

A CRITIQUE OF THE PRETERIST VIEW OF REVELATION 17:9–11 AND NERO*

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THE PREVIOUS FOUR ARTICLES IN THIS SERIES have answered a number of arguments given by preterists in support of their view that the events predicted in Revelation 6–19 were fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and related events. To defend this view preterists argue that the Book of Revelation was written in A.D. 65–66, that is, before the fall of Jerusalem, and in this way they seek to show that the prophecies have been fulfilled. Almost all premillennialists, on the other hand, maintain that the book was written about A.D. 95 and that its prophecies are yet to be fulfilled in the eschaton.

This final article critiques yet another argument preterists use, namely, the idea that the sixth king in Revelation 17 was Nero. For some preterists this is the strongest argument for their position.¹ In fact Gentry refers to this text as “*the leading objective evidence for Revelation’s date of composition.*”² Revelation 17:9–11 says, “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 a little while. And the beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction.”

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¹ Philip S. Desprez, *John, or the Apocalypse of the New Testament* (London: Longmans Green, 1870), 6; and J. Christian Wilson, “The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation,” *New Testament Studies* 39 (1993): 599.

² Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *The Beast of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2002), 137 (italics his).

The words “Here is the mind which has wisdom” allude to Daniel 2, 9, 11, and 12, thus indicating that those with spiritual understanding and wisdom can cognitively and spiritually discern the angel’s explanation of the vision of the beast and the woman in Revelation 17:9b–18.³ This allusion to Daniel is a clue that Daniel’s prophecy looms large over Revelation 17:9–11. The key issue in these verses is the identity of the seven kings. There are several approaches to their meaning.

SYMBOLIC OF ROMAN RULERS

The view of many scholars is that the seven heads and seven kings are symbolic of a complete set of Roman rulers, or possibly world kingdoms, regardless of how many there actually were. The number seven is regarded as an apocalyptic symbol indicating completeness.⁴ All agree that Revelation contains much symbolic language. But the problem with the symbolic interpretation in this text is that the symbol has no concrete, meaningful referent. If all the text means is that the Roman rule is complete, why is the vision so detailed and particular in noting that “five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while. And the beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction.” Also if seven is the number of completion, why add the reference to the beast as the eighth? The symbolic approach fails to do justice to the intricate details of the text.

Furthermore symbols in Daniel have historical referents. When Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, he said, “You are the head of gold” (Dan. 2:38). The angelic interpreter identified the four beasts as “four kings who will arise from the earth” (7:17), and the ram and the goat are identified as the “kings of Media and

³ G. W. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 867–68; and idem, “The Danielic Background for Revelation 13:18 and 17:9,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 31 (1980): 163–70.

⁴ Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (New York: Macmillan, 1919; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 704–8; George R. Beasley-Murray, “Book of Revelation,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 256–57; David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1998), 948; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 317; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 620; Ben Witherington III, *Revelation*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 223.

Persia” and “the king of Greece” (8:20–21). Even more significantly symbols in Revelation have identifiable, specific referents: the seven stars are seven literal messengers (Rev. 1:20), the seven lampstands are seven literal, historical churches (v. 20), the Lamb is Jesus (5:5–7), the golden bowls of incense are the prayers of the saints (v. 8), and the dragon is the devil (12:9).⁵ To make the seven kings in 17:9–11 symbolic of the full set of Roman rulers fails to take into account the way symbols are used in prophetic literature in the Scriptures.

SUCCESSIVE ROMAN EMPERORS

Preterists adopt a different view of the seven kings. In this approach the seven kings are identified as seven individual Roman emperors who ruled in succession. Preterists say that to determine the date of Revelation one simply must identify the sixth king who was ruling at the time the Apocalypse was written. “All that is required for determining the chronology indicated by Rev 17:10 is that we find a series of seven kings, five of whom ‘have fallen,’ the sixth of whom ‘is’ still ruling, and the last of whom was of but a brief reign. The one who ‘is’ will be the king alive and ruling at the time John wrote Revelation. Then, of course, the discovery of the dates of his reign will serve as the *termini* within which Revelation must have been composed.”⁶

According to this view the seven mountains on which the woman sits are an unmistakable reference to the city of Rome with its seven hills of Palatine, Aventine, Caelian, Esquiline, Viminal,

⁵ In other ancient apocalyptic literature, the referential nature of symbols can be observed. Examples of this are *1 Enoch* 85–90 and *4 Ezra* 3–14, where the subsequent interpretation by the angel reveals that the symbol has a historical or eschatological referent. Steven Friesen compares Revelation 17:9–11 to an analogous text in *4 Ezra* 11–12, where a vision of Roman imperialism is symbolized by an eagle with twelve wings, three heads, and eight smaller wings. He notes that in that text only three of the major wings and the three heads are important (*Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001], 140–41). He uses this argument to support his symbolic view of Revelation 17 and to suggest that the enumeration of consecutive emperors is unnecessary and inadvisable. While Friesen’s conclusion to reject the consecutive emperors view is correct, his basis for doing so seems flawed. In *4 Ezra* 12.19–22 the eight smaller wings are identified as eight kings “whose times shall be short and their years swift.” The text then gives specific details about these eight heads. *Fourth Ezra* 11–12 goes against his figurative interpretation.

⁶ Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell*, rev. ed. (Atlanta: American Vision, 1990), 152; cf. James M. MacDonald, “The Date of the Apocalypse from Internal Evidence,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 26 (1869): 474.

Quirinal, and Capitoline.⁷ With this background preterists begin the count of Roman “kings” with Julius Caesar and then Nero is the sixth king. The fact that the reign of Nero was followed by the brief reign of Galba is seen as further historical substantiation of this position.⁸ The following is a list of the twelve Roman emperors from Julius Caesar to Domitian.

1. Julius Caesar (49–44 B.C.)
2. Augustus (27 B.C.–A.D. 14)
3. Tiberius (A.D. 14–37)
4. Caligula (37–41)
5. Claudius (41–54)
6. Nero (54–68)
7. Galba (June 68–January 69)
8. Otho (January–April 69)
9. Vitellius (April–December 69)
10. Vespasian (69–79)
11. Titus (79–81)
12. Domitian (81–96)

However, there are three problems with the notion that the sixth king is Nero.

VARIETY OF SCHEMES

There are many different schemes for counting the seven kings in Revelation 17:9–11. Aune lists nine ways of counting the Roman emperors,⁹ Beal mentions five schemes for enumerating the emperors in those verses,¹⁰ and Ford lists four constructions.¹¹ The number of emperors in these schemes depends on answers to three questions.¹² First, with what emperor should one begin count-

⁷ MacDonald, “The Date of the Apocalypse from Internal Evidence,” 473; and Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 149–51.

⁸ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 158.

⁹ David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1998), 947–48.

¹⁰ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 874.

¹¹ J. Massyngherde Ford, *Revelation*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 289.

¹² John A. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 242–43; Adela Yarbro Collins, “Dating the Apocalypse of John,” *Biblical Review* 26 (1981): 35–36; J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*

ing—Caesar Augustus, Julius Caesar, or even Caligula? The evidence is far from conclusive. Several ancient sources suggest that the list should begin with Julius Caesar. These include Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 18.2.2; 18.6.10; 19.1.11; *Sibylline Oracles* 5.12–15; 4 *Ezra* 12:15; and Seutonius, who began his *Lives of the Caesars* with Julius. Against this view, however, is the fact that Julius Caesar was not part of New Testament history. Other ancient sources (including Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.789–97, and Tacitus, *Annals* 1.1) say Augustus was the first emperor¹³ because the Roman Empire was officially established under his rule and because he was the first to be proclaimed emperor.¹⁴

Second, are all the emperors to be counted or only those deified by an act of the Senate?

Third, should the brief reigns of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, all of whom reigned during the eighteen months between Nero's death and Vespasian's capture of Rome on December 21, 69, be excluded from the count?

Unfortunately for preterists, one must be absolutely correct in answering all three of these questions in order to arrive at the proper solution. And preterists' answers to these decisions are purely arbitrary.¹⁵ As Mounce concludes, "However people try to calculate the seven kings as Roman emperors, they encounter difficulties that cast considerable doubt on the entire approach."¹⁶ To support their view of the date of Revelation, Gentry and other preterist interpreters have to begin with Julius Caesar to arrive at Nero as the sixth king. But, as already noted, the counting can begin with Julius Caesar, Augustus, or even Caligula.¹⁷ Beginning

(Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 44–45; and Beale, *Revelation*, 872–73.

¹³ Gentry argues that Tacitus never denied the role of Julius as the first king of the empire (*Before Jerusalem Fell*, 154). However, Tacitus began his annals with the reign of Augustus, not Julius, and it is clear that he viewed Augustus as the first Roman king. See Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 947 n. c.

¹⁴ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 958.

¹⁵ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 297.

¹⁶ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 316–17. See also Witherington, *Revelation*, 223; and George R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, New Century Bible Commentary (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1974; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 256.

¹⁷ Collins says that beginning the count with Caligula is a credible theory because Caligula was "the first emperor to come into conflict with the Jews and the first to encourage the ruler cult" ("Dating the Apocalypse," 36). Beale notes that Caligula was the first Roman emperor to come to power after the death and resurrection of Christ (*The Book of Revelation*, 874).

with Caligula makes Domitian the sixth king. It must also be remembered that there was a seventeen-year gap between the death of Julius Caesar and the beginning of Augustus's reign.¹⁸

Early-date advocates, however, do not agree among themselves on the answers to these questions. Schaff, who holds to an early date for the writing of Revelation, excludes Julius Caesar, begins with Augustus as the first emperor, and then leaves out Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, and thus arrives at Vespasian as the sixth head.¹⁹ Hort, also an early-date advocate, says, "To begin counting the emperors from Augustus rather than Julius is the more correct reckoning of the two."²⁰ Robinson, who supports the early date, says, "But in Revelation it is clear that the first king must be Augustus."²¹ If it is clear-cut that one should begin counting with Julius, as Gentry alleges, why do a majority of early-date advocates begin the count with Augustus and end up with Galba (or even Vespasian) as the sixth king? One would expect much greater agreement among the proponents of a theory on which so much rests.²² Moreover, the modern problem associated with counting the kings is not due to a lack of historical information. The original audience would have had no more information concerning the succession of emperors than modern readers, and possibly even less.²³

IDENTITY OF THE EIGHTH KING

A second reason for rejecting Nero as the sixth king is that the rest of the facts in Revelation 17:9–13 do not fit this identification. Those who argue that Nero is the sixth king encounter an obstacle when they come to the seventh and especially the eighth king.

¹⁸ Robert L. Thomas, "Theonomy and the Dating of Revelation," *Master's Seminary Journal* 5 (1994): 195.

¹⁹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 1:835–36.

²⁰ F. J. A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John: I–III* (London: Macmillan, 1908), xxviii.

²¹ Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, 243. Raymond E. Brown also believes it is more historical to begin with Augustus as the first emperor (*An Introduction to the New Testament* [New York: Doubleday, 1997], 792). Brown indicates that Revelation was written during Domitian's reign but was backdated to the reign of Vespasian (*ibid.*, 792, n 38). He notes that backdating was not unusual in apocalyptic writings.

²² William Milligan, *Discussions of the Apocalypse* (London: Macmillan, 1893), 101.

²³ G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black's New Testament Commentary (London: A. & C. Black, 1966; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 218; and Alan F. Johnson, "Revelation," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 559.

Gentry, who views Nero as the sixth king, says Galba is the seventh king in verse 10, one who comes and remains “a little while.” Gentry notes that Galba’s reign was very brief—from June 68 to January 15, 69.²⁴ A consistent continuation of this method of interpretation would lead to Otho (January–April 69), the next Roman emperor after Galba, as the eighth king in verse 11. However, at this point Gentry skips both Otho and Vitellius (April–December 69) to arrive at Vespasian (69–79) as the eighth king. Gentry seeks to substantiate this view by contending that the Roman Empire almost disintegrated during the tumultuous years after the death of Nero in A.D. 68, but was revived under Vespasian, the eighth king, in A.D. 69.²⁵

Acknowledging the difficulty of this interpretation, Gentry explains his justification for skipping Otho and Vitellius to arrive at Vespasian as the eighth king.

The reference to the “eighth” king (Rev. 17:11) might seem a difficulty for this view. This is because the eighth emperor of Rome was actually Otho, the second of the interregnum rulers, and not Vespasian, who actually gave life again to the Empire. Exegetically, it should be noted that in the chronological line of the seven heads/kings, John speaks of the matter with exactness by use of the definite article. That is, he writes in Revelation 17:10 (we translate it literally): “*the* [ο] five fell, *the* [ὁ] one is, *the* [ὁ] other not yet come, and whenever he comes a little while it behooves him to remain.” But the definite article is conspicuously absent in reference to the eighth head/king in Revelation 17:11: “And the beast which was and is not, even he is *an* eighth.” Of course, there is no indefinite article in Greek, but the omission of the definite article that clearly and repetitively defined the chronological series of head/kings (“*the* five,” *the* one,” “*the* one to come”) vanishes before the eighth is mentioned. Thus, the eighth is “*an* eighth.” This indicates that John is not concerned with the number of the particular emperor arising after *the* seventh in the Roman Civil War. Rather he is interested solely with the fact that there is one coming soon, who will, as the empire’s stabilizing head, bring life back to the empire. There is a very important sense in which the revival of the Empire under Vespasian, was a revival under “an eighth,” who is “of the seven.” It is the same Roman Empire that is brought to life from the death of the Civil War. . . . The fact that this revival is of an eighth head, however, indicates the rapid recovery of the Beast. That recovery will come shortly after the demise of the original seven.²⁶

²⁴ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 158.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 315–16. Gentry further justifies this hermeneutical shift by noting that John’s vision referred to only seven kings and that the interpreting angel added the

This interpretation of the eighth king faces three serious problems. First, the novelty of Gentry's method alone argues strongly against this view. Gentry cites no other scholars who emphasize the lack of the Greek article. Moreover, would a reader, without a particular viewpoint to defend, make the shift from Galba to Vespasian, based only on the lack of the definite article? One cannot simply ignore or skip Otho and Vitellius to arrive at Vespasian to fit a predetermined outcome.²⁷

Second, Revelation 17:8, 11 parallel 13:3, 12, which describe the death and resurrection of the beast as a mimicry of the death and resurrection of Christ.²⁸ This would seem to require the actual death and resurrection of the beast, not a "near death" experience. Gentry says, "From June, A.D. 68, through December, A.D. 69, the Roman Empire suffered through a gruesome and severe Civil War that *almost* brought the Empire down, and that had reverberations throughout the Empire."²⁹ The language used in 13:3, 12 of the fatal wound of the beast is the same language used of Christ's death in 5:6. Gentry's view of the near death of the beast (the Roman Empire) fails to fit the details of the text. The best view is that the death and resurrection of the beast refer to the Antichrist in the end times who will receive a fatal wound and be healed and establish his rule.³⁰

Third, the mention of the eighth king seems to take the reader to the end of the list. There is no mention of a ninth or tenth king. The eighth king is the final manifestation of the beast.³¹ Speaking of the eighth and final form of the beast's rule, 17:11 says, "and he goes to destruction." Gentry says this refers to Vespasian. However, two chapters later (in 19:20) the beast and the false prophet are cast into the lake of fire, which is the same destruction of the

eighth. Gentry argues that the shift is in the text and that all he is trying to do is interpret it (*ibid.*, xxxi). It is true that the eighth king is added, but this does not justify skipping Otho and Vitellius and shifting from a reference to individual kings to the entire empire.

²⁷ Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2000), 51, 166.

²⁸ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 864–65, 875–77.

²⁹ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 144 (italics added).

³⁰ Gregory H. Harris, "The Wound of the Beast in the Tribulation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156 (October–December 1999): 464–68. For a defense of the literal death and resurrection of the Antichrist see Thomas Ice, "The Death and Resurrection of the Beast, Part 1," *Pre-Trib Perspectives* 8 (April 2005): 1, 4–5; and *idem*, "The Death and Resurrection of the Beast, Part 2," *Pre-Trib Perspectives* 8 (May 2005): 1, 4–5.

³¹ Poythress, *The Returning King*, 51, 166; and Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 875.

final head of the beast described in 17:11. Yet Gentry interprets 19:20 as a reference to Christ's providential destruction of Nero.³²

INCONSISTENT INTERPRETATION

As already noted, Gentry maintains that the "seven kings" in 17:9–11 are seven Roman emperors or kings. But in the very next verse (v. 12), without any justification for the shift, he interprets the "ten kings" as ten Roman kingdoms or provinces: Italy, Achaia, Asia, Syria, Egypt, Africa, Spain, Gaul, Britain, and Germany.³³ Gentry says that the word *βασιλεία* never means kingdom.³⁴ Yet the ten provinces he identifies as the ten kings are kingdoms.³⁵

SUCCESSIVE KINGDOMS

The best solution to the identity of the seven kings is the view that the seven kings represent seven successive Gentile world powers or kingdoms,³⁶ followed by the Antichrist as the eighth king. This in-

³² Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion* (Tyler, TX: Institute of Christian Economics, 1992), 413.

³³ *Ibid.*, 412–13.

³⁴ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 164.

³⁵ Another view of the seven kings is that they represent successive types of government in Rome. The five "kings" who have fallen are the five types of government in Rome before the imperialistic empire developed. The five are these.

The Tarquin Kings	753–510 B.C. (The first head)
The Counselors	510–494 B.C. (The second head)
The Plebians or Dictators	494–390 B.C. (The third head)
The Republicans or Decimvers (Oligarchy of Ten)	390–59 B.C. (The fourth head)
The Triumvirate	59–27 B.C. (The fifth head)

In this view the sixth head that was present when John wrote was the Empire of Imperialism, which began in the year 27 B.C. This view is held by Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum (*The Footsteps of the Messiah*, rev. ed. [Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003]), 42. Fruchtenbaum, of course, is a premillennialist, not a preterist. He writes, "There is one head still to come, that is the seventh head, which is the Antichrist stage and the stage of Absolute Imperialism. Once the seventh head is established, *he must continue for a little while*, namely 3 1/2 years. Thus, the seven kings represent a chronological development from the Tarquin Kings to Absolute Imperialism. Five heads are fallen, the sixth head of imperialism now exists, and one is yet to come, the Antichrist" (*ibid.*, 42, italics his). While this view is a credible solution to the meaning of the seven kings, it seems best to view the kings as separate kingdoms, not different types of government within one kingdom.

³⁶ Hengstenberg, *The Revelation of St. John*, trans. Patrick Fairbairn (Edinburgh: Clark, 1852), 2:200–204; Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (London: Rivingtons, 1865; reprint [4 vols. in 2], Chicago: Moody, 1958), 4:710–11; J. A. Seiss, *The Apoca-*

terpretation is supported by the parallels between Revelation 17:9–12 and Daniel 7:17, 23, where references to kings and kingdoms are interchangeable, thus revealing that a king represents the kingdom he rules. Adopting this interpretation, the eight kingdoms are the eight Gentile world powers that encompass the sweep of history: Egypt, Assyria, Neo-Babylonia, Persia, Greece, Rome, the reunited Roman Empire in a ten-king form, and the future kingdom of the beast or final world ruler who will emerge from the reunited Roman Empire.³⁷

This view can be traced all the way back to Andreas of Caesarea (ca. A.D. 600). He said the seven kings in Revelation 17:9–10 represent seven successive kingdoms, each of which was associated with a specific king: Assyria (Ninus), Media (Arbakus), Babylon (Nebuchadnezzar), Persia (Cyrus), Macedonia (Alexander), the old Roman Empire (Romulus), and the new Roman Empire (Constantine), with the eighth (v. 11) being the kingdom of the Antichrist.³⁸ This view of Andreas, which blends the kingdoms and the kings who ruled those kingdoms, is attractive because in Revelation the beast is present as both a kingdom and the satanically empowered individual who rules that kingdom.³⁹

lypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation (New York: Charles C. Cook, 1900; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1966), 391–94; William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (1939; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962), 170–71; John F. Walvoord, *The Book of Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 250–54; George E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 227–29, 391–94; and Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 297.

³⁷ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 296–300; Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, 392–93; Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 710; and Hengstenberg, *The Revelation of St. John*, 2:200–204. Beale prefers the successive-kingdoms view to the Roman-emperor view but he raises several issues (*The Book of Revelation*, 874–75). He says the empires in Daniel 7 differ from those in Revelation. This objection is only partially correct. Six of the eight kingdoms are the same in both texts (1) Babylon, (2) Medo-Persia, (3) Greece, (4) Rome, (5) the reunited Roman Empire under ten kings, and (6) the empire of the Antichrist, or the little horn. The only two that are different are Egypt and Assyria. It could be argued that God omitted these nations in the revelation to Daniel since the focus was on what would happen from Daniel's day forward. Beale's second objection is that this theory does not account for the major world empires between the time of the Roman Empire and the end times. However, if one views Revelation through the lens of Daniel 9:24–27 and sees a gap of time between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks, this objection disappears. See Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 115–39; and Thomas Ice, "The 70 Weeks of Daniel," in *The End Times Controversy*, ed. Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2003), 307–53.

³⁸ Andreas, *Patrologia graeca*, ed. J. P. Migne (reprint, Paris: Garnier, 1912), 106:379–83.

³⁹ Walvoord, *The Book of Revelation*, 200; and Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 154.

There are minor variations of the successive-kingdom scheme, but almost all of them include Egypt, Assyria, Neo-Babylonia, Medo-Persia, Greece, historical Rome, the reunited Roman Empire, and then the final world empire under the Antichrist.⁴⁰ In John's day the first five empires or kingdoms had already fallen and Rome was the sixth kingdom, the kingdom described as "one is."

This is the best view for three reasons.⁴¹ First, the seven heads are seven mountains (vv. 9–10), and "mountains" or "hills" often symbolize kingdoms or empires in the Old Testament and in Jewish writings (Pss. 30:7; 68:15–16; Isa. 2:2; 41:15; Jer. 51:25; Ezek. 35:3; Dan. 2:35; Hab. 3:11; Zech. 4:7; *1 Enoch* 52; Targum of Isaiah 41:15).⁴²

Second, though Rome was known as a city on seven hills, Revelation 17:10 says plainly that the seven mountains are seven kings. The text requires a strict political identification of the seven mountains with seven kings rather than a geographical location.⁴³

Gentry, however, writes that "the obvious allusion to Rome via the 'seven hills' cannot be mistaken. To allow it to refer to something other than Rome would be a cruel taunting of the original audience."⁴⁴ But how could this be a "cruel taunt" if the next phrase tells the reader that the seven mountains are seven kings? It is wrong to disregard the clear interpretation given by the angel and to try to import a preconceived meaning. Adding a geographical referent that is foreign to the context of the vision gives the

⁴⁰ Walvoord, *The Book of Revelation*, 251–54; Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation*, 229; and Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 297. Hendriksen views the first six kings as Old Babylonia, Assyria, Medo-Persia, Greco-Macedonia, and Rome, but he holds that the seventh king is the collective title for all the empires between the historical Roman Empire and the final days of world history (*More Than Conquerors*, 170–71).

⁴¹ Another argument that is sometimes used in favor of this view is the presence of the verb "have fallen" (*ἔπεσαν*, from *πίπτω*) in Revelation 17:10. According to Alford this word is much more applicable to the violent overthrow of empires or kingdoms than to individual kings. He notes that this word is used in the Septuagint repeatedly in Daniel of the violent overthrow of kingdoms (*The Greek Testament*, 710). Kistemaker also points to this verb in support of the successive-kingdoms view (*Revelation*, 472). However, this argument is not persuasive since the verb can be used of the demise of individuals or kingdoms. Also in Daniel in the Septuagint, *πίπτειν* is used more frequently of individuals falling down in homage or fear than it is of kingdoms falling. It is used of the violent overthrow of armies or kingdoms on four occasions (8:10; 11:14, 19, 26). See Beale, *Revelation*, 871; and Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 949.

⁴² Beale, *Revelation*, 868; and Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, 2:200.

⁴³ Johnson, "Revelation," 558–59; and Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 227.

⁴⁴ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 164.

seven heads a double meaning not indicated in the verse.⁴⁵ It also combines a symbolic and literal meaning for the seven hills that is not derived from the text itself.⁴⁶

Third, the successive-kingdoms approach fits the Old Testament imagery of the beast and its heads drawn from Daniel 7.⁴⁷ The imagery of the seven-headed beast in Revelation 13 and 17 clearly alludes to Daniel 7, where there are four beasts with a total of seven heads (each beast had one head except for the leopard, which had four). The statement in Revelation 13:2 that the beast is like a leopard, a bear, and a lion alludes to Daniel 7. Also the ten horns of the beast in Revelation 13:1; and 17:3, 7, 12 recall the ten horns of the fourth beast in Daniel 7. The four beasts that come up out of the sea and the seven heads on these beasts (Dan. 7) symbolize four great kingdoms. The parallel between the four beast kingdoms and seven heads in Daniel 7:3–7 and the beast and seven heads in Revelation 17:9–11 is unmistakable.

Moreover, Daniel 7:17 and 23 state that the four beasts are four kings although they in fact represent four kingdoms or empires: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. “These great beasts, which are four in number, are four kings who will arise from the earth” (v. 17). And verse 23 makes it clear that the beasts are kingdoms. “Thus he said: “The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the other

⁴⁵ Gentry notes that a symbol may have a twofold referent in Revelation (ibid., xlviii). In support of this he cites the seven heads of the beast, which represent both seven mountains and seven kings (Rev. 17:9–10). However, the difference is that the text specifically says that the seven *heads* have two referents while it never says that the seven *mountains* have two referents. All it says about the seven mountains is that they are seven kings. Going beyond this clear statement in search of an additional reference to the city of Rome is unnecessary and unwarranted.

⁴⁶ Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, 391–93. Seiss marshals an impressive array of evidence against the idea that the seven mountains in Revelation 17:9–10 refer to the city of Rome. One of his arguments is that Rome was the city of seven hills, not seven mountains. However, Aune presents evidence that Roman writers often used the Latin terms *mons* (“mountain”) and *collis* (“hill”) interchangeably when referring to the seven hills of Rome (*Revelation 17–22*, 944–45). Also the Greek term *ὄρος* can mean either mountain or hill.

⁴⁷ Surprisingly in *Before Jerusalem Fell* Gentry never mentions Daniel 7 in his discussion of Revelation 17:9–11. Yet near the beginning of his work he says that Revelation is the New Testament counterpart to Daniel (ibid., 17). In the Scripture index to *Before Jerusalem Fell* the book has only seven references to the Book of Daniel, and three of those are in footnotes. The Old Testament in general and Daniel in particular form the backdrop for properly understanding the Apocalypse. Gentry’s failure to interact with the Old Testament background of specific texts in Revelation is a major weakness in his work. Another example of this is his failure to make any reference to Ezekiel 40–48 in his discussion of Revelation 11:1–2.

kingdoms.’ ” Clearly then the kings in Revelation 17 represent kingdoms.⁴⁸

Since Revelation 17:9–11 draws imagery from Daniel 7 and the beasts/kings there are successive kingdoms, it makes sense that the same principle of interpretation should be applied in Revelation, and the kings in this text should likewise be interpreted as successive kingdoms. The following table shows significant parallels between Daniel 7:1–8 and Revelation 13:1–2 and 17:9–12.

<i>Daniel 7:1–8</i>	<i>Revelation 13:1–2; 17:9–12</i>
Four beasts (lion, bear, leopard, terrible beast with ten horns)	One beast that is like a leopard, bear, and lion (13:2) with ten horns (13:1; 17:3)
Seven heads representing four successive kingdoms	Seven heads representing seven successive kingdoms
Four kingdoms	Seven kingdoms
Ten horns (v. 7)	Ten horns (13:1; 17:3, 12)

Therefore in this interpretation the eight kingdoms in Revelation 17:9–11 represent the following kingdoms and their kings.⁴⁹

1. Egypt (Pharaohs)
2. Assyria (Assyrian kings)
3. Neo-Babylonia (Nebuchadnezzar)
4. Medo-Persia (Cyrus)
5. Greece (Alexander the Great)
6. Rome (Caesars)
7. Reunited Roman Empire (ten kings)
8. Final Gentile world kingdom (the Antichrist)

While no interpretation of the kings in Revelation 17:9–11 is without difficulty, the successive-kingdoms view avoids the nebulous nature of the symbolic view, is consistent with the Old Testament imagery from Daniel 7, and provides a consistent interpretation of the eight kings. For these reasons this is the preferred view. Therefore Revelation 17:9–11 offers no support for the early date of Revelation based on the idea that Nero is the sixth king.

⁴⁸ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 472.

⁴⁹ This list adopts Andreas's view that the heads are a blending of these kingdoms and the kings who embody them.

CONCLUSION

While contemporary preterism has other weaknesses, the Achilles heel of this view is the date of Revelation. The entire preterist system is built on the mid-sixties date of Revelation. If the traditional A.D. 95 date, or any date after A.D. 70, is correct, the preterist view cannot stand. In defending the Neronian date for Revelation preterists consider the internal evidence in Revelation to be their greatest strength. However, when considered one piece at a time, their internal evidence is unimpressive. It seems unwise to build an entire eschatological framework on the foundation of an early date of Revelation, which at best is strongly disputed.



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