

INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

I. AUTHORSHIP

A. The Testimony of the Book:

1. *"I, John, your brother and fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos, because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus." (Rev 1:9)*
2. *"And I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. . . . And he (the angel) said to me, 'Do not do that; I am a fellow-servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets (Rev 22:8-9)*

B. Various Suggestions

1. John the Elder
Not the apostle, but another person named John who supposedly ministered in Asia Minor (cf. Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* iii.39.4)
2. John Mark
3. A pseudonym
4. John the Apostle (one of Jesus' 12 disciples)

C. Evidence for John the Apostle

1. John did reside in Ephesus of Asia Minor
 - a. Testimony of Polycrates [bishop of Ephesus, 2nd cent. A.D.]

". . . John, who leaned on the Lord's breast, who was a priest wearing the mitre, and a witness and teacher: he sleeps at Ephesus."¹
 - b. Witness of Irenaeus² (c. A.D. 120-202)
 - 1) "Irenaeus and others record that John the Divine and Apostle survived until the times of Trajan; after which time Papias of Hierapolis and Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, his hearers, became well known."³

¹Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 3.31.3; 5.24.2

²Irenaeus was probably a native of Smyrna, where as a boy he listened to Polycarp. Tradition has it that he moved to Rome, where he studied before going on to become bishop of Lyons. Wrote *Against Heresies*.

³Eusebius, *Chronicon* for Olymp. 220.

- 2) ". . . all the Elders witness, who in Asia conferred with John the Lord's disciple, to the effect that John had delivered these things unto them; for he abode with them until the times of Trajan."⁴
2. Tradition connects John the Apostle with Patmos
- "After Domitian, Nerva reigned one year, who recalled John from the island (i.e., Patmos), and allowed him to dwell in Ephesus. He was at that time the sole survivor of the twelve Apostles, and after writing his Gospel received the honour of martyrdom. For Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, who was an eye-witness of him, in the second book of the Oracles of the Lord says that he was killed by the Jews."⁵
3. Irenaeus's Testimony
- "And if anyone will look more carefully at what the Prophets say of the end, and at all that John the Lord's disciple saw in the Apocalypse, he will find the Gentiles generally enduring the same plagues, which at that time Egypt in particular endured."⁶
4. Justin's Testimony (c. A.D. 100-165)
- Justin (who had once lived at Ephesus) knew the book, and attributed it to the Apostle John.⁷
5. Others who testify to John the Apostle
- a. Tertullian (150-225): *Adv. Marcion* 3.14
 - b. Clement of Alexandria (152-217): *Paed.* 2.119
 - c. Origen (185-253): *Johann* 5.3
6. Internal Evidence for John the Apostle
- a. Both the Gospel and Revelation use the word "Logos" of Christ, an expression found only in Johannine literature (Jn 1:1; Rev 19:13).

⁴Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* (Lat. *Adversus Haereses*) 2.22.5. Cited in *The Apostolic Fathers* by Lightfoot, 276.

⁵From Georgius Hamarlolus, *Chronicon Syntomon* (9th cent. Byzantine monk). Cited in *Apostolic Fathers* by Lightfoot, 267.

⁶Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.30.1–31.1. Cited in *Apostolic Fathers*, 282. When he refers to "John the Lord's Disciple," he clearly has in mind the Apostle John, for he not only uses this description but adds that he leaned on Jesus' breast and published the Gospel while residing in Ephesus (cf. *Against Heresies*, 3.1.1; 3.11.1; 4.20.11; 4.35.2; and 5.33.3-4).

⁷*Dialogue with Trypho*, 81. Since Eusebius, who did not accept apostolic authorship, cites this (see *Hist. Eccl.* 4.18), the testimony is quite reliable as being from Justin. [cf. *Apol.* 1.28 for allusion to Rev 12:9; 20:2]

- b. Both are patterned on the number seven. Gospel: seven signs and seven day account of the passion story. Rev: letters to seven churches; three sets of seven judgments, etc.
 - c. For lexical and syntactical similarities between Revelation and other Johannine literature, see Robert L. Thomas (pp. 11-17).
- D. The Objection to the Apostle John as the Author

Although many of the early church fathers attributed Revelation to the Apostle John, this was eventually challenged by Dionysius, a pupil of Origen and eventually bishop of Alexandria (3rd cent.; d. A.D. 264). His objection is suspect, however, since he had a negative bias against Revelation [he repudiated the theology of an earthly reign of Christ which Revelation tends to affirm]. See Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, 7.24; 7.25.7-27.

Dionysius's objections were based on certain alleged differences of thought & style with the Gospel of John, linguistic differences, irregular usage of Greek grammar, and the fact that the book makes no claim of apostolic authorship. These arguments, however, have been clearly refuted by Robert L. Thomas in his commentary (see pp. 2-9).

II. DATE OF WRITING

A. Suggested Dates:

- 1. Commonly accepted date: during the reign of Domitian, probably A.D. 90-95
- 2. Primary alternative: earlier—shortly after the reign of Nero, late A.D. 68-69

B. Evidence for the date in Domitian's reign (r. A.D. 81-96)

- 1. John was on Patmos during Domitian's reign

Clement of Alexandria says that after Domitian's death, John the Apostle moved from the island of Patmos to Ephesus.⁸

★ 2. Irenaeus's Testimony

Note: Keep in mind that Irenaeus (a native of Smyrna) had been a disciple of Polycarp who in turn had personally known and been taught by John the Apostle.

Irenaeus states, the Apocalypse "was seen no such long time ago, but almost in our own generation, at the end of the reign of Domitian."⁹

- 3. The Condition of the Asiatic Churches

Upon reading Rev 2-3, it seems that there is a marked deterioration in the condition of the churches (especially at Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea). This area had previously been the primary focus of the Apostle Paul (who died in the 60's). The deterioration would probably have taken some time, which argues

⁸*Quis dives salvetur* 42; cf. Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.23.6.

⁹Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5.30.3.

against a date shortly after Nero's reign (i.e., A.D. 68-70). Furthermore, Laodicea had been destroyed by an earthquake in A.D. 60-61.

4. The Timing of John's Arrival in Asia

John came to Asia from Palestine in the late 60's, at the time of the Jewish revolt of A.D. 66-70. Thomas reasons, "A Neronian dating would hardly allow time for him to have settled in Asia, to have replaced Paul as the respected leader of the Asian churches, and then to have been exiled to Patmos before Nero's death in A.D. 68."¹⁰

5. Emperor Worship and Persecution

Some would argue that the status of emperor worship and persecution favors a date in the latter reign of Nero, but this is not conclusive.¹¹ There is no evidence that Nero's persecutions extended to Asia Minor, and although Domitian is known to have persecuted Roman Christians, there is no solid evidence of a wider persecution.

Although the book may have allusions to emperor worship (see 13:4; 15:16; 14:9-11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4), this would not conclusively put it in Domitian's reign.¹²

C. The argument for a date shortly after Nero's reign (late 68 or 69)¹³

1. The primary argument offered for a date shortly after Nero is the reference in Rev 17:9-11 to 7 kings (this argument presumes that the "7 hills" in vs. 9 is a reference to Rome, and that the 6th king was then in power [possibly Galba who reigned briefly after Nero]). But this line of reasoning has problems:

- a. This is probably not a reference to Roman emperors.
- b. With which emperor do you start counting? Julius Caesar, Augustus or Caligula (the first persecuting emperor)?

2. More recently, "reconstructionists" have argued for a pre-70 date in order to relegate the fulfillment of Revelation entirely to the past. Hence, the prophecies were fulfilled with Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70.¹⁴

¹⁰Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 22.

¹¹There was a revival of persecution in Domitian's time, which is affirmed by Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.18.4) and Sulpicius Severus (*Chronicle*, 2.31).

¹²The period Nero to Domitian saw rapid development of emperor worship into an official policy of imperial politics. Domitian was determined to enforce it, though his method was uncertain. He ordered that he be addressed as *dominus et deus* (lord and god), perhaps as a test of loyalty (see Suetonius, *Domitian*, 13). There was a strong Caesar cult in Asia and a new Caesar-temple was erected in Ephesus during Domitian's reign, which could have made persecution possible (cf. Rev 1:9; 2:10, 13).

¹³For studies that entertain the early date, see Albert A. Bell ("The Date of John's Apocalypse. The Evidence of Some Roman Historians Reconsidered," *NT Studies* 25 [1978-79]: 93-102); Hort (*Apocalypse I-III*, xii-xxxiii); J. A. T. Robinson (*Redating the New Testament* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976], 221-53); and Christopher Rowland (*The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* [New York: Crossroad, 1982], 403-13).

D. Conclusion

The traditional date, late in the reign of Domitian, seems best. Perhaps A.D. 95-96.

III. SOURCES

A. Statistic: out of 404 verses in the whole book, 278 seem to have some allusion to the Old Testament.

These are not quotes so much, as allusions and borrowings. Beale prefers the term "dependence" to "allusion," and stipulates three kinds of dependencies: clear, probable and possible.¹⁵ These seem to have been drawn from both the Hebrew OT and the LXX.

B. Identification of Sources [see Appendix A.1]

For lists of OT parallels, see Charles (*Revelation*, 1: lxviii-lxxxiii); Swete (*Commentary on Revelation*, cxl-cliii), and G. K. Beale (*The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* [Lanham, MD: UPA, 1984]).

Swete observes (p. cliii), "But there are certain books which he uses with especial frequency; more than half his references to the Old Testament belong to the Psalms, the prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel, and the Book of Daniel, and in proportion to its length the Book of Daniel yields by far the greatest number."

IV. THE GREEK TEXT OF REVELATION

A. GENERAL NOTES

Compared to other books of the New Testament, there are far fewer Greek manuscript witnesses for Revelation. Swete estimated 230 manuscripts, although there have been some new discoveries since his day (notably \mathfrak{P}^{47}).¹⁶ Of these, five are papyrus mss, the longest of which only has 8–9 chapters (namely, \mathfrak{P}^{47}). Eleven are uncial mss (but only 3 of these have the whole book). The bulk of these are minuscule mss dating mainly from the 10th-16th centuries A.D. Many of the manuscripts are only fragments. One significant note: the famous Codex Vaticanus (B) does not have Revelation!

That a number of copies of Revelation were circulating shortly after John wrote is attested by Irenaeus in his discussion of the number 666: "Such, then, being the state of the case, and this number being found in all the most approved and ancient copies [of the Apocalypse], and those men who saw John face to face bearing their testimony [to it]."¹⁷

¹⁴Reconstructionism is also known as *Dominion Theology*, and is a form of post-tribulationism. Adverents include David Chilton (*The Days of Vengeance, An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* [Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion, 1987]) and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. (*Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* [Ft. Worth, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989]). For a refutation of this view, see Thomas (p. 20ff.).

¹⁵G. K. Beale, "A Reconsideration of the Text of Daniel in the Apocalypse," *Biblica* 67:4 (1986): 543.

¹⁶Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, clxxxvi.

¹⁷Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V.30.1, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1981), 558.

B. THE PAPYRUS MANUSCRIPTS

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| 1. | Ⲑ ¹⁸ | Rev 1:4-7 (3rd-4th cent.) | London: British Library |
| 2. | Ⲑ ²⁴ | Rev 5:5-8; 6:5-8 (4th cent.) | Andover Newton Theo Sch |
| 3. | Ⲑ ⁴³ | Rev 2:12-13; 15:8–16:2 (6th-7th cent.) | London: British Library |
| 4. | Ⲑ ⁴⁷ | Rev 9:10–17:2 (3rd cent.) | Dublin: Chester Beatty III |
| 5. | Ⲑ ⁸⁵ | Rev 9:19–10:2,5-9 (4th-5th cent.) | Strasbourg: Bibliotheque Nat. et Univ. |

C. THE UNCIAL MANUSCRIPTS

Of the eleven uncials for Revelation, only three have the complete book:

Ⲙ (01)	Sinaiticus (4th cent.)	London: British Lib.
A (02)	Alexandrinus (5th cent.)	London: British Lib.
046	(10th cent.)	Rome: Vatican Lib.

Another important uncial is C (04), named Codex Ephraemi Syri Rescriptus (5th cent.), which has most of Revelation (but not all). This is a *palimpsest* (washed clean for reusing). This ms was erased in the 12th century to be reused for a Greek translation of 38 tractates by Ephraem.

D. HELPFUL RESOURCES

Aland, Kurt, and Barbara Aland. *The Text of the New Testament*. Rev. ed. Translated by Erroll F. Rhodes. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1989.

Comfort, Philip W. *Early Manuscripts & Modern Translations of the New Testament*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1990.

Hodges, Zane C., and Arthur L. Farstad. *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*. 2d ed. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985.

V. CANONICITY¹⁸

A. Eusebius (c. 265-c. 339)

Eusebius records that some in his day questioned it, although it was generally recognized as genuine.¹⁹

B. Council of Laodicea (360)

Did not recognize Revelation as canonical (the Council of Hippo in 393, however, affirmed Revelation).

C. Opinion of Martin Luther

"My spirit cannot accomodate itself to this book. There is one sufficient reason for the small esteem in which I hold it—that Christ is neither taught nor recognized."²⁰

¹⁸For an overview of the canonicity of Revelation, see D. A. Carson, et al., *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 480-81. Cf. F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988).

¹⁹*Hist. Eccl.*, 3.25.

²⁰From the preface to Luther's 1522 Bible (cited in Carson, 481).