

The Overwhelming Presence of Nero in Early Apocalypse Commentaries

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Introduction

In this session we shall see how the emperor Nero shows up in many commentaries on Revelation from early and medieval Christianity. The comments about Nero that will be presented are on Rev 3:10; 6:3-4; 11:7; 13:3, 12, and 18; and Rev 17:10.

Revelation 3:10 The Hour of Testing About to Come Upon the Whole World

I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that is about to come upon the whole world.

Several Apocalypse commentaries from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries give two possible interpretations for the hour of testing in this verse, a preterist one and a futuristic interpretation. The writers of these commentaries state that the hour of testing could refer to either persecution of Christians in the first century or to a period of trial under a last days Antichrist. Ralph of Laon (d. 1136), for example, wrote on this passage in his widely circulated *Ordinary Gloss* on the Bible: “*From the hour of testing*, either of the general persecution which would happen immediately after Nero, or in the last time of Antichrist.”¹ This interpretation that the hour of testing refers to a persecution that happened immediately after Nero is similar to modern preterist thoughts on the passage. For example, David Chilton on this passage wrote, “It is also likely, however, that this judgment partially corresponds to the wars, revolutions, riots, and ‘world-wide convulsions’ that racked the Empire after Nero committed suicide in June 68.”²

Hugh of Saint Cher (d. 1263), a Dominican who served on the theology faculty at the University of Paris, wrote a commentary on the entire Bible, including the Book of Revelation, about the year 1235. On Rev 3:10, he proposes: “*From the hour, which was either in the time of Nero, or will be in the time of Antichrist.*”³ Hugh wrote a second commentary on Revelation. The comment on 3:10 is similar but a comparison will show that he changed “in the time of Nero” to “immediately after the death of Nero.”⁴

An unknown commentator from the thirteenth century wrote an *Exposition of the Apocalypse* that was published among the works of Thomas Aquinas, but is not believed to be his. This expositor also provided two options for his readers regarding the interpretation of the time of the hour of testing. On Rev 3:10 he wrote:

*I, who am able, shall save you from the hour of testing...which is coming on the whole earth to try the inhabitants of the earth. Moreover, this can be understood of either the general persecution which was after Nero, or that which will be in the time of Antichrist.*⁵

Nicholas of Gorran, a Dominican who wrote a commentary on Revelation between 1263 and 1285, on Rev 3:10 said that the hour of testing about to come upon the whole earth was “either immediately after the death of Nero, or in the time of Antichrist.”⁶

As you can see, at least four different commentators from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries all contained what, these authors believed, was one of two acceptable interpretations, that is, that the hour of testing, which was about to try the inhabitants of the whole world, was the time immediately after the death of Nero.

Revelation 6:3-4 Nero Seated on a Red Horse

And when He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, “Come.” And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men should slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.

Next let us look at three other medieval commentators on Revelation, from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, that saw Nero symbolized in the second horseman of

the Apocalypse. Now, we have often heard that sometime with the last seven years on earth, during the Great Tribulation, the seven seals will be opened and the four horsemen of the Apocalypse will unleash their judgments. Let us see what these commentators have to say about that.

Alexander “Minorita” of Bremen (d. 1271) wrote a commentary on Revelation between 1230 and 1240, in which he clearly viewed Nero as the rider on the red horse. He wrote on the second seal:

And I looked and *there went out another horse that was red*. That was the reign of Nero, red with the blood of many humans. *And he who sat upon it, namely Nero himself, it was given to him*, that is, permitted by God *to take peace from the earth*. Because he did that, when he destroyed the senate of Rome....He also committed many parricides, having killed his mother, brother, sister, wife and the rest of his relatives, and his teacher. He set fire to Rome, which burned for three days or more, so that he might see how Troy once burned. *And so that they might kill one another*. For Nero killed himself, and the emperors Galba in Spain, Otto in Rome, and Vitellius in Germany killed each other over a period of a year and six months, as Roman history shows. Here again he [John] repeats in prophetic fashion concerning Nero, so that it is understood that there would be another persecution of Christians. *And a great sword was given to him*, because through the sword he brought about the first persecution against the Christians, beginning with the leaders, namely Peter and Paul, whom he killed.⁷

Not only did Alexander believe that Nero was the rider on the red horse, Peter Auriol (d. 1322) explained it similarly. In the year 1319 he wrote a *Compendium on Holy Scripture*, a summary of the whole Bible. In its section on the Book of Revelation, he interpreted the red horse as the Roman Empire, and correlated its redness to certain deeds of the emperor Nero. He wrote:

The Second Seal. The Edict of the First Persecution. *And when he had opened the second seal*. John signifies and shows the edict of the first general persecution. I say general so that a partial persecution is excluded, which the faith had immediately from the beginning in Jerusalem and Judea. But Nero was the first among the Roman emperors who issued an edict that Christians should be

punished, as Eusebius says. And I say that he martyred the most blessed apostles Peter and Paul and many others throughout diverse parts of the world.⁸

Through the horse therefore the Roman Empire is understood. For, horses in Scripture have customarily designated kingdoms, as is evident in Zechariah 6:2, etc. But the red horse was the Roman Empire, red through the shedding of blood. Because, as Eusebius narrates, Nero progressed into such evil that he did not temper the sword even from his own family and household, and committed murder against his mother, his brothers, his wife and all his nearest relatives, and was incestuous. Or, it is called red by reason of his many abominable wicked deeds, since among all the emperors he led a life that was most evil and abominable, as is shown from the histories. Or, by reason of the conflagration and fire, since he wanted to see Rome burn. Accordingly, it had seemed as if red and flame-colored by reason of the combustion.⁹

And so *it was given* to Nero to sit upon the red horse, upon the Roman Empire, *that he might remove peace from the earth and that they might kill one another* on account of the murders he committed even against Romans.... Therefore, *a great sword was given to him*, since it was given to him by divine permission, that he might kill the great Apostles and that he might begin the first great persecution against the faithful.¹⁰

While many modern interpreters give a futuristic interpretation of the horsemen of the Apocalypse, Auriol believed that at least part of the vision of the red horse referred to Nero, a Roman emperor of the first century. To confirm his interpretation, he used Eusebius' *Church History*, written in the early fourth century. Interestingly, the full title of Auriol's compendium is *Compendium of the Literal Sense of the Whole Divine Scripture*. Those who insist on a futuristic view of the Book of Revelation frequently state that when people apply a literal hermeneutic to the Book of Revelation, it results in a futurist interpretation. However, in the case of Auriol, he applied a literal hermeneutic, and saw in the visions of the Apocalypse events that took place in the first century.

Nicholas of Lyra (d. 1349), another fourteenth century commentator on Revelation also saw the opening of the second seal as having reference to the church

under the Roman emperor Nero. Here I have used the translation of Philip D.W. Krey. Nicholas wrote:

And out came another horse, bright red. That is, the Roman people, which is called red at the time of Nero because Nero killed many of the Romans out of cruelty—even his own mother and wife, and he is said to have killed his brother, sister, and even his teacher, Seneca. In another way more properly “red;” because Nero caused the City of Rome to be burned for it to seem like the fire of ancient Troy. In such a fire, out of the mixture of smoke and fire the appearance of redness is caused.

Its rider. Namely, Nero having the power. *Was permitted.* That is, having been permitted by God. *To take.* That is, to carry off. *Peace from the earth,* Because the populace was thrown into confusion throughout the Roman Empire due to his evil deeds. *So that the people would slaughter one another;* As a result of Nero’s perfidy and after he killed himself, Otho, Galba, and Vitellius wanted to usurp the office. Out of their mutual struggle many were killed. *And he was given a great sword.* That is, the power of killing Christians. He started the first persecution against the Church, that is, persecutions instigated by Roman emperors. The Church had endured persecution earlier by the Jews. Indeed, the severe commands of Caligula were not directed against the Church, but against the inhabitants of Judah, of whom comparatively few were Christian; nor was the order executed, and, therefore, the first persecution of the Church is attributed to Nero. Even Claudius, who was emperor between Caligula and Nero, is not reputed to have persecuted Christians. Nero, however, killed the leaders of the Apostles, namely, Peter and Paul, and ordered many other Christians in Rome to be killed.¹¹

Late medieval commentators on John’s Apocalypse, among them Alexander of Bremen, Peter Auriol, and Nicholas of Lyra, all interpreted the rider of the red horse in Rev 6:3-4 as the emperor Nero. This variety of evidence shows convincingly that correlating the going forth of the horsemen with events in the first century was not a figment of Louis Alcazar’s seventeenth-century imagination, as is often alleged. Rather it was part of the medieval exegetical tradition on Revelation.

Revelation 11:7 The Beast Ascending from the Abyss, Nero Raised from Hell

And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them.

Probably with this passage as a basis, which speaks of a beast coming up out of the abyss, the writer Commodian (3rd-5th c.) described the end-time beast saying “Nero shall be raised up from hell.”¹² “For us Nero has become Antichrist...”¹³ he also wrote in a poem.

About the year 398, the church father Jerome wrote a Latin commentary on Revelation. When explaining the identity of the beast in Rev 11:7, he cited cross-references from Ezekiel and Isaiah. He then continued:

Moreover, he [the beast] was already in the kingdom of the Romans and was among the Caesars, [about which] the apostle Paul also testifies. For, he said to the Thessalonians: *Let him who now restrains, restrain, until he comes from [your] midst. And then that wicked one will appear, whose coming is according to the working of Satan with lying signs and wonders* (2 Thess 2:7-9). And so that they might know that the one, who is going to come, was he who was ruler at that time, he added: *The mystery, he said, of lawlessness is already at work*, that is, the lawlessness which he is going to do, works mysteriously, but he is not raised by his own power nor by the power of his father but by the order of God.

Therefore, this is why Paul says to the same: *For this reason, because they did not receive the love of God, God sends them a spirit of error...* (2 Thess 2:11).¹⁴

It seems that for Jerome, the beast of Rev 11:7 was none other than Nero. For, Jerome says that, according to the apostle Paul, the beast was already in the kingdom of the Romans, was among the Caesars, and “was ruler at that time,” that is, during the ministry of the apostle Paul. When Jerome mentioned that this beast will be “raised,” he seems to have held to the common belief among early Christians that at the end of the world Nero would be raised up from hell to torment the church again. Furthermore, Jerome makes the comment that this would not happen through his own power, nor even

from the power of his father (i.e. Nero's spiritual father, the devil), but it would happen by the order of God, since Paul wrote that *God* would send them a spirit of error.

In his commentary on Daniel, Jerome wrote “And so there are many of our viewpoint who think that Domitius Nero was the Antichrist because of his outstanding savagery and depravity.”¹⁵ Domitius was Nero's family name.¹⁶

Commodian and Jerome, like many other church fathers, believed in an end-time Antichrist. For them, Rev 11:7 taught or confirmed that he, also identified with the *wicked one* of 2 Thess 2, would be Nero resurrected in the last days. While this concept is dissimilar to that of modern preterist interpretation of Revelation—which sees in the Apocalypse references to the historical Nero, but not an end-time resurrected Nero—it is similar to modern preterist views in that it deciphers in the prophecies of the Apocalypse references to the first century emperor Nero.

Revelation 13:3, 12b Nero's Fatal Wound

And I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed...And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed.

Who is the “beast coming out of the sea” whose “fatal wound was healed”? Some dispensationalists, like the late John Walvoord, think that the healing of the wound teaches a revived Roman Empire. Others, like Tim LaHaye, assert that these passages prophesy that the Antichrist will die and rise again in the middle of the Great Tribulation.¹⁷ This essay illustrates that many in early and medieval Christianity connected the beast whose fatal wound was healed with the first century emperor Nero. In addition, at least one patristic text recommended that the letters of Nero's name be used to calculate the number of the beast, 666; and another linked the number of the beast with the Hebrew language. Let us read on.

Victorinus of Pettua, who commented on Revelation about the year 260, Jerome who revised Victorinus' commentary about 398, and the surviving manuscripts of the sixth-century Apocalypse commentary of Apringius of Beja all have on this passage: “He is referring here to Nero.”¹⁸ The expanded comments, in Jerome's version, read:

Moreover, *one of the heads slain unto death, and his fatal wound was healed*, he speaks of Nero. For it is plain that while the cavalry sent by the senate pursued him, he cut his own throat. Therefore, after he is raised, God sends this one, a worthy king for a worthy people. And the Jews merited such a Christ. And because he will bear another name, he will establish another life, so that the Jews should welcome him as Christ... Moreover, about him rising from hell, we have also spoken above in the word of Isaiah: “Water will nourish him, and hell increased him;”¹⁹ who, however, although he should come with name unchanged, and doings unchanged, the Spirit says: *His number is the name of a man and his number six hundred sixty six.*²⁰

Jerome’s comment links the fatal wound to Nero’s suicide, and then recites the belief that Nero will be raised up from hell to return under another name as a false Messiah for the Jews. In addition, Jerome’s narrative links the number of the beast to this revived Nero.

Sulpicius Severus (c. 405), writing a history of the emperor Nero, speaks about the belief that Nero would be revived in the end-time. In it he cites Rev 13:3. He wrote: Also after laws were passed the religion was forbidden, and publicly. With edicts having been put forth, it was not permissible to be a Christian publicly. Then Paul and Peter were condemned to death. Paul’s head was cut off with a sword. Peter was hung on a cross. While these things were happening in Rome, the Jews...began to rebel. Vespasian, with the command of the proconsul, was sent against them by Nero. After many grave battles, he compelled those conquered to take refuge inside the walls of Jerusalem. Meanwhile Nero, already detestable even to himself on account of the consciousness of his wicked deeds, was removed from human affairs. But it was uncertain whether he had committed suicide. Surely his body was gone. Whence it is believed, that although he pierced himself through with a sword, he was healed of his wound and was preserved, according to that which was written about him: *And his mortal wound was healed* (Rev 13:3), that he should return at the end of the world so that the *mystery of iniquity* (2 Thess 2:7) should be fulfilled.²¹

Severus attributed the origin of the *Nero redivivus* legend to uncertainties raised by the mysterious circumstances of Nero's death. During Nero's lifetime his astrologers "foretold that he would have to leave Rome but would find a throne in the East," and in his final days Nero spoke to some people about a plan for him to flee to Parthia.²² In addition, the ancient historian Suetonius informs us that public funeral rites had not been held for him, but only about five people—his scribe, his mistress, a freedman named Icelus, and two old nurses— saw Nero's dead body. According to Suetonius, they burned his body on a pyre and entombed it on the Pincian Hill in Rome.²³ This lack of closure for the Roman people sent curious minds sailing with speculation about whether he was really dead. Undoubtedly Rev 13:3,²⁴ which speaks of one of the heads of a beast being healed of a mortal wound, played a role in confirming for many early Christians that the emperor Nero either was still alive or would be resurrected, and that he would return at the end of the world.²⁵

Beatus of Lieban's commentary on Revelation, written in 786 AD, when explaining Rev 13:3 actually used the term "Nero Antichrist." With Jerome's commentary as a base, segments of which I have put in quotation marks, he expanded upon it and wrote:

"Moreover, *one of the heads*" of the beast, which we have said above was in the false prophets, *was as if it had been "slain to death and its fatal wound healed.* He speaks of Nero," who prefigured the Antichrist. And since the eighth is a beast, he is Antichrist himself, who now rules subtly in the church through false priests, but then he will devastate the church openly. Because the Jews crucified Christ, they are also expecting *Nero Antichrist* for Christ. "Therefore, after he is raised, God sends this one, a worthy king for a worthy people. And the Jews merited such a Christ. And because" the Antichrist will not have the name Nero, but "will bear another name, he will also establish another life, so that the Jews should welcome him as Christ."²⁶

Beatus believed that a future Antichrist was coming. However, he saw in Rev 13:3 a reference to Nero's fatal wound. The healing of that wound, for Beatus, meant that God would raise Nero from hell, who would come back as the Antichrist under a different name. Interestingly, Beatus refers to this person as "Nero Antichrist." This

caught the attention of Ernest Renan in his 1897 treatise on Antichrist, who wrote: “Saint Beatus of Liebana, who wrote on the Apocalypse in 786, asserts (with more than one inconsequence) that the “Beast” of chapters xiii and xvii, who is to reappear at the head of ten kings to annihilate the city of Rome, is Nero the Antichrist.”²⁷

The association of Nero with Antichrist can be traced in literature as far back as the late first century. *The Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* that was written at the end of the first century connected the Antichrist with Nero. In the passage on Antichrist, who is called “Beliar,” it says that he “will descend from his firmament in the form of a man, a king of iniquity, a murderer of his mother.”²⁸ Nero had his mother, Agrippina, murdered in 59 AD.

In Book 5 of the Sibylline Oracles, in a Christian redaction written in the second century, Nero is again associated with Antichrist. Lines 28-34 of Book 5 read:

One who has fifty as an initial will be commander,
A terrible snake, breathing out grievous war, who one day
Will lay hands on his own family and slay them, and throw everything into
confusion,
Athlete, charioteer, murderer, one who dares ten thousand things.
He will also cut the mountain between the seas and defile it with gore.
But even when he disappears he will be destructive. Then he will return
Declaring himself equal to God. But he will prove that he is not.²⁹

Finally, in modern Armenian, or at least in the Armenian language spoken in the late nineteenth century, the word “Antichrist” is *Neren*.³⁰ This is very likely due to the early association of the Antichrist with the emperor Nero.

Revelation 13:18 The Number of Nero Antichrist

Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.

The *Liber genealogus*, or *Genealogical Book*, is a chronology written in Latin by an unknown North African Donatist Christian in the fifth century. The Donatists, named

after their founding bishop Donatus of Casa Niger, were North African schismatics who separated from the larger Christian body after the Diocletian persecution over issues of ecclesiastical purity.³¹ This chronology was originally written between 405 and 427, but is preserved in four slightly different versions written in the years 427, 438, 455, and 463. It was edited by Theodore Mommsen in 1892 and reprinted in 1981.³²

In short entries the *Liber* lists persons and events in chronological order from Adam and Eve to the fifth century of the Christian era. In doing so, it makes extensive use of the genealogies in the Old Testament, the genealogies in Matthew and Luke, lists of Persian kings, and lists of Roman kings, dictators, and emperors. Other identifiable sources include a Latin translation of the *Chronicle* of Hippolytus, a recension of Victorinus' *Commentary on Revelation*, and the *Chronology* of Julius Quintus Hilarianus.³³

Toward the end of the chronology, it speaks about the birth and death of Christ under the emperors Augustus and Tiberius respectively. It then briefly touches upon the persecutions of Christians under the emperors Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Decius, Valerian, and Diocletian, as well as the persecutions of the Donatists. It is in this section of the *Liber*, which deals with the persecuting emperors (pages 194-196 of Mommsen's edition), that the relevant statements are made about Nero.

Citing a portion of Rev 13:18, paragraphs 614-620 of the version that was written in the year 438 states that the letters of Nero's name are to be used in calculating the number of the beast. It reads in English translation:

614. Moreover, from the passion of the Lord to the passion of Peter and Paul are thirty eight years: They suffered when Nero was consul. This first persecution was of Nero, which is going to occur again under Enoch and Elijah.

615. This Nero is he whose name John called in the Apocalypse 616. *Here wisdom is* (Rev 13:18) used, that the name of him who is thus called 'Antichrist' may be calculated through letters.

A	N	T	I	C	H	R	I	S	T	V	S
1	13	18	9	3	9	17	9	18	19	20	18

The collected number equals 154. This [multiplied by] four “strokes, according to the four letters of the name of Nero” makes 616, which is the name of Antichrist.³⁴

The *Liber genealogus* illustrates that some African Christians saw an allusion to Nero in Rev 13:18, the passage about the number of the beast. Paragraph 615 shows that that verse of Scripture, in the author’s copy of the Apocalypse, read 616 rather than 666. The 616 variant, found in Papyrus Oxyr. 4499 (also known as P 115), uncial manuscript C, cursives 5 and 11 (no longer extant), and *Codex Ephraemi rescriptus*, was known to early Christian writers of the second through eighth centuries including Irenaeus, Tyconius, Caesarius of Arles, [and the unknown authors of *De monogramma* and the Irish Reference Bible.³⁵]

In paragraph 615, the author of the *Liber* was quoting from an ancient source that informed him of the correct way to calculate the number of the beast, i.e., to use the four “strokes, according to the four letters of the name of Nero.”

Irenaeus, Nero, and the Number of the Beast. The calculation of the number of the beast by early Christians using Nero’s name, attested to in the *Liber*, sheds light on the question of *whether or not Irenaeus (c. 180), the earliest church father to write about the number of the beast, was aware of the Nero identification for the number of the beast.* For the past fifty years, scholarly opinion has overwhelmingly asserted that Irenaeus had no knowledge of any Christians in his day associating the number of the beast with Nero. For example, Gregory K. Beale writes:

...Irenaeus discusses various possible identifications for the number of the ‘beast’ (666). But he does not entertain the possibility that the beast is to be identified with Nero, and he even rejects the possibility that the beast is to be identified with any Roman emperor at all. Such lack of consideration is striking since Nero’s infamous reputation as a persecuting tyrant would still have been well known.³⁶

Leon Morris’ 1969 commentary on the Book of Revelation says that Irenaeus did not “even include Nero in his list, let alone regard this as a likely conjecture.”³⁷ Barclay Newman in a 1963 article examining Irenaeus’ views on the Apocalypse, claimed likewise: “Where Irenaeus makes reference to the speculation concerning the number

666... in no instance does he even reflect knowledge of the Nero-redivivus myth in the list of interpretations familiar to him.”³⁸

Let me repeat this. Scholarly opinion says that Irenaeus, the earliest church father to write about the number of the beast, was not even aware of the Nero identification. But let us examine Irenaeus’ writing to see if this is so.

In Book 5.30 of *Against Heresies* Irenaeus reviewed and evaluated three names that equaled the number of the beast, 666. These were ‘Evanthas’, ‘Lateinos’, and ‘Teitan.’ But in the same chapter Irenaeus explained that there were some in his day who were using a corrupted reading of Rev 13:18, which read 616 instead of 666. He then informs us that some “have ventured to **seek out a name** which should contain the erroneous and spurious number,” and were affirming “that **this name**, hit upon by themselves, is that of him who is to come.”³⁹ From these statements, it seems very likely that Irenaeus knew exactly what that name was, but he never specified for his readership what it was. One reason for this may have been because he believed it was based upon a corrupt version of Scripture, and so he did not want to give it the least bit of credence.⁴⁰ Another reason may have been because it was the name of a Roman emperor, and Irenaeus was adverse to the idea that the number should be interpreted with respect to the Roman emperors.⁴¹ The point is that Irenaeus himself seems to have known the name that these Christians were using to arrive at 616.

What was that name? The *Liber genealogus* may provide a clue. It reveals that some African Christians, whose version of Rev 13:18 read 616, were using the name of Nero, and arriving at the number of the beast, 616. No patristic writing, of which I am aware, provides another name for the beast whose sum totals 616. Therefore, I think it is highly probable that the name to which Irenaeus alluded was Nero, and that he in fact did know of the Nero theory for the number of the beast, but rejected it for the reasons mentioned above.

Many modern scholars believe that the earliest Christians calculated the number of the beast in Rev 13:18 by adding the sum of the Hebrew letters of the name *nrwn qsr*, transliterated *Neron Kaisar* in Greek.⁴² John W. Marshall explained that the Nero solution “is well received by the majority of scholars”; and *The IVP Bible Background*

Commentary confirmed that the Nero identification is “the most popular proposal among scholars today.”⁴³ The *Liber genealogus*, a fifth-century text, spoke of a procedure used by some Christians that adds the sum of the letters in the word “Antichristus” and multiplies it by four, the number of letters in Nero’s name. Although these two modes do not correspond exactly, the practice mentioned in the *Liber* may be a vestige of the original method. Another vestige possibly can be found in the anonymous *Handbook on the Apocalypse of the Apostle John* written between the sixth and eighth centuries. On Rev 13:18 it says: “*The number of his name* is understood according to the Hebrew language.”⁴⁴

Against critics who regard the Nero identification of the number of the beast as a novelty not to be found in the early church, the *Liber genealogus* shows that it did in fact exist in the earliest centuries of Christian history.

One objection that people raise against 666 being a cryptogram for *nrwn qsr* is that for it to work, the name Nero (*nrv*) has an “n” added to it, that is, *nrwn*. However, a similar spelling was found in a scroll at Qumran.⁴⁵ There also was a certain coin minted in the holy land during the reign of Nero, and I brought a sample. It clearly has on the reverse the letters in Greek, N E R W N. I will pass it around.

Revelation 17:9-10 Nero as the Sixth King

Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain for a little while.

According to some contemporary scholars, such as J. Ramsey Michaels, this verse “offers the best hope of dating the book [of Revelation.]”⁴⁶ For, if one can identify the sixth king—the “one” who “is” reigning at the time of John’s vision—then one can fix the date of the Apocalypse within the years of that emperor’s reign. Kenenth Gentry expressed this as well, writing, “We find an extremely important chronology indicator in Revelation 17 where the ‘sixth king’ is mentioned,”⁴⁷ and J. Christian Wilson affirmed this saying, “The most important internal evidence for dating Revelation is the passage chapter 17:9-11.”⁴⁸

Four medieval commentaries on Revelation list Nero as the sixth king, the one who is. They are the Irish Reference Bible from about the year 750, the commentary of Beatus of Liebana from 786, a tenth-century commentary in a manuscript in Cambridge, and the commentary of Nicholas of Gorran c.1263-1285.

The Irish Reference Bible is an anonymous Latin commentary on the whole Bible, from the second half of the eighth century, perhaps as early as the year 750.⁴⁹ On Rev 17:9-10 it reads:

*Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come, that is, Gaius Julius Caesar the first emperor, the second Augustus under whom Christ was born, the third Tiberius under whom he suffered, the fourth Claudius under whom the famine in the Acts of the Apostles occurred (cf. Acts 11:38), the fifth Galba, the sixth Nero...*⁵⁰

Beatus' commentary on the passage reads: "Gaius Julius Caesar the first...The second...Augustus...under whom the Lord was born...The third Tiberius under whom He died...The fourth Claudius, under whom the famine in the Acts of the Apostles is described (cf. Acts 11:38), the fifth Galba....the sixth Nero..."⁵¹

The commentary on this passage in a tenth-century manuscript at Cambridge reads: "Gaius Julius Caesar the first emperor, the second Augustus under whom the Lord was born, the third Tiberius under whom He died, the fourth Claudius under whom the famine in the Acts of the Apostles occurred (cf. Acts 11:38), the fifth Galba, the sixth Nero..."⁵²

Finally, the commentary by Nicholas of Gorran has: "The first was Gaius Caesar, the second Augustus, under whom the Lord was born. The third Tiberius, under whom He died, the third [sic] Claudius, under whom occurred the famine, Acts 11. The sixth is said [to be] Nero."⁵³

Martin McNamara, who wrote an article on the commentary in the tenth-century manuscript at Cambridge, said that the reason that the Cambridge commentary and the Irish Reference Bible have almost identical comments on some passages of Revelation is not because of dependence upon one another, but because they both used a common source, a lost Apocalypse commentary that he dated before 750. How far back into the early church that commentary reaches is yet to be determined.⁵⁴

At least four commentaries on Revelation from the middle ages show that interpreters long before the modern period believed that the sixth king, who “is” reigning at the time John wrote Revelation, was Nero.

Summary

Many commentaries from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries gave as an acceptable interpretation of the hour of testing in Rev 3:10 the time immediately after the death of Nero, which corresponds to David Chilton’s interpretation of that passage. Other interpreters in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries saw the second horseman of the Apocalypse in Rev 6 as the emperor Nero, red with the blood of the saints, and having taken peace from the earth.

In the early church, Victorinus, Jerome, and Sulpicius Severus interpreted the beast whose fatal wound was healed as a reference to the suicide of Nero. In the early middle ages, Beatus of Liebana associated that beast with “Nero Antichrist.” This corresponds to interpretations by modern partial preterists like Kenneth Gentry and Gary DeMar, who see a reference to Nero in the sea beast in Rev 13.⁵⁵ Some of the aforementioned patristic writers, however, believed that the healing of Nero’s wound would occur at the end of the world when he would be raised up from hell and persecute the church again, and that belief is generally not held by those today who hold a preterist view of the Book of Revelation.

A fifth-century text entitled *Liber genealogus* recommended that the four letters of Nero’s name be used in the calculation of the number of the beast. While its method does not correspond exactly with the method today of using the numerical value of *nrwn qsr* in Hebrew, the connection between the number of the beast and Nero in this patristic document is informative, as is another early medieval commentary that says that the number should be understood “according to the Hebrew language.” And at least four commentaries from the Middle Ages identified the emperor Nero as the sixth king of Rev 17, the one who was reigning at the time John wrote the Book of Revelation.

What does this all mean? Our dispensational brothers and sisters in Christ tell us that the hour of testing is the Great Tribulation, which they define as the last seven years before the Second Coming of Christ to earth. They also tell us that the visions in

Chapters 6-19 of Revelation are all about historical events that are going to take place in that seven year period. But here we have seen that many of the early and medieval commentaries on the Apocalypse, by notable people in the church, saw references to the emperor Nero in passages in those chapters. Therefore, when we hear proponents of dispensationalism saying that *their* view of Revelation was *the* view of the early church, it is simply not true. The church fathers were all over the map on Revelation, and some of their interpretations of certain of its visions correspond, at least in part, to contemporary partial preterist views.

¹ Ralph of Laon, *Ordinary Gloss*. On Rev 3:10. PL 114:716 (under the pseudonym of Walafrid Strabo). My translation of the Latin *Ab hora tentationis, vel generalis persecutionis in Christianos statim post Neronem futurae, vel ultimo tempore Antichristi*.

² David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, Dominion Press, 1997), 135. Cf. Chilton, *Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Tyler, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), 129.

³ Hugh of St. Cher, *Exposition of the Apocalypse*. On Rev 3:10. In *Vgonis de S. Charo...opera omnia*, Vol. 7 (Venice: Sessas, 1600), 378v. My translation of the Latin *Ab hora,] quae fuit, vel tempore Neronis, vel erit tempore Antichristi*.

⁴ Hugh of Saint Cher, *Exposition on the Apocalypse*. On Rev 3:10. This one begins with the words *Vidit Jacob*, and is found in a printed edition in the works of Thomas Aquinas. *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici...opera omnia*, Vol. 23 (New York: Musurgia Publishers, 1950), 355. I believe the Latin text is also available on the worldwide web under the title *Vidit Jacob*. My translation of the Latin *Et ego te servabo, qui servasti verbum ad [sic] horam tentationis, quae ventura est in orbem universum, vel statim post mortem Neronis, vel tempore Antichristi, tentare habitants in terra..*

⁵ pseudo-Thomas Aquinas, *Exposition of the Apocalypse*. On Rev 3:10. In *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici...opera omnia*, Vol. 23 (New York: Musurgia Publishers, 1950), 538. My translation of the Latin *Ego qui possum servabo te ab hora tentationis...quae ventura est in orbem universum tentare habitantes in terra... Hoc autem potest intelligi vel de generali persecutione, quae fuit post Neronem, vel ea quae erit tempore Antichristi*.

⁶ Nicholas of Gorran, *On the Apocalypse of the Apostle John*. On Rev 3:10. In *Acta Apostolorum et singulas apostolorum Iacobi, Petri, Iohannis et Iudae canonicas epistolas et Apocalypsim commentarii* (Antwerp, 1620), 200. My translation of the Latin *vel statim post mortem Neronis, vel tempore Antichristi*.

⁷ Alexander Minorita, *Expositio in Apocalypsi [Exposition of the Apocalypse]*. Alois Wachtel, ed. (Weimar: Hermann Bohlaus Nachfolger, 1955), 94-5. My translation of the Latin *Et vidi et exivit alius equus rufus. Quod erat Neronis regnum rufus multorum hominum sanguine. Et qui sedebat super eum, scilicet ipse Nero, datum est illi, id est permissum a Deo, ut sumeret pacem de terra. Quod tunc fecit, quando senatum Romae destruxit....Qui et parricidia multa commisit, matre, fratre, sorore, uxore ceterisque consanguineis interfectis atque magistro. Romam tribus diebus sive sive amplius fecit incendi, ut videret quomodo olim Troia arderet. Et ut se invicem interficiant. Nero enim seipsum interfecit, Galba in Hispania, Otto Romae, Vitellius in Germania imperatores per annum et sex menses se invicem interfecerunt, sicut Romana narrat historia. Hic iterum repetit more prophetico de Nero, ut intelligatur alia persecutio fuisse Christianorum, dicens: Et datus est illi gladius magnus, quia ipse primam persecutionem per gladium intulit Christianis, incipiens a maioribus, scilicet Petro et Paulo, quos interfecit.*

⁸ Peter Auriol, *Compendium sensus litteralis totius divinae scripturae [Compendium of the Literal Sense of the Whole Divine Scripture]* (Quaracchi: College of St. Bonaventure, 1896), 464. My translation of the Latin, *II. Sigillum. Primae persecutionis edictum. Et cum aperuisset sigillum secundum, designat Ioannes*

et demonstrat primae generalis persecutionis edictum; generalis dico, ut excludatur partialis, quam statim fides habuit a principio in Ierusalem et Iudaea. Nero autem primus inter imperatores Romanos dedit edictum, ut punirentur Christiani, sicut dicit Eusebius, et dico martyrizavit beatissimos apostles Petrum et Paulum et plures alios per diversos partes orbis.

⁹ Peter Auriol, *Compendium*, 464-5. My translation of the Latin *Per equum ergo intelligitur Romanum imperium. Nam equi in scriptura conserunt designare regna, ut patet in Zach. C.6,2 etc. Rufum autem tunc fuit Romanum imperium vel per effusionem sanguinis; quia, ut narrat Eusebius, in tantum sceleris Nero progressus est, ut nec a propriis quidem ac domesticis temperavit gladium, sed in matrem et in fratres et in uxores atque in omnes sanguinis proximos patricida extiterit et incestuosus. Vel dictum est rufum ratione multiplicis nefandi sceleris, quia inter omnes imperatores nequissimam ac nefandissimam vitam duxit, ut ex historiis patet. Vel ratione incendii et ignis, quia voluit videre Romam ardere. Unde visa fuit quasi rufa et flammea ratione combustionis.*

¹⁰ Peter Auriol, *Compendium*, 465. My translation of the Latin *Neroni itaque sedenti super equum rufum super Romanum imperium datum est, ut sumeret pacem de terra et us se invicem interficiant propter mortes, quas exercuit etiam in Romanos....Isti ergo datus est gladius magnus, quia permissione divina sibi datum est, ut magnos Apostolos interficeret et ut primam magnam persecutionem in fideles excitaret.*

¹¹ Nicholas of Lyra, *Apocalypse Commentary*. Philip D.W. Krey, *Nicholas of Lyra's Apocalypse Commentary* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), 82-3.

¹² Commodian, *Instructions*, 41. ANF 4:221. Commodian's *Instructions* have been variously dated from the mid-third century to the early fifth century.

¹³ Commodian, *Carmen*, 933. Cited in Pierre Prigent, "Au temps de l'Apocalypse," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 55 (1975):215-35 at 231. My translation of the Latin *Nobis Nero factus Antichristus...*

¹⁴ Jerome, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. CSEL 49:103. My translation of the Latin *fuisse autem eum iam in regno Romanorum et fuisse inter Caesares et Paulus apostolus contestatur. ait enim ad Thessalonicenses: qui nunc tenet, teneat, donec de medio fiat. et tunc apparebit iniquus ille, cuius est adventus secundum efficaciam satanae signis et portentis mendacibus. et ut scirent illum venturum, qui tunc erat princeps, adiecit: acranum, inquit, malitiae iam molitur, id est, malitiam quam facturus est, arcane molitur, sed non sua virtute nec patris suis suscitatur sed dei iussu. quare ergo Paulus eisdem dicit: idcirco quod non receperunt amorem dei, mittit eis duos spiritum erroris...*

¹⁵ *Jerome's Commentary on Daniel*. Gleason L. Archer, Jr., trans. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1958), 133.

¹⁶ Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*. Catherine Edwards, trans. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 195-7.

¹⁷ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 199; Tim LaHaye, *Revelation Unveiled* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 211.

¹⁸ Cited in William C. Weinrich, ed., *Revelation*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. New Testament XII (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 2005), 200. Weinrich's translation is of the Latin words *Neronem dicit in Victorinus and Jerome*, editions of which are both in CSEL 49:120-121 (ANF 7:358). For the same words in the manuscripts of Apringius, see Alberto Del Campo Hernandez, *Commentario al Apocalipsis de Apringio de Beja: Introduccion, Texto Latino y Traduccio* (Navarra, Spain: Editorial Verbo Divino, 1991), 95.

¹⁹ According to the notes in the edition in CSEL 49, this passage is not found in Isaiah.

²⁰ Jerome, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. CSEL 49:121, 123. My translation of the Latin *Unum autem de capitibus occisum in mortem et plaga mortem eius curate est: Neronem dicit. Constat enim, dum insequeretur eum equitatus missus a senatu, ipsum sibi gulam succidisse. Hunc ergo suscitatum deus mittere regem dignum dignis et Christum, qualem meruerunt Iudei. Et quoniam aliud nomen offertur est, aliam etiam vitam institutus, ut sic eum tamquam Christum excipiant Iudei...De inferno autem illum surgere et superius diximus verbo Esaiae: aqua nutriet illum et abyssus auxit illum. Qui tamen licet et nomine inmutato et actu inmutato veniat, ait spiritus: numerus eius nomen hominis est et numerus eius sexcenti sexaginta sex...*

²¹ Sulpicius Severus, *Historia Sacra [Sacred History]*, Book II, Ch. 29 in PL 20: 145D. My translation of the Latin *Post etiam datis legibus religio vetabatur, palamque, edictis propositis, Christianum esse non licebat. Tum Paulus ac Petrus capitis damnati: quorum uni cervix gladio desecta. Petrus in crucem sublatus est. Dum haec Romae geruntur, Iudaei...rebellare coeperunt. Adversus eos Vespasianus proconsulari imperio a Nerone missus, multis gravibusque praeliis devictos coegit intra muros*

Hierosolymae confugere. Interim Nero jam etiam sibi pro conscientia scelerum invisus, humanis rebus eximitur: incertum an ipse sibi mortem consciverit. Certe corpus illius interemptum. Unde creditur, etiamsi se gladio ipse transfixerit, curato vulnere ejus servatus, secundum illud quod de eo scriptum est: Et plaga mortis ejus curata est (Apoc. XIII,3); sub saeculi fine mittendus, ut mysterium iniquitati exerceat. An English translation cited in Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (San Francisco: Christian Universities Press, 1997) reads: "It was accordingly believed that, even if he did put an end to himself with a sword, his wound was cured, and his life preserved, according to that which was written regarding him,--'And his mortal wound was healed,' [Rev. 13:3]..." (p. 79)

²² John J. Collins, *The Sibylline Oracles of Egyptian Judaism*. Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 13 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1974), 80-1.

²³ Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*. Catherine Edwards, trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 224-5. See also, M.P. Charlesworth, "Nero: Some Aspects," *Journal of Roman Studies* 40 (1950):69-76.

²⁴ 2 Thess 2:7 played a role as well. On this passage Chrysostom (*Hom 2 Thess*, 4; NPNF 13:389) wrote: "For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work. He speaks here of Nero, as if he were the type of Antichrist." Theodoret on the same passage wrote: "Some commentators claimed that to Nero is given the name *mystery of iniquity*, and that he became a worker of godlessness." Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentary on the Letters of St. Paul* (2 vols.; Translated by Robert Charles Hill: Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001), 2:129. Augustine also in *On the City of God* 20.19 (Marcus Dods, trans. New York: Random House, 1950) wrote: "Some think...that in saying, 'For the mystery of iniquity doth already work,' he alluded to Nero, whose deeds already seemed to be as the deeds of Antichrist. And hence some suppose that he shall rise again and be Antichrist. Others, again, suppose that he is not dead, but that he was concealed...and will live until he is revealed in his own time..."

²⁵ On the *Nero redivivus* legend, J. Nelson Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 161-4; Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 65-7; Martin Bodinger, "Le mythe de Néron de l'Apocalypse de Saint Jean au Talmud de Babylone," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 206 (1989):21-40; Larry Kreitzer, "Hadrian and the Nero Redivivus Myth," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 79 (1988):92-115; Paul Trudinger, "The 'Nero Redivivus' Rumour and the Date of the Apocalypse of John," *St. Mark's Review* 131 (Sept 1987):43-4; John M. Lawrence, "Nero Redivivus," *Fides et Historia* 11 (1978):54-66; J. Rougé, "Néron à la fin du IV^e siècle et au début de V^e siècle," *Latomus* 37 (1978):73-87; Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 179-90; Eva Matthews Sanford, "Nero and the East," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 48 (193):75-103.

26 E. Romero-Pose, ed., *Sancti Beati a Liebana commentarius in Apocalypsin*, Vol. Alterum (Rome: Typis Officinae Polygraphicae, 1985), 164-5. My translation of the Latin *Unum autem ex capitibus bestiae, quam supra diximus in pseudoprophetis esse, tamquam iugulatum ad mortem et plaga mortis eius sanata est, Neronem dicit, qui Antichristum praefiguravit: et quia octavus bestia est, ipse Antichristus est, qui nunc in ecclesia per pseudosacerdotes subtiliter regnat, tunc aperte ecclesiam devastabit: quia Iudaei Christum crucifixerunt et pro Christo Neronem Antichristum expectant. Hunc ergo suscitatum Deus mittere regem dignum dignis et Christum qualem meruerunt Iudaei. Et quia non habebit nomen Nero Antichristus sed aliud nomen afferturus est, aliam etiam vitam instituturus, quod sic eum tamquam Christum excipiant Iudaei...*

²⁷ Ernest Renan, *Antichrist*. Joseph Henry Allen, trans. (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1897), 356.

²⁸ *The Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah*, 4.2. Translated in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 161.

²⁹ *Sibylline Oracles*, 5. 28-34. Cited in Gregory C. Jenks, *The Origins and Early Development of the Antichrist Myth* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), 263.

³⁰ "Apocryphal Apocalypses and the Apocalypse of St John," *Church Quarterly Review* 89 (Oct 1897):151-62 at 160. In the journal article, no author is listed.

³¹ One indication of Donatist authorship is in section 546: "and there was war between them [Rehoboam and Jeroboam] all the days of their lives, just as there is now between true Christians and false Catholics." Quoted in Maureen A. Tilley, "Sustaining Donatist Self-Identity: From the Church of the Martyrs to the *Collecta* of the Desert" *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5:1 (1997):21-35 esp. 30 n. 42. On Donatism, see also Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa*. Translated Texts

for Historians 24 (Liverpool, England: Liverpool University Press, 1996); William H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952, 1971).

³² Theodore Mommsen, ed., *Liber genealogus*. In *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi*, Vol. 9: *Chronica Minora Saec IV. V. VI. VII.* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892; Repr., Munich: Strauss and Cramer, 1981), 154-193.

³³ Brief descriptions of the *Liber genealogus* are in G. Broszio, "Liber genealogus" in *Dictionary of Early Christian Literature*, (ed. Siegmund Döpp and Wilhelm Geerlings; trans. Matthew O'Connell: New York: Crossroad, 2000), 381; Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 139-40; Martine Dulaey, *Victorin de Poetovio premier exégète latin* (2 vols., Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1993), 1:346; Paula Fredriksen, "Apocalypse and Redemption in Early Christianity from John of Patmos to Augustine of Hippo," *Vigiliae Christianae* 45 (1991):151-83 esp. 182 n. 86; Antonio Isola, *I Christiani dell'Africa Vandolica nei Sermones del Tempo (429-534)* (Milan: Jaco, 1990), 33; Paul Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne*, Vol. 4: Le Donatisme (Paris, 1912; Repr. Brussels: Culture et Civilisation, 1963), 102; Frend, *Donatist Church*, 303.

³⁴ The full Latin text upon which this translation is based is included in Francis X. Gumerlock, "Nero Antichrist: Patristic Evidence for the Use of Nero's Name in Calculating the Number of the Beast (Rev 13:18)," *Westminster Theological Journal* 68 (2006):347-60 at 351-2.

³⁵ Roger Gryson, ed., *Commentaria minora in Apocalypsin Johannis*. CCSL 107:143-4, 149, 151, 276; L. J. Lietaert Peerbolte, *The Antecedents of Antichrist* (New York: Brill, 1996), 151; Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece et Latine* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), 659 in apparatus on Rev 13:18; Kenneth B. Steinhauser, *The Apocalypse Commentary of Tyconius: A History of Its Reception and Influence* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 300; Lawrence, "Nero Redivivus," 55; P.J. Williams, "P115 and the Number of the Beast," *Tyndale Bulletin* 58:1 (2007): 151-3; David C. Parker, "A New Oxyrhynchus Papyrus of Revelation: P115 (P.Oxy. 4499)," *New Testament Studies* 46 (2000):159-74; Germain Morin, ed., *Sancti Caesarii Arelatensis opera varia* (2 vols.; Maredioli [Bruges, Belgium]: Desclée, 1942), 2:247; Robert H. Charles, *Studies in the Apocalypse* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1913), 47-8.

³⁶ Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 20.

³⁷ Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 38, 174. Cited in Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 203-4.

³⁸ Barclay Newman, "The Fallacy of the Domitian Hypothesis," *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963):133-9 esp. 136.

³⁹ Irenaeus, *On Heresies*, 5.30, 1. ANF 1:558.

⁴⁰ Jenks, *Origins and Early Development of the Antichrist Myth*, 89: "Irenaeus, however, considered this alternative reading [616] to be an error of too great a magnitude to be allowed to pass unrebuked, since it not only involved an alteration to the text of the Bible but would also mislead the faithful into seeking Antichrist under a name whose letters totaled 616 instead of 666."

⁴¹ Barclay Newman, "The Fallacy of the Domitian Hypothesis," *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963):133-39 at 136-7: "Where Irenaeus makes reference to the speculation concerning the number 666, he does so to quell and to refute any mistaken notion that this number should be interpreted with regard to the Roman Emperors....Neither does Irenaeus afford any compassion for those who seek to uncover some contemporary-historical allusion in the reading 616 which occurs in some manuscripts in place of 666." A. J. Visser ["A Bird's-Eye View of Ancient Christian Eschatology," *Numen* 14 (1967):4-22 at 11] observed that Irenaeus did not identify "the beasts with the Roman Empire (as St. John undoubtedly did)."

⁴² Some include Ralph E. Bass, *Back to the Future: A Study in the Book of Revelation* (Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press, 2004), 318; Gentry, *Beast of Revelation*, 37-50; Gary DeMar, *End Times Fiction: A Biblical Consideration of Left Behind Theology* (Nashville: Nelson, 2001), 148; Jay Adams, *The Time is at Hand: Prophecy and the Book of Revelation* (Woodruff, SC: Timeless Texts, 2000), 73, n. 1. For more comprehensive lists, see Gumerlock, "Nero Antichrist," 348, n. 5; and Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 200.

⁴³ John W. Marshall, "Parables of the War: Reading the Apocalypse within Judaism and during the Judean War," (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1997), 255; Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary, New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 799.

⁴⁴ *Commemoratorium de Apocalypsi Johannis Apostoli [Handbook on the Apocalypse of the Apostle John]*. CCSL 107:221. My translation of the Latin 'numerus nominis eius' intelligitur iuxta hebreum linguam.

⁴⁵ D.R. Hillers, "Revelation 13:18 and a Scroll from Murabba'at," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 170 (1963):65.

⁴⁶ J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1992), 44.

⁴⁷ Kenneth L. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Atlanta: American Vision, 1998), 146.

⁴⁸ J. Christian Wilson, "The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation," *New Testament Studies* 39 (1993):587-605 at 55. Other contemporary scholars include Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 403: "The references in Revelation 17:8ff certainly appear to give some kind of clue as to the particular historical setting."; and Albert A. Bell, Jr., "The Date of John's Apocalypse. The Evidence of Some Roman Historians Reconsidered," *NTS* 25 (1978):93-102 at 97: "The identity of the fifth head or emperor in 17.9-11 is the crux of the problem."

⁴⁹ On the Irish Reference Bible, see Gerard MacGinty, ed., *The Reference Bible, Das Bibelwerk: Pauca problemsmata de enigmatibus ex tomis canonicis, nunc prompta sunt Praefatio et libri de Pentateucho Moysi*. CCCM 173 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000); Joseph F. Kelly, "A Catalogue of Early Medieval Hiberno-Latin Biblical Commentaries (I)," *Traditio* 44 (1988):538-71 at 552; Martin McNamara, "Plan and Source Analysis of *Das Bibelwerk*, Old Testament," in Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter, eds., *Irland und die Christenheit* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987), 84-112; Kelly, "Das Bibelwerk: Organization and Quellenanalyse of the New Testament Section," in Chatháin and Richter, *Irland und die Christenheit*, 113-23; Kelly, "Bede and the Irish Exegetical Tradition on the Apocalypse," *Revue bénédictine* 92:3-4 (1982):393-406.

⁵⁰ CCSL 107:286. The commentary on Revelation in the Irish Reference Bible was edited recently under the title "De enigmatibus ex Apocalypsi Johannis [On the Mysteries of the Apocalypse of John]," in Roger Gryson, ed., *Commentaria minora in Apocalypsin Johannis*. CCSL 107 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 231-95.

⁵¹ Beatus of Liébana, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin*, IX. In E. Romero-Pose, ed., *Sancti Beati a Liebana commentarius in Apocalypsin*, Vol. Alterum (Rome: Typis Officinae Polygraphicae, 1985), 282-3. On the dating of Beatus' commentary, Kenneth B. Steinhauser, *The Apocalypse Commentary of Tyconius: A History of Its Reception and Influence* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 143, 161-4; and Marcia Cohn Growdon, "The Narrative Sequence in the Preface to the Gerona Commentaries of Beatus on the Apocalypse," Ph.D. diss. (Stanford University, 1976), 1-2. The hypothesis of Henry A. Sanders (*Beati in Apocalypsi libri duodecim*. Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome, Vol. 7 [Rome: American Academy in Rome, 1930]) that Beatus wrote a first edition in 776, revised it in 784, and wrote a final edition in 786, is widely accepted.

⁵² Cambridge MS CUL Dd, X. 16, fol. 98v. The Latin was obtained through personal correspondence with Martin McNamara, professor emeritus at Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosophy in Dublin. who wrote an article about that commentary. Guy Lobrichon of the Université of Avignon has been preparing a critical edition of the Cambridge Apocalypse commentary for the Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis series published by Brepols in Turnhout.

⁵³ Nicholas of Gorran, *Acta Apostolorum et singulas apostolorum Iacobi, Petri, Iohannis et Iudae canonicas epistolas et Apocalypsim commentarii* (Antwerp, 1620), 273. The Anderson rare book room of Pittsburg Theological Seminary in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania owns a copy of it. Call # BS 2625. N5 1620.

⁵⁴ McNamara, "The newly-identified Cambridge Apocalypse Commentary and the Reference Bible. A Preliminary Enquiry," *Peritia. Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland* 15 (2001):208-256 at 250-51. It is possible that the lost commentary is that of Cominus Scotus, a disciple of Saint Columbanus (d. 615). On the lost commentary of Cominus Scotus, see Joseph Kelly, "A Catalogue of Early Medieval Hiberno-Latin Biblical Commentaries," *Traditio* 45 (1989-1990):394-434 at 433.

⁵⁵ Gentry, *Beast of Revelation*, 91; DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church*, 4th ed (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), 257; DeMar, *End Times Fiction*, 143.