Before Nero’s Death: Reconsidering the Date of the Book of Revelation

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Introduction

The argument over the date of the book of Revelation still remains a burning issue in contemporary scholarship. Hence Bell Jr. comments that “one of the thorniest questions in the New Testament scholarship is the date of the composition of John’s Apocalypse.”¹ Throughout the 19th century almost all New Testament exegetes favored the early date of the book of Revelation.² In the first two deca-

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des of the 20th century, however, the situation changed. Recently, nearly all exegetes are unanimous in dating the Apocalypse during the last years of megalomaniac emperor Domitian around AD 95. Without exception, these scholars interpret Revelation in the light of the Domitianic persecution on the basis of Irenaeus’s statement quoted in Eusebius’s *Church History* 3.18.1-3. However, not a few scholars supporting the early date of Revelation have been producing a totally different voice against this governing phenomenon. Of course, the Neronian persecution from July 64 to June 68 comes to the fore to them.

This paper is aimed at probing the date of the book of Revelation. When the external evidence is not certain, the date should be determined particularly by examining closely the internal evidence. In order to investigate the date of Revelation, firstly the external arguments are analyzed critically. Then, exploration about internal evidence is done. Finally, interpretive implications of the early date are scrutinized in connection with the role of the unbelieving Jews, the Nicolaitans, worship, and the kingdom of God. Through this study, the early date of AD 66 on the basis of the external and internal evidence and its interpretive implication are suggested.


4) For the list of more than 150 scholars who agree with the early date of Revelation, see Kenneth L. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Tyler: ICE, 1989), 30-38. Thus it is a mistake to say that the number of the early date proponents is few.
I. External evidence

Most New Testament scholars choose the late date of the Book of Revelation under Domitian (AD 95-96) chiefly on the basis of the external evidence provided by Irenaeus and Eusebius. Despite this dominant opinion, the number of the advocates for the early date is growing gradually in several current works. Caution is required when establishing the value of Irenaeus’s account whether it is true or not. Consequently, it is important to read Irenaeus’s account with a critical eye. There seems to be no contact point between the early and the late dates.

1. Irenaeus’s Against Heresies in Eusebius’s Church History and ancient testimonies on the Domitianic persecution

Irenaeus (AD 130-202), Bishop of Lyons, is the key person for the late date advocates. Though Irenaeus did not mention his source for the information, his book Against Heresies 5.30.3 quoted in the bishop of Caesarea Eusebius’s (AD 263-339?) Church History 3.18.3 and 5.8.6 is the mightiest weapon of the external evidence for the late adherents. Its English translation is as follows:

5) An awkward integration concerning the date of Revelation is suggested by H.J. Klauck on the basis of the Nero Redivivus myth (Rev. 13:3), that is, Nero would return to Rome in the guise of Domitian, In this way one can justify the Neronian overtones and simultaneously to harmonize them with the late date, Cf. H.J. Klauck in G.H. van Kooten, “The Year of the Four Emperors and the Revelation of John: The Pro-Neronian Emperors Otho and Vitellius, and the Images and Colossus of Nero in Rome,” JNT 30, no 2 (2007): 208.
“We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in the present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision (ten apokalypsin heorakotos). For that (he?) was seen not very long time since (oude gar pro pollou chronou heorathe), but almost in our day (alla schedon epi tes hemeteras geneas), towards the end of Domitian’s reign (pros to telei tes Dometianou arches).”

Several questions arise regarding the above paragraphs and their context: (1) Who is the subject of ‘was seen’ (ἑωράθη), namely, John who beheld the apocalyptic vision or the book of Revelation? (2) What is the time reference of “no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian’s reign”? (3) What is the context of Against Heresies 5.30.3? (4) What is the compatible relationship between Against Heresies 5.30.3 and 5.30.1, which also informs about Revelation? (5) What is the implication of Irenaeus’s historical errors in his writings in order to understand Against Heresies 5.30.3?6)

The subject of ‘was seen’ is John who saw the vision, but not the Apocalypse by many reasons: (1) Irenaeus usually uses ‘for’ when referring back to the main idea in the previous sentence, and here, the main idea is the ‘him’ not the vision. (2) Irenaeus likes to use the word ‘was seen’ with reference to person, but not for things.7) (3) In this

6) Gentry, Before Jerusalem fell, 48-67.
7) “It is argued that this means that Irenaeus would not refer to John as being seen until the time of Domitian; hence the referent in question must be the vision. This is countered by the point that Irenaeus only says that John was seen until Domitian’s reign, not that he
paragraph the position of John (βεορρακωτος) is nearer to the verb than
the Apocalyptic vision." (4) The gap between Irenaeus’s writing Against Heresies ("but almost in our day") and the end of Domitian’s reign is around 100 years. Therefore the conjecture that the Apocalypse was written ‘no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of the Domitian’s reign’ is not convincing. (5) The context of Against Heresies 5.30.3 is situated in the argument of the identity of the beast from the sea (Rev. 13:1). Accordingly, strictly speaking it is not the book of Revelation but John that can elucidate its identity. (6) In Against Heresies 5.30.1, Irenaeus reports that “...this number (i.e., 666) is found in all the approved and ancient copies, and those who ‘saw’ John face to face confirm it ...” The emphasis on personal knowledge of John corresponds better with the referent being back to John, rather than to his vision. Indeed, ‘saw’ here is the same verb with ‘was seen.’ Many ‘ancient manuscripts’ of the book of Revelation had been produced long before his time. This does not exclude the early date of Revelation, nor support the late date. (7) It should be noted that Irenaeus does not mention any persecution connected with the book of Revelation or with Domitian and does men-
tion Polycarp’s martyrdom as an unusual fate of Christians in Asia Minor.\(^9\) Further Irenaeus does not comment on even John’s (and other Christians’) banishment to Patmos,\(^{10}\)

Here, an important question should be answered as to another external evidence of Revelation: Was the Domitianic persecution historical fact? According to Domitian 8-15 of Suetonius (AD 69-130?), Domitian terrorized the senate and persecuted many ‘leading members’ (e.g., Roman consul Flavius Clements and his wife Flavia Domitilla, Glabrio) in order to reinforce emperor worship and to prevent conspiracy and assassination, Suetonius listed Domitianic persecution on the credit side of Nero’s ledger that he persecuted the Christians, so it is highly likely that if Domitian took similar action against them as a group he would also have received a favorable notice.\(^{11}\) Melito of Sardis (c. 170, To Antonius) cited in Eusebius’s Church History 4.26.5-11 stated that the church enjoyed prosperity under all the emperors aside from Nero and Domitian. This is the earliest existing remark of Domitian’s harassment of Christians. This statement of Melito is not crucial for the late date supporters nor for the early date advocates, because he mentions Nero too. Having spo-


Newman maintains that the Patmos sojourn of John was likely nothing more than protective custody until Trajan, B, Newman, "Fallacy of the Domitian Hypothesis," NTS 10, no 1 (1963): 138. But ‘protective custody’ is not matched with the atmosphere of emperor’s persecution in Revelation.

\(^{11}\) Bell Jr, “Date of John’s Apocalypse: The Evidence of Some Roman Historians Reconsidered,” 96.
ken earlier of the Neronian persecution in some detail (Church History 2, 25), Eusebius says of Domitian merely, "he showed himself the successor of Nero in enmity and hostility to God, He was in fact, the second to organize persecution against us" (Church History 2, 17). By the time of Eusebius, a kind of connection between Christianity and Domitian’s persecution seems to exist. But no Christian historian before Eusebius reports about the Domitianic persecution. According to Melito, Hegesippus (c. 110-180, Five Memoirs in Eusebius Church History 3, 18, 1; 2, 20, 8-9) and Tertullian (AD 150-230), Domitian had a disposition as a persecutor in a short time. Consequently, the argument of Orosius of the fifth century that Domitian tore up from the roots of the church throughout the entire Empire by issuing a harsh edict of persecution needs to be corrected, and can be judged as an unconvincing report based on a confused and inaccurate memory.

As Melito reports, though Domitian slandered the Christians and their teachings, he did not aim any whole scaled and systematic assault against Christianity. Thus Domitian’s ferocity reached only the Roman aristocracy. As F.C. Baur insists, “it is possible that here and there in the provinces single acts of persecution took place because of the easily excitable hate of the people against Christians, but these are details which have no great significance for the general view.” 12) Moreover, there is no reference of the extension of Domitian’s persecution to the whole provinces in the Roman Empire, or among the

commonality even in the city of Rome.\(^{13}\)

From Irenaeus, Eusebius, Melito, Clement of Alexandria, Clement of Rome, and Pliny the Younger, it is not easygoing to glean detail and objective evidences including numbers of Christian victims, circumstances and characteristics about Domitian’s persecution against Christians. Accessible data for the Domitianic persecution are insufficient, obscure, and questionable. In contrast to Victorinus and Eusebius, Tertullian apparently affirms that the exile of John to Patmos happened at the same time in which Peter and Paul were executed(\textit{De Praescriptione Haereticorum} 36). Although Tertullian mentions the perversity of Domitian, he does not mention John and his exile(\textit{Apologetic.} 5).\(^{14}\)

2. ‘Dominus et Deus Noster’(ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν; Rev. 4:11)

The emperor cult was undeniably firm in Asia Minor in the 1\textsuperscript{st} century, but its power was owing to unceasing tradition and development for centuries before Domitian. There is no historical clue that Domitian himself affected the custom of emperor worship in Asia Minor to any significant degree.\(^{15}\) It seems that Domitian forced peo-


\(^{15}\) F.O. Parker, “Our Lord and God’ in Rev 4:11: Evidence for the Late Date of Revelation?,” \textit{Biblica} 82, no 2 (2001): 207-223; D. Warden, “Imperial Persecution and the Dating of 1
ple to call himself ‘Dominus et Deus’ and was irritated by those who were reluctant to call him Lord and God (cf. Suetonius *Domitian* 13.2; Dio Cassius *Roman History* 67.4,7).

As discussed above, however the emperor worship influenced by the empire of Greece started long before Domitian. For example, Julius Caesar, the first emperor, learnt from Cleopatra the political benefit of the deifications of royalty - the Pharaohs having been acknowledged by their subjects as incarnated divinities. He was the first emperor to be deified posthumously. In BC 42 the Roman senate gave him the name *Divus Iulius*. Augustus (BC 27-AD 14) was called ‘the god and lord emperor’ during his lifetime. Domitian is named ‘the 2nd or new Nero’ (cf. Tacitus’s *Annals* 15.42-44), but several scholars question this title for Domitian due to his local and sporadic persecution (e.g. Slater,18) Collins, Fiorenza, Witherington, Osborne, Beale). Nero (AD 54-68) was certainly the most evil Roman emperor of the 1st century surpassing both Caligula and Domitian in disrepute. Nero claimed the title ‘Son of Apollo’ and was praised as god, fortune, fate mention but a few (Suetonius *Nero* 53; Dio Cassius *Roman History* 61,20,5). Coins from Nero’s reign show him with a hairstyle identical to one depicted on Apollo.19) In fact, when Revelation was written, Nero as the tyrant 20) employed cheerleaders from Alexandria in order

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to enforce his fictive identity as God and absolute ruler. Though Nero
was called as ‘the only one form the beginning’, this is a parody of God
who existed from the beginning.

In the time of the Apostle John, people shouted that the emperor,
city Rome, Roman citizens, Roman Empire would be eternal. Their
shouting is another parody of the eternal kingdom of God,
Augustiani, the choir employed by the emperor, praised him day and
night around the palace by shouting the virtues which seemed to be
proper to the emperor. On the contrary, it is God who received the
praise day and night and did not allow the aggressive Roman Empire
to receive it. 21)

It should be noted that in a poem celebrating Domitian’s 17th con-
consulship in AD 95, Statius refers to the emperor as Augustus, Caesar,
dux, Germanicus and parens but never as either dominus or deus (Silv.
4, 1). 22) Consequently, the expression ‘Dominus et Deus noster’ can-

20) Clement of Rome (c. 150-215) mentions that the apostle John left Patmos after the death
of the tyrant (Quis Sabus Dives 42). The tyrant is a normal title for Nero instead of
Domitian. Cf Rojas-Flores, “The Book of Revelation and the First Years of Nero’s Reign,”
377.
21) D. Seal, “Shouting in the Apocalypse: The Influence of First-Century Acclamations on
22) Cf. L.L. Thompson, The Book of Revelation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 105,
105. In addition, the relation between the Jews and the emperor worship in the 1st cen-
tury draws our interest. Since Augustus and the Herod the Great, the Jews had sacred
space for Rome as a token of loyalty to emperors. But when the emperor worship was
intended to expand into the synagogue or the temple, the Jews resisted it. The Jews
tried to avoid the recognition of the divine character of the emperor. Hence they never
used the title θεός but did freely use the Latin word divus and dominus or even κύριος.
In AD 66 Jews used the sacrifices offered ‘on behalf of (not ‘to’) the emperor as the sym-
not be a critical evidence of the late date, because it rather supports the early date.\(^{23}\)

II. Internal evidence

1. The characteristics of the war (esp. the river Euphrates in Rev. 9:14; 16:12)

The phrase ἃ δὲ γενέσθαι εν τάξει in Revelation 1:1 manifests the interpretive key of Revelation in that the prophecy of John must be soon fulfilled in a short time, not in a distant future. For this reason, it is natural to reason that the war in Revelation took place in the time of John.\(^{24}\) The geographical background of the armies crossing the river Euphrates (Rev. 9:14; 16:12) is Palestine where the Jewish-bolic start of the claim to their independence. But even after the AD 70 event, Jews were allowed a freedom of practicing their religion at the price of 2 drachmas payable to the fisus Iudaicus. However, the Jews after the rule of Vespasian and Titus seemed to face an increasing menace because of the emperor worship as Josephus’s Antiquities written in AD 93 implies. Cf. J.S. McLaren, “Jews and the Imperial Cult: From Augustus to Domitian,” JSNT 27, no 3 (2005): 278; Keresztes, “The Jews, the Christians, and Emperor Domitian,” 11-12; S.J. Case, “Josephus’ Anticipation of a Domitianic Persecution,” JBL 44, no 1-2 (1925): 19.

\(^{23}\) Contra Kistemaker, Revelation, 37.

\(^{24}\) Following the compilation hypothesis of historical criticism, Aune insists that earlier materials written by John during the First Jewish Revolt (AD 66-73), which reflect conditions in Judea or the empire prior to the conclusion of the Revolt, were incorporated with the later material, David E. Aune, Revelation (WBC 52A; Dallas: Word Books, 1997), cxxii.
Roman war lasted 3 and half years in AD 66-70. Jerusalem was originally attacked in the Jewish War by four military sections of Cestius that came from near the Euphrates to invade Palestine. In many cases in Revelation the articulated Greek noun γῆ indicates Palestine. The destruction of trees and greenery of the land (Rev. 8:7) was in line with the Roman ‘scorched earth’ policy as reported in Josephus’ *The Jewish War* 6.1.1. The famine, wild animals, sword, and pestilence (Rev. 6:2-8) match the four punishments laid out in Deuteronomy 28:20-68 against the covenant people of Israel. These warnings are found in the Olivet Discourse too (Mt. 24:7).

Like the new Babylonian Empire in the Old Testament, the Roman Empire destroyed the temple and Jerusalem. Rome is called ‘Babylon’ in 4 Ezra, Sibylline Oracle V, and the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch. But ‘Edom’ is the most common for Rome in rabbinic literature. This does not mean that the harlot Babylon denotes Rome instead of Jerusalem. Since ‘Babylon’ in 1 Peter 5:13 indicates Rome before AD 70 namely in the time of Nero, the term is not a technical term denoting Rome af-

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28) For more intertextuality among Revelation, the Olivet Discourse, and *The Jewish War* (e.g., Rev. 16:19/*The Jewish War* 5.1-4; Rev. 6:12-14/Mt. 24:29) see Gentry, *Before Jerusalem fell*, 232-256.
ter AD 70.\(^{30}\) In Revelation, Jerusalem and the Jews appear as the harlot Babylon(14:8; 17:15; 18:2), the great city(18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21),\(^{31}\) Sodom and Egypt where their Lord was crucified(11:8), the holy city(11:2), the land(1:7), the false prophet(19:20; 20:10), and the beast from the land(13:11). On the other hand, Rome appears as the beast from the sea(13:1) and the red beast(17:3).

Then what is the impact of the Jewish-Roman war to the readers in Asia Minor far from Palestine? For the Jews in Palestine and in diaspora the destruction of the temple means the collapse of the entire Jews. Geographical distance does not matter to the Jews who regard the temple as their center of whole lives,

2. The temple(Rev. 11:1-2)

The temple measuring and its destruction in Revelation 11:1-2 is evidence of the early date. However, a critique comes from non-preterists on Gentry’s mixture of figurative interpretation of the temple symbolizing the Christians in Revelation 11:1 and literal interpretation of the outer court devastated by Roman armies in 11:2(cf. Lk. 21:24\(^{32}\)). In contrast to the true temple(ναός) symbolizing protected Chri-

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\(^{31}\) Geographically and literally, Jerusalem is not a great city. But it was great in terms of diaspora and covenant, since Jerusalem/Israel was called the priestly nation.

stians, the outer court symbolizing renegade worshipers with religious enthusiasm is to be judged as historically fulfilled in AD 70. The temple measurement symbolizes God’s protection of his people as the true temple (cf. Ezek. 40-42). Textual context of Revelation 11 supports the above argument. The temple measuring (11:1-2) is followed by the place of martyrdom of two witnesses where their Lord was crucified in Jerusalem. Hermeneutically speaking, symbol is not irrelevant to the contemporary historical setting. For this reason, the Apostle John might have considered a 1st century background when he chose symbols. Hence the temple in Revelation 11:1-2 is at least implicitly related with the 2nd temple in Jerusalem. Furthermore, it is not steno symbol but tensive symbol which indicates more than one reference, for instance, the head as the mountain and the king in Revelation 17:9-10. It is implausible that the nature of the book of Revelation could fail to mention the destruction of the temple as the center of the persecuting Jews, if Revelation was written after AD 70. If the Jerusalem temple were about to be destroyed, the vision of the new and holy Jerusalem in Revelation 21:2-22:5 would have provided exactly, and at the proper moment, all the encouragement the first readers needed. Therefore, it is not plausible to argue that John used an earlier source about the temple when he incorporated into


33) Gentry, Before Jerusalem fell, 192.
34) Smalley, The Revelation to John, 3.
this vision of temple measuring.35)

3. The number of the beast from the sea, 666(Rev. 13:18)

It is plausible that as most exegetes agree, the enigmatic number 666(ἑξακόσιοι ἥξηκοιτα ἡξ) of the beast from the sea in *gematria* as numerical value of each Hebrew letter of the alphabet(בָּיֵת פֶּסַח) signifies Nero Caesar.36) In paragraphs 614-20 of *Liber Genealogus*, a chronology written in Latin by an unknown North African Donatist Christian in c. AD 438, cites a portion of Revelation 13:18, stating that the letters of Nero’s name are to be used in calculating the number 666.37) The textual variation 616 denotes Nero when one takes the final nun off from the name Neron. Among emperors Suetonius(Nero 39.2) recommends only Nero as having *gematria* linked with his name.38) Of course there is room for an alternative interpretation which is not in contrast to *gematria*, 666 as a tensive symbol would denote Nero as well as another reference, for instance incompleteness of human’s power/effort.

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4. The seven heads of the beast from the sea (Rev. 17:9-10)

If one counts from Julius Caesar who claimed the title ‘Imperator’ (cf. Suetonius’s *Julius* 76) as the first emperor, Nero then was the sixth Roman emperor (cf. Sib. Or, 5:12-51; 4 Ezra 11-12; Josephus *Ant*. 18, 32; 4 Ezra; Tacitus; Aurelius Victor, Eutropius). The three succeeding emperors of Nero’s suicide (cf. mortal wound in 13:8) are Galba (June 68-January 69), Otho (January-April 69), and Vitellius (April-December 69). The three emperors who ruled shortly in 68-69 must not be omitted in counting the number of emperors. All of them ruled shortly as prophesied in Revelation 17:10. The short-lived rule of the 7th king Galba ‘has not yet come’ (Rev. 17:10). One should not skip Galba, Otho and Vitellius because they were legitimate emperors (cf. minted coins in Asia Minor). Yet the fact that premillennialists connect the 7th emperor with the kingdom of the antichrist is strange, since the term of antichrist does not appear in Revelation. It is also very weird that the late date proponent Collins regards Caligula as the first emperor, and omits the three emperors who ruled for short period, then considers Domitian as the sixth.

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is Nero as the 6th emperor not Domitian who put to death immense multitude of Christians (cf, Rev. 6:11; 7:14) as Tacitus’s *Annals* 15.44 and 1 *Clement* 6:1 testify.

5. The harlot Babylon’s murder(Rev. 14:8; 16:19; 17:5, 16; 18:2, 10, 21)

The late date advocates regards 'Babylon' as a weighty internal evidence, because the term denotes Rome in the Jewish literature of AD 2nd century (4 Ezra 3:1-2, 28; 15:46; 2 Baruch 11:1; 67:7; Sib. Or, 5, 143, 159). Yet it is suspicious that John learned the symbolic name Babylon from these sources of after AD 70, given his favorite of the Old Testament. It is noteworthy that John does not refer to the harlot Babylon as the destroyer of the temple.

The harlot Babylon was murdered by the beast from the sea, the Roman Empire(Rev. 17:16). The Old Testament intertextual concept of harlot(πορνη, Ezek. 16:32; 23:11-35; Jer. 13:26-27; 51:7; Hos. 1:2; 2:3; 3:1) is allied with the apostate Jews, not with the gentiles. The destruction of the harlot Babylon in scarlet(Rev. 17:16; 18:16) is described in terms which clearly echo the prophecy of God’s punishment on unfaithful Israel in the Old Testament. The sea(τὰ ὕδατα, wa-

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ters) in Revelation 17:15 symbolizes all the nations which in the 1st century context denotes the Roman Empire. Hence, Rome’s conquest of the Jewish nation was fulfilled by the catastrophic event of AD 70. Agreeing with the late date and idealist W. Hendriksen, Isbell holds that descriptions of the luxury, influence, etc., of harlot Babylon in Revelation 17-18 (esp. 17:4; 18:12-13) do not fit for Jerusalem, which is far smaller than Rome. However, Jerusalem is not smaller or less significant than Rome in terms of covenant in the whole Bible. The luxury of the harlot in Revelation is well coordinated with the extravagance of the upper class of Jerusalem (Josephus *Jewish War* 6.5.3). If the late date advocates want to connect the luxury of the harlot (Rev. 18:3, 12-13) with the wonton luxury of Domitian (Suetonius *Domitian* 4, 21-22), (s)he should remember that Vitellius’ (AD 69) extravagances are notorious too (Suetonius *Vitellius* 13). Rome as the beast from the sea does coincide with military power, not with seduction which is harmonized with the harlot as the false prophet.

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49) Wilson, ”The Early Christians in Ephesus and the Date of Revelation, Again,” 180.

III. Interpretive implications of the early date

From the early date, one can at least get basis to begin an interpretation that Revelation was generally or to some extent fulfilled in AD 70 like the Olivet Discourse as a little Apocalypse. From the argument of the late date, however, Revelation offers nothing for the (partial) preterist at all. How does the early date of Revelation affect for the interpretation of the book? During the Neronic persecution in AD 64-68, on the one hand Palestine was in upheaval owing to the Jewish-Roman war, on the other hand Rome was shaken by the civil war during the year of the four emperors. These historical situations seem to be the judgment of God, in that God intervenes into history by revenging his enemies for the sake of his suffering people. The decade of AD 60s is a significant time because Pax Romana was interrupted by the Roman civil wars and by the war in Judaea. Hence, it is the salvation history in the 1st century not the futuristic or the ahistorical application that plays a crucial role in a proper understanding of the book of Revelation as the epistolary communication between John and his readers.

1. The unbelieving Jews (Rev. 2:9; 3:9; 11:8) and the AD 70 calamity (Rev. 1:7)

In Revelation 2:9 and 3:9, ‘Jew’ is an honorific term. This means that John sees himself first as a faithful Jew and that he sees the Christian community as the true Israel. Such a self-identification by a
Christian is more understandable in the 60’s than in the 90’s when Christians and Jews were beginning to see themselves more as separate groups. It is likely that one in the Christian movement would see himself as a Jew during Nero’s reign than during Domitian’s.\(^{51}\)

The non-Christian Jews both in Palestine and in the diaspora obeyed the persecuting Roman Empire, therefore they properly deserved the title ‘the synagogue of Satan’(συναγωγὴ τοῦ σατανᾶ, 2:9; 3:9) as covenant-breaking apostates.\(^{52}\) New Testament consistently testifies the responsibility of the Jews as a persecuting power whom God definitely cursed in AD 70(Mt, 26:4; 27:1, 24-25; John 11:53; 19:6, 14-15; Acts 2:22-23; 6:8-7:60; 1 Th, 2:14-15; Rev, 17:15; 18:24). The effect of the AD 70 catastrophe in Jerusalem must have penetrated into the whole diaspora, because the city was the heart of the Jews. It is reasonable to assume that before their loss of nation, the Jews were equipped with power of maltreating Christians. If this is precise, the early date is supported by the role of the synagogue of Satan.

The cloud-coming of the risen Jesus in Revelation 1:7 to judge all the tribes of the land(πᾶσαι αἱ φυλai τῆς γῆς) took place in AD 70. Here the coming with the cloud is symbolic action as an indicator of God’s judgment against the people in the promised land in light of biblical intertexts(Pss, 18:7-15; 104:3; Isa, 19:1; Ezek, 32:7-8; Mt, 24:30). Because the Jews pierced the Messiah and were not penitent for that(cf, Zech, 12:12; John 19:15), a judgmental visitation of the risen Christ was unavoidable to them. Thus the universalization of the

\(^{51}\) Slater, “Dating the Apocalypse to John,” 258.

\(^{52}\) Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, 102.
Old Testament intertext in Revelation 1:7 is unpersuasive in its context. A parousia of the risen Christ to the promised land in AD 66-70 causes vengeance to the non-Christian Jews, but brings salvation to the church there.

2. The role of Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:15) and the escaping emperor veneration

The teaching of Nicolaitans (Νικόλαϊτων) is a kind of syncretistic heresy of incipient Gnosticism. They enticed the Christians to commit adultery and to eat the food dedicated to idols. By doing that, Christians could escape from the persecution of emperors. The proper noun ‘Nicaus’ (Νικάους) like Balaam meaning ‘overcoming the people’ signals that not few Christians fell into the seduction of this heresy. In 2 Peter 2:15 and Jude 11 the false teachers are accused of the error of Balaam, which Revelation 2:14-15 closely links with to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. The Apostle Peter wrote 2 Peter in terms of internal evidence (2 Pe. 1:1). In consequence, this intertextuality proves the early date of Revelation.

3. Worship, new songs, and Christian war scroll (Rev. 5-6)

In a sense, the gist of Revelation as a Christian war scroll (in Bauckham’s term) is about who is worthy of receiving worship and songs: the God who sits on the throne or the Roman emperor? By being aware of the parody on the emperor, the first readers of Revelation should have worshipped God who is about to make war against Rome. By praising God with new songs, the seven churches in Asia Minor must have been comforted with hope restored though their earthly situation was still unchanged. Up to here, the present researcher has focused on the preterist meaning of Revelation in the 1st century context. The futuristic message of Revelation appears after the harlot’s destruction (Rev. 18) and its accompanying song (Rev. 19:1-6), in particular in the millennialism (Rev. 20:1-6), the final judgment (Rev. 20:11-5), New Heaven and Earth and the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:1-22:5).

4. The expansion of God’s kingdom (Rev. 11:15; 12:10-12)

The key verse of Revelation is 11:15 proclaiming the extension of God’s kingdom throughout the world. Then, how this comes true? The answer lies in Revelation 12:10-12. Facing outward persecutions by Nero (the beast from the sea) and the synagogue of Satan (harlot Babylon, the beast from the land) and inward challenge by the

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Nicolaitans, the Christians in the middle of the 1st century had to stand steadfastly on the Christ event to manifest the sovereignty of the One who sits on the throne. When this message of Revelation as an epistle of consolation and encouragement is applied clearly into modern church, the faithful even in travail circumstances can do their best for the kingdom of God.

IV. Conclusion

This paper verifies the early date of the book of Revelation based on critical examination of the external and internal evidences. It would be a faux pas to construe the Book of Revelation as a rejoinder to Domitian’s supposed extreme claims to divinity or to a rule of horror in AD 95-96.57) While Nero’s persecution is important for a proper interpretation of Revelation, the role of the apostate Jews, which the late date advocates unanimously neglect, must be accentuated too. Though the first reader of Revelation lived in Asia Minor, God punished the apostate Jews by destroying the Jerusalem temple in AD 70. The reason why God cursed Jerusalem is that the city was the center of the whole Jews. On the other hand, God judged Rome in AD 68-70 through the severe civil war that almost brought the empire down. The gruesome situation of Rome after Nero’s suicide and his three following emperors gave no vigor to Rome to persecute the Christians,

consequently its outcome was the expansion of God’s kingdom (Rev. 11:15).
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이 논문은 요한계시록의 내증과 외증을 살펴서 가장 타당한 기록 연대를 결정하는 것을 목적으로 한다. 하지만 오늘날 다수의 학자들은 '주와 신'으로 불린 도미티안 황제의 박해가 계시록의 배경이라고 주장한다. 20세기 초부터 인기를 끈 도미티안의 박해라는 가설은 터툴리안 같은 다른 교부들의 증거는 물론 계시록의 내적인 증거를 통해서 다시 검증될 필요가 있다. 666이라는 상징적 수를 가진 바다에서 올라온 짐승인 6대 황제 네로의 박해가 중요하지만, 또 다른 박해 세력인 불신 유대인의 역할을 간과하지 말아야 한다. 네로의 자살 직후 3명의 황제가 암살과 자살을 반복한 시민전쟁은 반드시 속히 일어난 하나님의 심판이었다. 같은 시기에 벌어진 예루살렘 돌성전 파괴는 불신 유대인을 항한 하나님의 심판이었다. 계시록이 AD 96년경 도미티안 때가 아니라, 네로 황제의 자살 이전인 AD 65-66년경에 기록되었다고 본다면, 돌성전 파괴의 중요성도 함께 고려할 수 있다.