

Revelation - Introduction, Part 6

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COURSE  COMMENTARY 



Date Written

- **Range of Dates**
Dates for the book have been proposed between A.D. 41 and A.D. 117. The majority place the date of writing between A.D. 54 and A.D. 96.
- **Significance of Date**
Significance depends on the interpretive system one holds. For the most popular form of preterism (discussed in detail later), the date is **critically important**. Other systems are not as sensitive to the date of writing.
- **Significance to Preterism**
One form of preterism holds that the events of Revelation describe the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish state in A.D. 70. If Revelation is written later than approximately A.D. 68, the **preterist interpretation collapses!**
- **Internal Evidence vs. External Evidence**
The two sources of evidence for determining the date: **internal** evidence and **external** evidence. Internal evidence is much more subjective than external evidence.

Internal Evidence for Early Date

- **John's Knowledge of Priestly Service**
Edersheim holds that John's knowledge of priestly service indicates Revelation must have been written by someone active in priestly service. Therefore, the Temple must have still been standing.
- **Mention of a Temple**
John is told to "Rise and measure the Temple of God..." (**Rev. 11**). Therefore, the Temple must have still been standing.

But Ezekiel describes a Temple at a time when no Temple stood (575 B.C.). Ezekiel's Temple is also measured (**Eze. 40:5**). Ezekiel's Temple is described in **much greater detail than John's** yet is not standing at the time. Daniel also mentions a Temple when none is standing ("the Sanctuary" in **Dan. 9:26**).

Nero as Fulfillment for Early Date?

- **Caesar Nero**
Caesar Nero was the fifth Roman Emperor (AD 54–68). He became infamous for his personal debaucheries, and extravagances. Like "the beast" of Revelation (**Rev. 11:7**; **Rev. 13:1**), Nero persecuted Christians.



Image courtesy of Mike McCorkle.

Nero as Fulfillment for Early Date

- [The Nero Revival Myth](#)
Some hold that the mention of the revival of the Beast ([Rev. 13:3, 14](#); [Rev. 17:8, 11](#)) must refer to the Nero revival myth.
- [The Number of Nero's Name](#)
One variation of the Hebrew spelling of the Latin title "Caesar Neron" adds up to "666" ([Rev. 13:18](#)).

External Evidence for Early Date

- [Paul Followed Pattern of Seven Churches](#)
The *Muratorian Fragment* (170-190) and the *Monarchian Prologues* (250-350) claim that Paul wrote to seven churches following the pattern of John in Revelation.

(Revelation would then have to predate the Pauline Epistles! Galatians written in A.D. 49.)
- [Papias' Statement Concerning John](#)
Papias says, " he was killed by the Jews, thus clearly fulfilling, **together with his brother**, Christ's prophecy concerning them " ([Mark 10:39](#)). (James was martyred in A.D. 63.)

(This merely states *who* killed John, not *when* he died.)

Late Date Evidence Tortured to Support Early Date

- [Statement of Irenaeus \(ca. A.D. 180\)](#)
" 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 this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision. For **that was seen** no very long time since, but almost in our day, **towards the end of Domitian's reign.** "
- [Church Historian Schaff](#)
" The traditional [late] date of composition at the end of Domitian's reign (95 or 96) rests on

the **clear and weighty testimony of Irenaeus**, is confirmed by Eusebius and Jerome, and has still its learned defenders... "

Preterist Ken Gentry

" What is the subject of this verb [was seen]? Is it 'him who saw the Apocalypse' (i.e., John) or 'the Apocalypse'? "

Irenaeus Tortured to Support Early Date

o Irenaeus' Statement is Clear

- 1) The nearest antecedent to the verb "it was seen " is "the apocalypse."
- 2) The passive verb *eorathe* , "he/she/it was seen," is not appropriate for describing the length of a person's life.
- 3) If John were the subject, Irenaeus would have said that John lived until the reign of Trajan, something Irenaeus knew. Instead, he mentions Domitian.
- 4) There is no textual ambiguity. It is simply wishful thinking.

o Irenaeus Destroys Preterism!

" But when the Antichrist shall have devastated all things in this world, he will reign for three years and six months, and sit in the temple at Jerusalem; and then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds, in the glory of the Father, sending this man and those who follow him into the Lake of Fire; but bringing for the righteous the times of the kingdom, that is, the rest, the hallowed seventh day; and restoring to Abraham the promised inheritance, in which kingdom the Lord declared, that 'many coming from the east and the west should sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.' " [Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, *Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. I* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), ECF 1.1.7.1.5.31.]

Internal Evidence for Late Date

o Changes in Church at Ephesus

If John wrote Revelation in A.D. 64-67, then the letter to the church at Ephesus in [Rev. 2:1-7](#) overlaps with Paul's two letters to Timothy, who was pastor of the church when Paul wrote. Paul's epistles fail to mention the problems recorded in Revelation.

o Changes in Church at Laodicea

Paul indicates that the church was an active group ([Col. 4:13](#)) in about A.D. 60-62. Yet the church received no commendation when the time Revelation was written ([Rev. 3:14-22](#)). Clearly, considerable time intervened.

o Nicolaitan Sect

When Revelation was written, the Nicolaitans were an established, well-recognized sect ([Rev. 2:6, 15](#)), yet they are not mentioned in the epistles.

o No Mention of Paul

Paul ministered at Ephesus for almost 3 years (A.D. 52-54). If John wrote only 12-16 years later (ala the early date), it seems very unusual there is not the slightest inference about Paul in the letters to the Seven Churches.

o Emperor Worship

If the worship of Roman Emperors is reflected in the persecution recorded in the letters to the Seven Churches ([Rev. 2:13](#)), this would accord better with a later date.

" More important for the [dating] issue here is that Nero was not deified, though there is

some evidence that he wished to be. However, there was no widespread demand that he be recognized as such.... the coins of the 90s prove Domitian's megalomania; they show even his wife was called the mother of the divine Caesar.... the imperial cult was apparently much more developed and prominent in Domitian's day than it was in Nero's time. " [Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 6-7.]

External Evidence for Late Date

- o **Irenaeus**

The previously discussed clear statement of Irenaeus (slide 14).

- o **Eusebius**

In the 14th year of Domitian: " Persecution of Christians and under him the apostle John is banished to Patmos and sees his Apocalypse, as Irenaeus mentions. "

- o **Other Church Fathers**

Tertullian (ca. 160-220) and Origen (ca. 185-254) support the late date. Although they do not specifically say that John was banished by Domitian, Jerome and Eusebius interpreted Tertullian as holding this view. Late date is attested by Victorinus (d. ca. 304) who wrote the first commentary on the *Book of Revelation*. Jerome (writing ca. 390) witnesses to the late date.

- o **Statements Unchallenged**

These statements made so near the time of writing by such well-known people would surely have been challenged if they were in error. We have no such indication from the historic record.

For additional information on this topic, see the [commentary](#).