

A Critique Of The Preterist View Of Revelation 13 And Nero

Mark L. Hitchcock

Mark L. Hitchcock is Pastor, Faith Bible Church, Edmond, Oklahoma.

This is the fourth article in a five-part series "Preterism and the Date of the Book of Revelation."

Preterism is the view that the Book of Revelation does not predict yet-future eschatological events but events that were fulfilled before and in the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in A.D. 70. Preterists argue that the book was written in A.D. 65–66. This runs counter to the more commonly held view that Revelation was written in the nineties.

Preterists maintain that Nero was depicted by the first beast of Revelation 13 and that the chapter therefore does not have a future fulfillment. By suggesting that Revelation 13 prophesies events in Nero's life in the sixties, the book had to have been written before those events occurred. Early-date supporters rely on four arguments to support their view that Nero was the beast.¹

First Argument: Nero And The Number 666

One of the most popular and well-known sections of Revelation is 13:16–18, which describes the number 666 or the mark of the

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beast. "And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, and he provides that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name. 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."

A common interpretation of 666 is that six is mankind's number, which is one number short of God's perfect number of seven. Walvoord explains this view.

Though there may be more light cast on it at the time this prophecy is fulfilled, the passage itself declares that this number is man's number. In the Book of Revelation, the number "7" is one of the most significant numbers indicating perfection. Accordingly, there are seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls of the wrath of God, seven thunders, etc. This beast claims to be God, and if that were the case, he should be 777. This passage, in effect, says, No, you are only 666. You are short of deity even though you were originally created in the image and likeness of God. Most of the speculation on the meaning of this number is without profit or theological significance.²

Beale adopts a similar symbolic view of 666. "But the triple six repetition of sixes connotes the intensification of incompleteness and failure that is summed up in the beast more than anywhere else among fallen humanity."³

While the symbolic view may be part of the significance of 666, its meaning seems to involve some form of gematria, the rabbinic Hebrew term for cryptogrammic riddles in which the numerical value of letters in a proper name are added up to arrive at a numerical value for the name.⁴ These cryptograms were widely recognized in Greek and Hebrew literature.⁵ Deissman records a graffito from Pompeii that reads, "I love her whose number is 545," and

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another that says, "Amerimnus thought upon his lady Harmonia for good. The number of her honourable name is 45 (or 1035)."⁶ In the *Sibylline Oracles* the numerical value of the name of Jesus in Greek is 888.⁷

Apparently some kind of numerical value for the beast's name is intended in Revelation 13:18, since the one with wisdom is to "calculate" or "count" the number. To count the number of a name means simply to add up the numbers attached to all the letters in the name. Fruchtenbaum notes that five clues in verses 17–18 hint at the meaning of the mark: the name of the Beast, the number of his name, the number of the beast, the number of a man, the number 666.⁸ These clues indicate that the personal name of the beast will equal the number 666. Further support for the gematria view of 666 is derived from Irenaeus, who assumed this interpretation in his discussions of the mark of the beast.⁹

Advocates of an early date for the writing of Revelation use the gematria to identify Nero as the beast of Revelation 13. In fact he is the only Roman emperor Suetonius mentioned as having gematria associated with his name. A Greek poem circulating around Rome ridiculed Nero in this way: "Alcmaeon, Orestes, and Nero are brothers. Why? Because all of them murdered their mothers. Count the numerical values of the letters in Nero's name, and in 'murdered his own mother': You will find their sum is the same."¹⁰ The numerical value of Nero's name in Greek is 1005. This is the same numerical value as the phrase "murdered his own mother."¹¹

Early-date supporters apply gematria to Nero's name with the added title "Caesar." They note that when the Greek words Νέρων Καίσαρ are translated into Hebrew (נרון קיסר) the gematria value equals 666, thus indicating that John wrote the Apocalypse during Nero's reign.

Several arguments have been raised against identifying Nero with 666. Gentry lists several of the objections and deals with each

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of them.¹² However, five arguments remain that make the identification of Nero with the number of the beast in Revelation 13:16–18 doubtful. First, for the number 666 to fit the gematria value of Nero, the name and title Nero Caesar must be used. This is important to note because there are many names and titles for Nero one could choose.¹³ How can one be sure that this form should be adopted? While Nero's name with his title can certainly be rendered in this way, this is a case of adapting the facts to fit a predetermined solution. Moreover, the titles of other first-century Roman rulers also yield the number 666. Abbreviated forms of the titles of Domitian that appeared on coins can equal 666.¹⁴ And coins issued in A.D. 72 bear a legend around the head of Vespasian, the sum of which is 666.¹⁵

Second, verse 16 specifically says that the numerical value 666 is the “the *name* of the beast or the number of his *name*” (italics added). “Nero Caesar” was not Nero's name. It was his name with an added title. Using Nero Caesar to calculate the number of his name would be similar to someone today using the title “President” or “Prime Minister” as part of a person's name to arrive at the gematria value of his name. Moreover, Irenaeus used only single names in his examples of names that equal 666, and he did not include any titles with the names.¹⁶

Third, as already noted, for the gematria value to fit Nero Caesar as 666 the Greek must be transliterated into Hebrew. One wonders why John, writing to a primarily Greek-speaking audience in western Asia Minor, would use a Hebrew form instead of a Greek form.¹⁷ Furthermore the Greek numerical value of Νέρων Καίσαρ is 1005.¹⁸ Gentry attempts to answer this objection by noting that Revelation is one of the most “Jewish” books in the New Testament, that John often used Hebraic names such as “Abaddon”

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(9:11) and “Armageddon” (16:16), and that Asia was well populated by Jews.¹⁹ However, Revelation was written to a primarily Greek-speaking audience and a Greek calculation would make much more sense.²⁰ As Kistemaker notes, “Would these hearers (1:3) readily understand that they had to transliterate a name from Latin via Greek to Hebrew (or Aramaic) to understand the number 666?”²¹ Irenaeus, in his discussion of 666, assumed without question that the calculation of 666 must be made in Greek.²²

Fourth, even if one agrees that this title Νέρων Καίσαρ is the correct one and that the correct form is the Greek transliteration into Hebrew, there is still another hurdle. The calculation in Hebrew equals 666 only if the Hebrew letter yod is omitted from the word Caesar (קסר, instead of קיסר). This appears to be a defective spelling. Hillers claims that the spelling of Caesar in Hebrew without the yod is present in a Judean scroll fragment from Murabba'at.²³ This Aramaic document is dated to the “second year of the emperor Nero.”²⁴ The letter ק follows the word Nero (נרון), but the letters after the ק are missing. The missing letters could be ס and ר, to form the word קסר, but others could also be supplied.²⁵

An examination of the document confirms that if the damaged word were קסר, there is probably not sufficient space for a ' between the ק and ס.²⁶ However, there is no way to be certain that

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the missing letters are ס and ר.²⁷ Moreover, Buchanan affirms that only the spelling with the yod is found in a concordance search of the Talmuds, the Mishnah, the Tosephta, and the Tannaitic Midrashim.²⁸ Therefore there is no indisputable evidence for the spelling of קסר without the י, and yet this spelling is necessary for identifying Nero as the first beast of Revelation 13.

Also in order to arrive at the number 666 the ו in נרון (Νέρων) must be retained.²⁹ This kind of subjective decision-making in spelling could easily expose this view to the charge of manipulating the facts to fit a desired result.

Mounce summarizes the problems early-date advocates face on this issue. “What is not generally stressed is that this solution asks us to calculate a Hebrew transliteration of the Greek form of a Latin name, and that with a defective spelling.”³⁰

Salmon has developed three rules that have been used throughout the centuries for making any desired name equal 666. His rules are appropriate for the attempts to make Nero fit the number of the beast. “First, if the proper name by itself will not yield it, add a title; secondly, if the sum cannot be found in Greek, try Hebrew, or even Latin; thirdly, do not be too particular about the spelling... We cannot infer much from the fact that a key fits the lock if it is a lock in which almost any key will turn.”³¹

Second Argument: Nero And The 616 Variant

Early-date supporters also seek to identify Nero as the beast of Revelation based on the occurrence of the number 616 in a few ancient manuscripts.³² If the Latin form Nero, rather than the Greek form Νέρων, is transliterated to Hebrew, then the final letter v with

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a numerical value of fifty, is omitted. If this is done, the total adds up to 616.³³ Preterists claim that this variant was intentional in order to make the identity of the beast with Nero more readily discernible to a non-Hebrew mind.³⁴ However, there is no evidence to prove that the 616 variant was intentional. There are several other reasonable explanations. It is likely that the variant resulted from the accidental confusion of the Greek letter ι for ξ (in the number 666, χξς) which would change the number in Revelation 13:18 from 666 to 616.³⁵ (One manuscript, 2344, has the number 665, but this too could have resulted from a scribal error.)³⁶

But even if the variant were intentional, there is no way to be certain that a connection with Nero was intended. Rühle believes that the 616 variant is best explained as an intentional attempt to identify the cruel Roman emperor Caligula with the beast. Caligula's title “Gaius Caesar” equals 616.³⁷ Also if the final v is dropped from Teitan (Titus), the value of Teita is 616.³⁸ Since there is no way to be certain if the 616 variant was accidental or intentional, and since there is no way, even if it was intentional, to know it was connected to Nero, this does not add any support to the early-date view of Revelation.

Third Argument: The Worship Of The Beast

Gentry argues that if Nero is the personal incarnation of the beast of Revelation, then Nero must have been worshiped since Revelation 13:8 says, "All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain."³⁹ To support

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his identification of Nero as the beast, Gentry provides evidence from Seneca, Suetonius, Tacitus, and Dio Cassius that Nero was worshiped.⁴⁰ He notes that a statue of Nero the same size as the statue of Mars was set up in the temple of Mars in A.D. 55.⁴¹

The question, however, is not whether Nero was the recipient of worship. No one can deny that Nero was worshiped during his reign. The issue is whether the worship of Nero fits the facts of the worship of the beast in Revelation. Gentry's main example of emperor worship of Nero is a narrative from Dio Cassius from A.D. 66 when Tiridates, king of Armenia, bowed in worship to Nero.⁴²

Indeed, the proceedings of the conference were not limited to mere conversations, but a lofty platform had been erected on which were set images of Nero, and in the presence of crowds of Armenians, Parthians, and Romans Tiridates approached and paid them reverence; then, after sacrificing to them and calling them by laudatory names, he took off the diadem from his head and set it upon them. . . . Everything had been thus got ready during the night; and at daybreak Nero, wearing the triumphal garb and accompanied by the senate and the Praetorians, entered the Forum. He ascended the rostra and seated himself upon a chair of state. Next Tiridates and his suite passed between lines of heavy-armed troops drawn up on either side, took their stand close to the rostra, and did obeisance to the emperor as they had done before. At this a great roar went up, which so alarmed Tiridates that for some moments he stood speechless, in terror of his life. Then, silence having been proclaimed, he recovered courage and quelling his pride made himself subservient to the occasion and to his need, caring little how humbly he spoke, in view of the prize he hoped to obtain. These were his words: "Master, I am the descendant of Arsaces, brother of the kings Vologaesus and Pacorus, and thy slave. And I have come to thee, my god, to worship thee as I do Mithras. The destiny thou spinnest for me shall be mine; for thou art my Fortune and my Fate."⁴³

Based on this account Gentry concludes that by this action King Tiridates "actually worshiped 'the image of the Beast' (Rev. 13:15)."⁴⁴ But there are three problems with Gentry's conclusion.

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First, according to Dio, Tiridates paid homage to *images* of Nero (plural), whereas in verses 14–15 the word "image" (ει κων) is singular.⁴⁵ Second, there is no evidence that the image Tiridates worshiped was revered or spoke or received breath as stated in verse 15.⁴⁶ Third, the worship described in verse 8 is global in scope, not local.⁴⁷ As Thomas notes, "The prophecy anticipates the almost universal success the beast will have in attracting worshipers. The only limiting factor will be the refusal of the elect to comply."⁴⁸ The worship of Nero by Tiridates does not meet the requirements of Revelation 13.

Fourth Argument: The Death Of The Beast

Gentry also notes that Nero died a violent death by means of a sword. In this connection he cites Revelation 13:10. "If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints." Verse 14 also mentions the death of the beast by the sword. According to verse 3 one of the beast's heads receives a mortal blow delivered by someone else. However, Nero committed suicide by stabbing himself in the throat with the help of his secretary Epaphroditus.⁴⁹ Gentry further argues that verse 10, "Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints," was intended to give "encouragement to those whom the Beast was presently afflicting."⁵⁰ But it is generally agreed that the Neronic persecution never extended beyond the city of Rome and its immediate environs.⁵¹ So how could verse 10 be understood as encouragement

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to the persecuted believers in Asia during the Neronic era when his persecution never reached them?⁵²

Three Additional Reasons For Rejecting The Nero View Of Revelation 13

In addition to the arguments against the Nero view of Revelation 13 that have already been presented in answering Gentry's four contentions, three more reasons for rejecting this view may be noted.

Nero, 666, And The Early Church

The identification of Nero with 666 is not corroborated by the early church fathers as one would expect if this view were correct and were as obvious as Gentry alleges. To his credit Gentry openly admits the problem this poses for his position.

It would seem most reasonable to expect that since Irenaeus wrote within about one hundred years of Revelation, he likely would have heard of the proper view. At the very least, we would think, Irenaeus would recognize the true view, though growing indistinct, as a theory to be given equal footing with the solutions he does proffer. But, as a matter of fact, in his lengthy treatment of the gematria in *Against Heresies* 5.28–30 (especially chapter 30), he provides at least three possible interpretations—and Nero's name is conspicuously absent. Furthermore, *no* early Church father suggests Nero's name as the proper designation of 666, even though various suggestions were given by such men as Irenaeus, Andreas of Caesarea, Victorinus, Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria, and others. Surely this is a potent objection for the twentieth century interpreter.⁵³

Gentry is correct here. Irenaeus wrote extensively about the number 666. He warned against anyone who falsely presumed that he knew the name of the Antichrist.⁵⁴ He was aware of many candidates for the number 666 and mentioned three of them by name: Evanthas, Lateinos, and Teitan.⁵⁵ However, he never identified anyone with the number 666. He said, "We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing

positively as to the name of Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld

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the apocalyptic vision.”⁵⁶ Andreas, in his commentary on Revelation, also mentions several Greek names that total 666.⁵⁷ This pattern is followed by Arethas,⁵⁸ Primasius,⁵⁹ and Victorinus.⁶⁰ Those closest in time to the Book of Revelation and Nero, as Gentry admits, never made any connection between 666 and Nero.

Gentry proposes three possible solutions to this problem. First, he suggests that Irenaeus’s uncertainty concerning the proper designation of 666 indicates that the proper interpretation had been lost.⁶¹ While it is possible that the correct interpretation had been lost, this in no way proves that Gentry’s view is the correct interpretation.

Second, Gentry argues that Irenaeus’s reference to Lateinos signifies the Roman Empire and could be a reference to the emperor, which could be Nero if the book was written during Nero’s reign. Irenaeus also mentioned Teitan in his section on 666. Gentry maintains that Teitan is the sun god and that Nero adopted the attributes of the sun deity as his own.⁶² From these references Gentry concludes, “It seems that Irenaeus at least may have been on the right path.”⁶³ However, if Irenaeus believed that others had identified Nero as the beast, why would he refer to him in such a veiled fashion? Why would Irenaeus not just name Nero specifically if that is who he meant? Moreover, it is possible that Irenaeus’s mention of Teitan is a reference to Titus who destroyed Jerusalem.⁶⁴

Third, Gentry states that Irenaeus may not have recorded the Nero theory because of his predisposition to a futuristic interpretation in keeping with his premillennialism or chiliasm.⁶⁵ However,

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this is mere conjecture. Gentry provides no evidence to substantiate this claim. One could use this kind of argument to prove almost anything. Irenaeus clearly stated why he did not identify any particular person with the number 666.⁶⁶ He believed that any such identification would be presumptuous.

Scholars generally agree that the first proposal of the name Neron Caesar for the number 666 was not made until the 1830s independently by four German scholars, namely, O. F. Fritsche, Ferdinand Benary, Ferdinand Hitzig, and Eduard Reuss.⁶⁷ This conclusion has recently been challenged by Gumerlock, who says he has “evidence from a fifth-century book on biblical genealogies that some in the early church had been using Nero’s name to calculate the number of the beast.”⁶⁸

Gumerlock found this evidence in a chronology entitled *Liber genealogus* (*Genealogical Book* or *Book of Genealogy*),⁶⁹ which was written in the fifth century in North Africa, composed between 405 and 412 and then edited in 427, 438, and 455. Written in Latin, it was edited by Theodore Mommsen.⁷⁰ It lists events from the creation of Adam and Eve all the way up to the fifth century A.D.

The *Liber genealogus* says on page 194 that “Nero is he whose name John called in the Apocalypse 616. *Here wisdom is understood* [Rev 13:18], that through letters the name of him may be computed, who is called, as is related: ‘Antichrist.’ 1 13 18 9 3 8 17 9 18 19 20 18. The collected number equals 154. Multiplying this

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by four, according to the four letters of the name of Nero equals 616, which is the name of Antichrist.”⁷¹

Admittedly this moves the date of the first connection between Nero and the first beast of Revelation 13 back about 1, 400 years from what was previously believed. But even if some leaders in the fifth century made this connection, the question still remains, Why did none of the earliest Christian writers who discussed 666 ever mention it? Why were Irenaeus, Andreas, Primasius, and Victorinus apparently unaware of this view? If Neron Caesar is such an obvious connection to the number 666 or even 616, then why did it take at least 350 years for someone to see it? The lack of any early support for the Nero view still undermines the view that Nero is to be identified by the number 666.

Identity Of The Second Beast

A second reason for rejecting the notion that Nero is the beast out of the sea in Revelation 13:1–10 is that there is no historical figure during Nero’s reign who corresponds to the second beast, the beast from the earth in verses 11–18. This second beast is called the “false prophet” in 16:13; 19:20; and 20:10.⁷² The first beast is the civil, political, and military head, while the second beast represents religious power employed in fostering worship of the first beast.⁷³

Preterists seem to be at a loss to find any historical person in the Neronic era to serve as a satisfactory fulfillment of the prophecies of the second beast.⁷⁴ Following J. Stuart Russell, Gentry identifies the beast from the earth as Gessius Florus, the Roman procurator or governor of Judea under Nero.⁷⁵ Gentry believes that the origin of the second beast “from the earth” means “from the land,” that is, the land of Israel.⁷⁶ While it is possible that the false prophet will be a Jewish apostate, his origin from the earth probably denotes his “earthly” as opposed to heavenly origin. As Kistemaker

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says, “This beast stands in direct opposition to everything that comes from heaven and is devoid of anything that is heavenly.”⁷⁷ Or his origin from the earth could be in contrast to the first beast who comes from the sea, which is more fearsome and mysterious than the earth.⁷⁸

However, even if the second beast is a Jew, that hardly proves that he should be identified with Gessius Florus. Neither Gentry nor Russell provide any historical evidence that Gessius Florus ever performed great signs and wonders, that he constructed an image of Nero, that he made the image speak, that he forced the mark of the beast on the populace as a kind of passport for commercial transactions, or that he executed those who failed to take the mark of the beast (13:11–18).⁷⁹ The false prophet will be a key religious figure who will actively promote

the worship of the first beast. Josephus, who discussed Gessius Florus, never mentioned any activities by him that even remotely correspond to the prophecies of verses 11–18.⁸⁰ If Florus did perform great signs and wonders, constructed an image of Nero, and gave breath to the image, Josephus's failure to mention these stupendous feats is inexplicable. The inability to identify a historical person who fulfilled the role and activities of the false prophet in the Neronian era is a drawback for the preterist position and an early date for Revelation.

No Literal Fulfillment By Nero

A third argument against identifying Nero with the first beast of Revelation 13 is that Nero did not fulfill the activities of the beast as recorded in that chapter and other places in Revelation. Gentry

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and other preterists take the reference to 666 literally as the gematria value of the name Neron Caesar. They also take the forty-two months in verse 5 as a literal span of time when Nero persecuted Christians. However, they are not able to point successfully to literal fulfillments of the other prophecies in Revelation 13. This chapter states that the beast will rule the world for forty-two months, that all who dwell on the earth will worship him, that he will be killed and come back to life, that everyone must take his mark of 666 on his or her right hand or forehead, and that all must take this mark to engage in any form of commerce. The reign of Nero from A.D. 54 to 68 did not include these things. As Brown concludes, "Too many elements in Rev seem irreconcilable with Nero's lifetime."⁸¹

Twice Gentry cites Revelation 19:20 in an effort to identify the beast with Nero.⁸² "And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat upon the horse and against His army. And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat upon the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh" (vv. 19–21). But when were these verses ever fulfilled in the life of Nero? Nero never gathered his armies with other kings of the earth to make war against the returning Christ from heaven (vv. 11–18). Nero was not cast alive into the lake of fire. He died in Rome on June 9, A.D. 68. History never records that Nero had a henchman like the false prophet. There was never a time when Nero's army was slaughtered and fed to the birds after he was cast alive in the lake of fire.

Preterists are not consistent at this point in their method of interpretation. If the beast is a literal world ruler (Nero), if the numerical value of his name is literally 666, if he is literally worshiped, and if he literally waged war against Christians for forty-two months, then consistency demands that the other prophecies concerning him in Revelation 13 and elsewhere must also be literally fulfilled. But history indicates they were not literally fulfilled in Nero.

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Conclusion

The best view is the futurist interpretation, which maintains that the first beast of Revelation 13 refers not to Nero but to the future Antichrist who will literally fulfill all the prophecies in this chapter. This was the view of the early church, as witnessed by Irenaeus and Hippolytus.⁸³ McGinn summarizes the "kind of mainline eschatology" of the early church in the closing decades of the second century concerning the Antichrist. "Antichrist is a Jewish false messiah whose coming is still some time in the future, following the fragmentation of the Roman Empire. Antichrist is seen primarily as a persecuting tyrant who will rebuild Jerusalem and its temple. Exalting himself as God and demanding public worship, he will slaughter those who refuse to worship him. . . His fall after three and a half years will usher in Christ's return to earth."⁸⁴

This view of the beast of Revelation 13 is consistent with futurism and contrary to preterism. For these reasons the identification of Nero with the first beast of Revelation 13 is rejected, thereby eliminating this argument as a support for an early date for Revelation.

The concluding article in this series will discuss the attempt of preterists to identify Nero with the sixth king in Revelation 17.

¹In addition to these four main arguments for identifying Nero with the beast Gentry includes three other arguments that are hermeneutically questionable. First, Gentry contends that Nero, like Satan, is a serpent (Rev. 20:2) because in English and in Greek the pronunciation of the number 666 (χξς) "sounds hauntingly like a serpent's chilling hiss," and "their eerie sound is that of a serpent's hiss" (Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation*, rev. ed. [Atlanta: American Vision, 1998], 215). Second, he says that the middle number-letter of 666 in Greek has the appearance of a writhing serpent: ξ (ibid.). Third, he notes that for a time Nero had a red beard like the color of the beast in Revelation 17:3 (ibid., 217). But see Robert L. Thomas, "Theonomy and the Dating of Revelation," *Master's Seminary Journal* 5 (1994): 195 n. 57.

²John F. Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton, IL: SP, 1990), 587.

³G. W. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 722; cf. Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 395.

⁴Grant Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 518–19.

⁵Gentry provides an excellent discussion of the meaning and ancient use of gematria (*Before Jerusalem Fell*, 193–97). Richard Bauckham argues that John and his audience would have been familiar with the concept of gematria from other Jewish and Christian apocalyptic writings (*The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* [Edinburgh: Clark, 1993], 384–407).

⁶Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), 276.

⁷*Sibylline Oracles* 1.324–29.

- ⁸Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 255.
- ⁹Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.30.3.
- ¹⁰Suetonius, *Nero* 39.2.
- ¹¹Mark Wilson, "The Early Christians in Ephesus and the Date of Revelation, Again," *Neotestamentica* 39 (2005): 184.
- ¹²Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 203–12.
- ¹³Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 719.
- ¹⁴*Ibid.*, 720; G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Black, 1966; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 175. Both Beale and Caird note that the weakness of this view is that no single coin contains all five abbreviated titles together.
- ¹⁵W. G. Baines, "The Number of the Beast in Revelation 13:18," *Heythrop Journal* 16 (1975): 195–96.
- ¹⁶Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.30.3.
- ¹⁷George E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 186.
- ¹⁸*Ibid.*
- ¹⁹Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 209–12.
- ²⁰Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 175; and Osborne, *Revelation*, 520.
- ²¹Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 395.
- ²²Donald A. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 959–60; and Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.30.3. Also, as already noted, the *Sibylline Oracles* used the name of Jesus in Greek, not Hebrew, to reach the total 888 (*Sibylline Oracles* 1.324–29).
- ²³D. R. Hillers, "Revelation 13:18 and a Scroll from Murabba'at," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 170 (1963): 65.
- ²⁴*Ibid.* See also P. Benoit, J. T. Milik, and Roland de Vaux, *Discoveries in the Judean Desert, II, Les grottes de Murabba'at*, no. 18, plate XXIX (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), 100–102.
- ²⁵Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 719.
- ²⁶Benoit, Milik, and de Vaux, *Discoveries in the Judean Desert*, 100–102; and Hillers, "Revelation 13:18 and a Scroll from Murabba'at," 65. G. W. Buchanan, who has analyzed the Judean scroll fragment, agrees that in the part of the word where the yod should be located it is missing and that even if the broken word were $\rho\sigma\tau$ there does not seem to be enough space for it to include the yod (*The Book of Revelation: Its Introduction and Prophecy*, Mellen Biblical Commentary [Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical, 1993], 345–46). Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 719.
- ²⁷Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 719.
- ²⁸Buchanan, *The Book of Revelation*, 345–46.
- ²⁹H. A. Sanders refers to this as "especially awkward" ("The Number of the Beast in Revelation 13:18," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 37 [1918]: 97). Sanders contends that 666 refers to the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius, who used the title Aurelius Caesar Deus, which yields 666 (*ibid.*, 99).
- ³⁰Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 262.
- ³¹G. Salmon, *An Historical Introduction to the Study of the Books of the New Testament*, 9th ed. (London: John Murray, 1904), 230–31.
- ³²The manuscripts that read 616 are P¹¹⁵, C, and some that are no longer extant (some manuscripts known to Irenaeus and two minuscules, 5 and 11). See *New English Translation, Novum Testamentum Graece*, ed. Michael H. Burer, W. Hall Harris, and Daniel B. Wallace (Dallas: NET Bible, 2004), 885.
- ³³Bauchham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 387; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 719; and Gerhard A. Krodel, *Revelation*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 259.
- ³⁴Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 202–3.
- ³⁵Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 719 n. 298.
- ³⁶*Ibid.*
- ³⁷Oskar Rühle, "αριθμῶ, αριθμός," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 463; cf. Sanders, "The Number of the Beast in Revelation 13:18," 99; and Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 960.
- ³⁸William Milligan, *Discussions on the Apocalypse* (London: Macmillan, 1893), 117.

- ³⁹Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *The Beast of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2002), 73.
- ⁴⁰Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 271–73.
- ⁴¹Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 81.
- ⁴²Gentry cites the Roman historian Dio Cassius as a witness for the worship of Nero (*Before Jerusalem Fell*, 273). However, sixteen pages later Gentry questions the usefulness of Dio since his testimony at that point is against Gentry's view (*ibid.*, 289). One cannot rely on a source when it helps one's case but then question that same source when its testimony is unfavorable (unless there is some evidence to indicate that the testimony in that specific case is unreliable).
- ⁴³Dio, *History* 62.23.3; 62.4.3–5.2.
- ⁴⁴Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 82.
- ⁴⁵Andy Woods, "Revelation 13 and the First Beast," in *The End Times Controversy*, ed. Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2003), 242.
- ⁴⁶*Ibid.*
- ⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 241–42.
- ⁴⁸Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 164.
- ⁴⁹Suetonius, *Nero* 49; and Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 31.
- ⁵⁰Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 89–90.
- ⁵¹Leon Morris, *Revelation*, rev. ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 37; Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2000), 50; Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 805; Ben Witherington III, *Revelation*, New Cambridge Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 4; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 12; and Osborne, *Revelation*, 8.
- ⁵²Woods, "Revelation 13 and the First Beast," 238–39.
- ⁵³Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 205 (*italics his*).
- ⁵⁴Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.30.1.
- ⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 5.30.3.
- ⁵⁶*Ibid.*
- ⁵⁷Andreas, *Patrologia graeca*, ed. J. P. Migne (reprint, Paris: Garnier, 1912), 106:340.
- ⁵⁸Arethas, *Patrologia graeca* 106:681.
- ⁵⁹Primasius, *Patrologia latina*, ed. J. P. Migne (reprint, Ridgewood, NJ: Gregg, 1965), 68:194.
- ⁶⁰Victorinus, *Patrologia latina* 3:339.
- ⁶¹Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 205–6.
- ⁶²*Ibid.*, 206.
- ⁶³*Ibid.*, 207.
- ⁶⁴Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 31.
- ⁶⁵Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 207.
- ⁶⁶Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.30.1 and 5.30.3.
- ⁶⁷Many scholars refer to this discovery in the 1830s. See David Brady, *The Contribution of British Writers between 1560 and 1830 to the Interpretation of Revelation 13.16–18: (the Number of the Beast): A Study in the History of Exegesis*, *Beitrage zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983), 291–93; William Milligan, *Discussions on the Apocalypse* (London: Macmillan, 1893), 110; Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 387 n. 10; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 394–95; and Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 42. Ferdinand Benary relates 666 to Nero ("Interpretation of the Number 666 (χξς) in the Apoclypse (13:18) and the Various Reading 616 (χις)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 1 (1844): 84–86. This article was an excerpt from a book Benary authored, *Zeitschrift für speculative Theologie*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Berlin: n.p., 1836).
- ⁶⁸Gary DeMar and Francis X. Gumerlock, *The Early Church and the "End of the World": The Past Fulfillment of Matthew 24* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2005), 81 n. 108.
- ⁶⁹Francis X. Gumerlock, email message to the author, July 15, 2005.
- ⁷⁰Theodore Mommsen, ed., *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi*, vol. 9 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892; reprint, Munich: Strauss and Cramer, 1981), 154–96.

⁷¹Francis X. Gumerlock, "NERO ANTICHRIST: Patristic Evidence of the Use of Nero's Name in Calculating the Number of the Beast (Rev 13:18)," *Westminster Theological Journal* 68 (2006): 347–60 (translation his).

⁷²Osborne, *Revelation*, 510.

⁷³*Ibid.*; cf. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 183.

⁷⁴Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 183.

⁷⁵Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), 410; and J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: The New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming*, new ed. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 465–69.

⁷⁶Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, 410.

⁷⁷Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 388.

⁷⁸Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 172; and Morris, *Revelation*, 166.

⁷⁹Steven J. Sherrer discusses the use of contrived religious wonders in the imperial cult which he believes fulfills Revelation 13:13–15 ("Signs and Wonders in the Imperial Cult: A New Look at a Roman Religious Institution in the Light of Rev. 13:13–15," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 [1984]: 599–610); cf. Edwin A. Judge, "The Mark of the Beast," *Tyndale Bulletin* 42 (1991): 158–59. However, Sherrer and Judge seem to miss the point that in Revelation 13 these are real signs and wonders, not tricks, manipulation, or sleight of hand (Matt. 24:24; 2 Thess. 2:9). These miracles are said to be under divine control (Rev. 13:14). It "was given" to the false prophet to do these signs and wonders (vv. 14–15), that is, God will permit the false prophet to delude the world with counterfeit signs and wonders as part of the great end-time deception and delusion (2 Thess. 2:9–12; Rev. 13:14; 19:20). It would not be necessary for God to give special permission for the false prophet to perform tricks or sleight of hand (Osborne, *Revelation*, 513–16; and Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 177–78).

⁸⁰Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 20.11.1.

⁸¹Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 805.

⁸²Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 73, 224.

⁸³Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.25.3–4; 5.28.2; 5.30.1; Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel* [*Patrologia graeca* 10:647–55, 665–66]; and *idem*, *On the Antichrist* 49 [*Patrologia graeca* 10:767–68]. Hippolytus's commentary on Daniel is the oldest extant Christian biblical commentary. Hippolytus saw the Roman Empire as merely preparatory to the kingdom of the Antichrist. The Antichrist could not come until the Roman Empire had been divided into ten kingdoms or "ten democracies" (Hippolytus *Antichrist* 27 [*Patrologia graeca* 10:747–50]). The *Didache* also refers to the future deceiver of the world who will appear as a son of God, and *Didache* 16.3–8 makes clear reference to Mark 13 and Matthew 24 as predicting yet-future events.

⁸⁴Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994), 63.

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