the Christian church 'about the middle of the century' can be assessed. And the best, indeed the only, way of discovering any fixed points is to turn to the evidence provided by the life and writings of Paul.