

Chapter 2 and 3

Jews, Christians and Seven Letters to Seven Churches

Church Schema http://www.biblaridion.info/PDF/church_schema.pdf

This chapter will examine the seven letters of Rev 2-3 within the framework of Jewish-Christian relations. It is a valid avenue to pursue because Jews are twice mentioned in a negative sense (in Rev 2.9 and Rev 3.9) and this poses questions about the Jewish presence in Asia Minor and interactions with Christians. It also poses questions about the dating of the seven letters. What follows is therefore not homiletic as there are many commentaries that can provide exhortation; rather, it is an analysis of the socio-historical context as a correct grasp of the setting will influence our reading of the letters (and therefore of the whole book of Revelation). For example, an interpretation that understands “seven church ages” that run consecutively will lead to a particular understanding (i.e., we might believe that we are living in the “age” of Philadelphia or of Thyatira etc).

However, before we proceed it should be noted that the distinction between Jews and Christians is largely artificial because at this time¹ *many* Christians were Jews --- Christianity was not yet a “Gentile religion”. Although the apostle John was himself a Jew, John often uses the term “Jew” in a pejorative sense in the fourth gospel (to denote the ruling elite).² In the period that concerns us believing and non-believing Jews worshipped side by side and attended the same synagogues. Within this context we can understand Stephen disputing with his fellow Jews in the synagogue of the Libertines (Acts 6.9).

Dunn says, “The significance of these findings should not go unnoticed. For one thing they raise again the issue of the ongoing relations between the churches and the synagogues. Were all the Jewish believers wholly detached from the synagogue or did they see no inconsistency in owning a dual allegiance to ‘synagogue’ and ‘church’, perhaps regarding the believer’s in Messiah Jesus as a (controversial!) renewal group within the Jewish community? Here we also need to bear in mind that in a city where many Jews had settled, the synagogues might themselves have been quite diverse; putting the same point the other way; we should not assume that the several synagogues (gatherings of Jews) in a large city were homogeneous. In which case the first churches might well have been seen as simply part of that diversity and their legal status have been left unquestioned accordingly”.³

Knowles sums it up succinctly; “Christianity began as a renewal movement within first century Judaism. Jesus himself was a Jew. His original disciples were all Jews. The first believers were Jews. Initially, this movement operated entirely within Judaism, not outside of it. In that context, it was known as “the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5), in the same way we read of “the sect of the Pharisees” (Acts 15:5) and the “sect of the Sadducees” (Acts 5:17). It was not until later, at gentile Antioch, that the name “Christian” caught on (Acts 11:26). Initially, it may have been an epithet, rather than a merely descriptive term”.⁴

Levine sums up the situation as follows; “In all, Acts mentions the synagogue nineteen times, almost always referring to the institution as “synagogue,” with but one exception, Philippi, where the term *proseuche* is used. Acts informs us of synagogues in Damascus (9:2, 20), Salamis (13:5), Antioch of Pisidia (13:14), Iconium (14:1), Thessalonica (17:1), Berea (17:10), Athens (17:17), Corinth (18:7, 8), Ephesus (18:19ff.), and Philippi (16:13). The frequent reference to synagogues in Acts is not fortuitous. According to Luke (author of Acts), this institution was a critical factor in the spread of Christianity in its early stages. Almost every reference to a synagogue is related to Paul’s missionary activity; at first he addresses the Jews and only later the gentiles. The pattern appearing in Acts is almost inexorable: visit to a synagogue, effective preaching, Jewish hostility, and expulsion. This recurrent phenomenon goes to the heart of Acts’ theological and political message. Paul is rebuffed time and again by the Jews, and only then devotes himself fully and unequivocally to the gentile mission. The theological basis of this schema is clearly spelled out in Acts 13:46: “And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, ‘it was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from yourselves, thereby judging yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the gentiles.’”⁵

Christians would also meet outside the synagogue in “house churches” (Acts 2.46a, 12.12, 16.3, 5, 40 ; 1 Cor. 16.19; Col 4.15; Phil 1,2). Therefore, in the early days both believing and non-believing Jews would attend the synagogue and believing Jews (Christians) would “break bread” etc in their homes.⁶ In Judaism the home is the most important centre of spiritual life. The first church buildings did not start to appear until the early 200s.

God Fearers

As well as believing Jews (Christians) and non-believing Jews, there were also the “God fearers” who were Gentiles that were attracted to the Jewish religion. In the first century there were many Gentiles who although they were uncircumcised and did not adhere to the strict food laws etc⁷ were accepted (as we might term “interested friends”) and acted as “patrons” supporting the Jewish religion financially and in other ways because they found it preferable to paganism. It is not difficult to imagine that the “God fearers” were the most susceptible to the gospel message,⁸ especially as they were now received as fully-fledged fellow brethren. No longer were they treated as second class believers by Jewish exclusivity but as fellow-workers.

One such example is the Roman centurion Cornelius who was obviously well versed in scripture⁹ and understood that Christ was the promised messiah; “A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always” (Acts 10.2). This man was an ideal candidate for conversion as he did not have “Jewish baggage” in other words he did not believe that access to God was his right by birth or race. When he heard the truth he understood it without bias, tradition, or privilege clouding his view.

In the past many scholars thought of the early Pauline churches as being predominately Gentile and that may have been true for some of the churches in Galatia but after analysing the provenance of the names in the greetings of the Pauline epistles and further investigation Dunn concludes; “The reality was a good deal more confused and hardly uniform. Paul, as we have seen, typically used the local synagogue(s) as the springboard for his mission to Gentile God-fearers. But Luke does indicate that many Jews were also converted (footnote: Acts 13.43; 14.1; 17.4, 11-12; 18.8; 19.9; 28.24), and they would have formed part of the core members around which the earliest churches began to grow”.¹⁰

The Jews of Asia Minor

It is necessary to properly evaluate the Jewish presence in Asia Minor before the situation in the churches of Asia Minor can be properly understood. In the past scholars often thought that “synagogues” were a phenomenon that appeared on the scene after the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. More recently a raft of archaeological (epigraphic) and literary evidence has come to light that demonstrates that this is patently untrue.

The institution of the “synagogue” existed in Israel but especially in the Diaspora for centuries. This supports the historical accounts depicted in Acts. It is actually quite logical that Jews should develop a “synagogue” culture even before the fall of the second temple. Not everyone could afford to travel to Jerusalem, not even once in their lifetime, and although the temple was financially supported by collections in the Diaspora, local communities need a place to gather and focus their religious and ethnic identity.

It comes as no surprise that the institute of the synagogue developed to fill this gap. Although the synagogue did not replace the temple it became a gathering place for various guild associations (to make business connections), a debating society (discussing the Law etc), a bible study school, a place where administrative decisions were made regarding the community and last but not least a place for communal worship. Outside of the family home the synagogue became the focal point of Jewish identity and the “face” that Judaism presented to the Gentile community.

Gentile Benefactors

These are Gentiles who gave financial and political patronage to the Jewish community and in particular to the building and upkeep of synagogues. Recent archaeological evidence has brought this to light and we turn to a number of commentators who evaluate the find. Horst¹¹ has the following to say;

“There are several indications for this high degree of integration. Here only some of the most striking instances can be mentioned. In Phrygian Acmonia, we find a very intriguing inscription (*IJO* II 168) that tells us that some prominent members of the local Jewish community had the synagogue restored that had been built by Julia Severa. This woman is well known to us — she is mentioned also in other inscriptions and on coins from Acmonia — as the priestess of the local emperor cult in the middle of the first century CE. So she was certainly not Jewish but played a prominent role in an important pagan cult in the city. Even so this inscription testifies to her warm interest in the Jewish [religion]. Julia Severa was an aristocratic lady (her son later became a senator in Rome), who had close connections with the prestigious Roman emigrant family of the Turronii; one of them, Turronius Rapo, was also a priest for the emperor cult and together with Julia Severa he is mentioned on the coins of the city, while another member of the same family, Turronius Cladus, is mentioned in our inscription as the ‘head of the synagogue’ (*archisynagōgos*) that had the renovations done!”

Levine¹² comments as follows on the inscription:

“The items of interest here are manifold, most striking, of course, is the fact that the synagogue building itself was built by one Julia Severa a number of years prior to the date of this inscription, which itself deals with the restoration of the structure. Even more unusual than the nature of this woman’s benefaction is the fact that she was a well-known pagan who came from “a nexus of leading families.” The local coinage celebrates Julia Severa as politically active in the mid-first century, holding the positions of *agonothete* and ἀρχιτέρεια (high priestess) of the local Imperial cult.” Pagan donations to synagogues are known elsewhere in Asia Minor as well, but donating an entire building was indeed rare”.

An *agonothete* (plural *agonothetes*) has the following historical definition: An officer who presided over the great public games in Ancient Greece. This office (obviously) had religious implications as the games were dedicated to the “gods”. Trebilco¹³ observes the following:

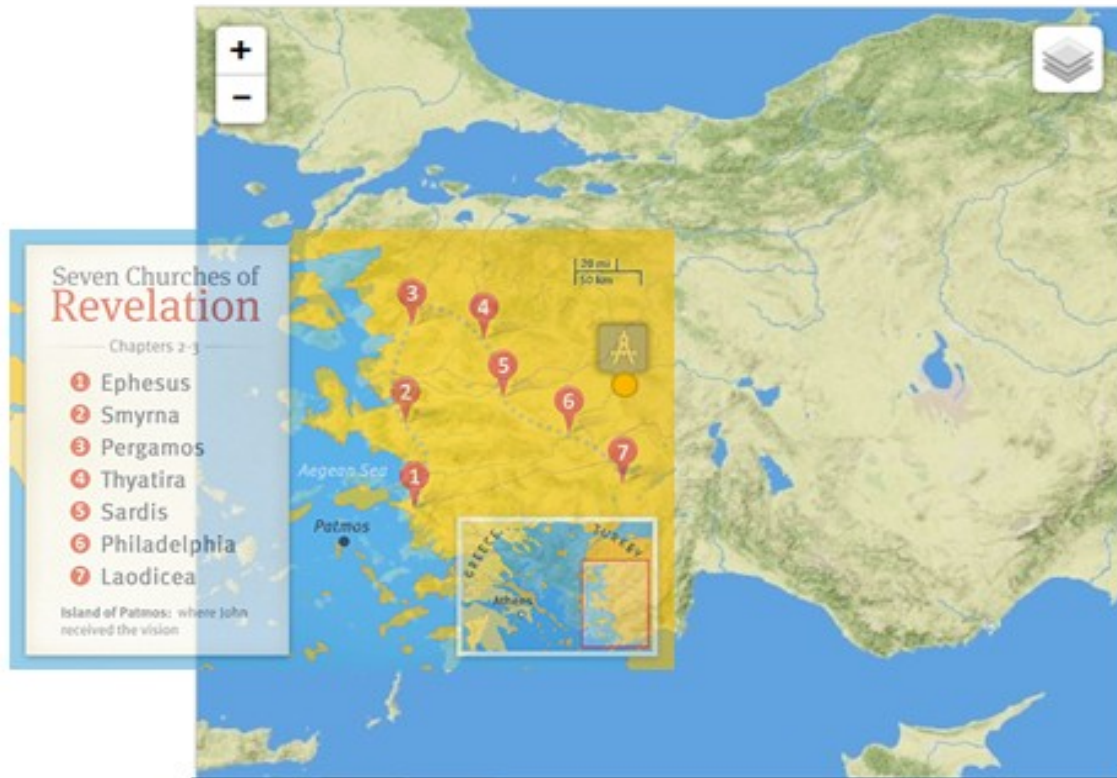
The text deals with the restoration of the synagogue which was originally built by Julia Severa. We know from coinage that she was active in the 50s and 60s of the first century CE, thus suggesting that this inscription is to be dated in the 80s or 90s, in order to allow time for the synagogue to require repairs. It is therefore the earliest synagogue in Asia Minor attested by an inscription. Julia Severa is well known from numismatic and epigraphic evidence. She was ἀρχιέρεια of the Imperial cult at Acmonia for at least three terms **of office in the reign of Nero [emphasis mine]** and was also an *agonothete*.

Of course the dating of the renovation is scholarly speculation and rests on the premise that it fell into disrepair through neglect but this was a region well known for minor earthquakes such as damaged Laodicea in 60. In all probability she built the synagogue for the Jews in the 50s and repaired it in the 60s.

Of paramount interest is that this “God fearer” (sic) was associated with Nero who persecuted the Christians. Is it coincidence that another “God fearer” was Nero’s mistress (later to become his wife).¹⁴ There were many aristocratic (Paul calls them honourable) “Greek Women” who became Christians (Acts 17.12) but there were also many “God fearers” who remained associated with Judaism but still kept one foot in the “pagan camp”.

The location of the inscription¹⁵ is Acmonia or Akmonia (Ἀκμονία). An ancient city and a titular see of Phrygia Pacatiana, in Asia Minor, now known as Ahat Köyü. It is mentioned by Cicero (Pro Flacco, 15) and was a point on the road between Dorylaeum and Philadelphia.¹⁶ To give a sense of where the synagogue at Akmonia is located I have superimposed a transparent map of the seven churches¹⁷ on top of a screenshot of the map from the archaeological application¹⁸ – the scale is kept roughly the same by matching the coastlines:

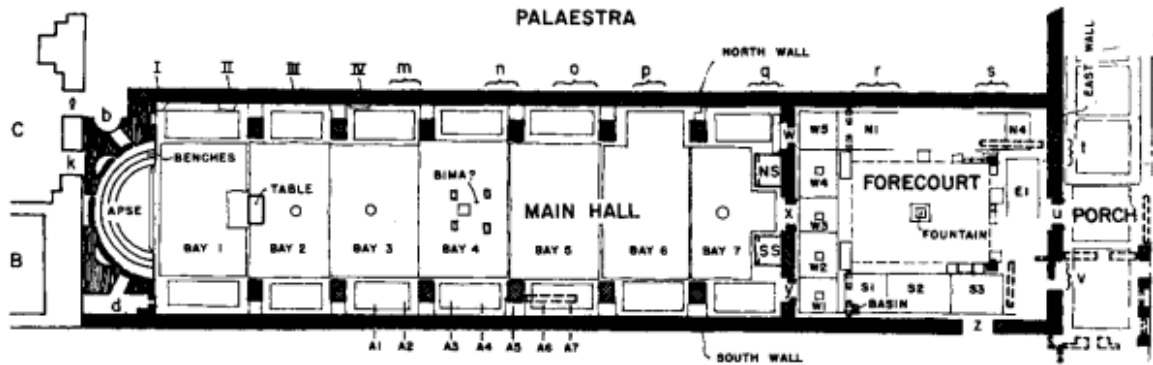
Map of the Seven Churches and Akmonia



The distance from Akmonia (yellow dot) to Philadelphia is barely 50 km.

Sardis

The synagogue at Sardis has been chosen as an example (floor-plan below):



Plan of the Sardis synagogue.

A reconstruction¹⁹ of the synagogue:



Levine relates how the rabbinical writing Tosefta (first appearing in the third-century) has a tradition that describes a colossal synagogue in Alexandria and although the rabbinical account is clearly exaggerated Philo does describe a large Alexandrian synagogue in 38 CE. According to the Tosefta it had 71 golden thrones for the “elders” (mimicking the Sanhedrin and high priest). Levin goes on to say:

“From an archaeological perspective, the only evidence that could possibly relate to this Alexandrian tradition of seventy-one elders comes, as mentioned, from fourth-century Sardis. At the western end of the hall were three semicircular benches, clearly intended for people of rank within the congregation. These Sardis elders, who sat on benches facing eastward, toward the centre of the hall and the Torah shrine (or shrines), also may have numbered seventy, as the building’s excavators have estimated on the basis of the space available”. [p. 93]

The seating arrangements were often in professional “guilds” (cf. Paul was a rabbi but a tentmaker by profession).

“Once again, the Sardis synagogue may offer an interesting parallel. Located on the main street of the city, it stood adjacent to a row of shops, many of which appear to have been owned by Jews. One side entrance of this synagogue even joined its atrium to these shops”. [p.94]

N. T. Wright puts the situation into perspective as follows;²⁰

“As in most cities of the region, there was almost certainly a significant Jewish community in Philadelphia; Sardis, not far away, was a major Jewish centre at the time. As in the letter to Smyrna, we have here an indication that the synagogue community was using its civic status to block the advance of the message about Israel’s Messiah, Jesus, a message so very Jewish and yet so challenging to Jewish people. We should not imagine a ‘church’ on one street corner and a ‘synagogue’ on another, as in many cities today. We should imagine a Jewish community of several thousand, with its own buildings and community life, and a church of probably two or three dozen at most, holding on to the highly improbable, and extremely risky, claim that the God of Israel had raised Jesus from the dead. That imbalance goes some way to help us explain what is now being said”.

Below are 23 occasions where the NT names a particular location as having a synagogue, together with documented extra-biblical sources (where available). Of course, the NT only names a particular location as having a synagogue if it is relevant (e.g., the synagogues at Sardis and Akmonia are not referenced). Jewish synagogues were therefore prolific throughout the first century, particularly in the region of Asia Minor.

Synagogue Locations

Antioch, Pisidia Acts 13:14–17	Jerusalem Acts 24:12, inscription, Talmud
Antioch, Syria (Paul) Acts 6:5; Josephus W. 7.44	Laodicea Col 4:16; Cicero Flaccus 28
Athens Acts 17:16–17	Miletus Acts 20:17; Josephus Ant. 14.244
Berea Acts 17:10–14	Magdala Mark 5:21, Excavation
Cana Jn 2:1; Jos. Life 86	Nazareth Luke 4:16-30
Capernaum John 6:59, Excavation	Pergamum Rev 2:12; Cicero Flaccus 28
Corinth Acts 18:4–11	Philadelphia Revelation 3:7-13
Cyrene Mark 15:21; Inscription	Salamis, Cypress Island Acts 13:4–5
Damascus Acts 9:1–25	Smyrna Revelation 2:8-10
Ephesus Acts 16:13; 18:19-19:20	Thessalonica Acts 17:1–9
Iconium, Pisidia Acts 14:1–7	Thyatira Acts 16:14; Rev 2:18
Jericho Lk 19:1, Excavation	

The Most-High God

One way in which Jews and pagans could compromise and still (supposedly) retain their separate religious identity was by worshipping the “Most High God” together. Of course it is nothing more than syncretism – both Jews and pagans pretending to worship the same thing – after all, as the saying goes, “you have to go along to get along” and it would surely lead to more harmonious relationships (especially of the business kind). Of course, the Most-High God of the OT is not the head of a pantheon of “gods” (even lesser ones) as Yahweh clearly states that “*there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me*” (Isa.46.9). But principles can be stretched almost endlessly for the higher good of getting along and making money. Horst²¹ describes this phenomenon as follows:

“Finally, we have to discuss a very significant form of rapprochement between Jews and Gentiles in Asia Minor, namely the cult of *Theos Hypsistos*, God Most High. Stephen Mitchell collected some 375 inscriptions of worshippers of this god, mostly from the second and third centuries CE, 46 mainly from the eastern Mediterranean, but especially from Asia Minor. A large percentage of these inscriptions, more than 160, are from Asia Minor, and in most cases it is impossible to determine whether the inscription is pagan, Christian, or Jewish; arguments for assigning them to either category are rarely decisive. That is so because *Theos Hypsistos* is a designation that was current as an epithet for the highest god in both paganism and Judaism and Christianity. It is highly probable that this rather elusive cult concerned a syncretistic religious movement that did a conscious effort to bridge the gap between polytheism and monotheism. Its origins lie not in Jewish but in pagan henotheistic circles, where the attraction of Judaism was so strongly felt that one was seeking common ground. Hypsistarians chose to address their god by a name that fitted both pagan and Jewish patterns of belief. Quite often they combined their worship of *Theos Hypsistos* with that of angels, another trait with monotheistic, or at least henotheistic, overtones. As Mitchell says, “We are evidently dealing with an area of belief, where Jews, Judaizers, and pagans occupied very similar territories. (...) The cult of *Theos Hypsistos* had room for pagans and for Jews. More than that, it shows that the principal categories into which we divide the religious groupings of late antiquity are simply inappropriate or misleading when applied to the beliefs and practices of a significant proportion of the population of the eastern Roman Empire”

Well might Dunn (2009: 620) comment, “...we have evidence of boundaries between Jewish synagogues and other associations which were permeable to powerful beliefs and influential practices”.

Jews, Christians and the Imperial Cult

Almost to a man scholars adopt the imperial cult as an explanation for the persecution of the “churches” in Revelation and as the back ground for the “image worship” in later chapters. It is virtually heretical to question the scholarly consensus – the beast is the Roman Empire and image worship is the Imperial cult. On the surface this is a plausible explanation but even if accepted many questions are left unanswered.

The Imperial cult of ancient Rome identified emperors and some members of their families with the divinely sanctioned authority (*auctoritas*) of the Roman State. Its framework was formulated during the early Principate of Augustus (27 BCE–14 CE), and was rapidly established throughout the Empire and its provinces, with marked local variations in its reception and expression. A deceased emperor held worthy of the honour could be voted a state divinity (*divus*, plural *divi*) by the Senate and elevated as such in an act of apotheosis. The granting of apotheosis served religious, political and moral judgment on Imperial rulers and allowed living Emperors to associate themselves with a well-regarded lineage of Imperial *divi* from which unpopular or unworthy predecessors were excluded.²² It was impossible to ignore the imperial cults, since Herod the Great had ringed Judea with temples to Augustus before the time of Christ and Caligula and Nero were resolutely active in cultivating divine honours during the time of Paul.²³

However, although Robinson does agree that later chapters in the Apocalypse reference “Emperor Worship” Robinson **does not find any reference to the Imperial cult in the seven letters:**

“The most noticeable feature in the account of what has actually been suffered by the churches of Asia, or is immediately likely to be, is the absence of any clear reference to the imperial cult, which pervades the rest of the book. There is nothing in the warnings and encouragements given to the congregations that requires us to pre-suppose more than Jewish harassment, the action of local magistrates, and general pagan corruption. Even in Pergamon, which is stated to be 'Satan's throne' (2.13), there is no compelling evidence that the allusion is to emperor-worship. In so far as Satan is characteristically for this writer 'the old serpent' (12.9; 20.2), the allusion may well be to the snake-worship associated with the shrine of Asclepius, of which the city was a centre [So Hort, *ad loc.*; Zahn, INT III, 411f.]. Even if, as later commentators tend to argue, the reference is to the temple consecrated there to 'the divine Augustus and the goddess Roma', [I.T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, New York 1919, 456, notes that Pergamon was the first place in the province of Asia

to have such a temple. Yet Augustus also sanctioned temples in Ephesus and Nicaea with the inscription 'To the goddess Roma and the divine Julius' (Dio Cassius, Hist.51.6.) this had been founded in 29 bc [Tacitus, Ann. 4.37; cf. 3.63; 4.55; and Suetonius. Aug. 52.] and does not of itself require a late date. Yet though emperor-worship can be read into the letters to the seven churches it is not demanded by them (in strong contrast with the visions that follow). Even if a gigantic statue of the Emperor Domitian was indeed erected in a temple at Ephesus, [Cf. Reicke, NT Era, 279, for the references.] there is absolutely nothing in the letter to the Christians there to suggest that this was the issue they faced: their struggle was not with the state but with false apostles, the Nicolaitans, and loss of fervour within the church (2.1-7). This is not, of course, to deny that for the seer the final battle with the 'beast' underlay everything else. But the development of emperor-worship in the province of Asia cannot be used for determining the historical context into which the letters fit".²⁴

In agreement with Robinson, no references to the Imperial cult can be found in the seven letters, it is clearly a case of reading into the seven letters the "image worship" found in Rev 13 but contra Robinson (and many other commentators) even the "image worship" found in Rev 13 **can be given a historically (and scripturally) satisfying explanation** without the necessity to impose the imperial cult on the text.²⁵

Another objection to reading the Imperial cult into the back into the setting of the persecutions and problems of the seven churches is that "Christians" were not regarded as separate group by the Romans. Early Christians were a sub-group of Judaism and many Christians were ethnic Jews (as already discussed) and therefore (like the Jews) exempt from the Imperial cult. Once again we turn to Dunn for a summary of the situation [2009: 618-619];

"Of crucial importance was the consistent recognition of and toleration for the rights of Jewish diaspora communities. In particular, Caesar and Augustus had given Jewish synagogues formal recognition, and Caesar expressly exempted Jewish communities from the bans on *collegia*. Josephus makes a point of documenting these decrees and rulings no wonder, since they secured the toleration of and protection for Jewish laws and customs in the empire. These rights included the right of assembly, the right to administer their own finances (including the exceptional permission for the Temple tax to be collected and transmitted to Jerusalem), jurisdiction over their own members (including the power to administer corporal punishment 2 Cor. 11.24), freedom from military service (because of the Jewish requirement to observe the Sabbath), and not least in importance, permission not to participate in the imperial cult. In short, the Jewish religion remained throughout our period under the formal protection of the Roman state, although the expression

(much used in modern literature) *religio licita* is not actually to be found in the literature of the period. It is important to underscore the fact that the Jewish *synagōgai* were thus officially regarded as equivalent to, on a par with, the *collegia* and *thiasoi* of other national and religious groups — the Jewish ethnic association, the devotees of the cult of Kyrios Yahweh, the practitioners of the philosophy taught by Moses. These, *synagōgai* would, of course, have been one of the more homogeneous associations, consisting of Jews as the core members and participants in the synagogue's corporate life. But, as already noted, they were not an exclusive association, for they evidently welcomed non-Jewish adherents and sympathizers (God-fearers) in their gatherings. So too, it is worth repeating, there is sufficient evidence of civic approbation of certain synagogue communities, not least in Asia, so that we can be confident that by and large Jewish synagogue communities were regarded as just another of the wide range of national and religious associations which was such a feature of Roman society".

Therefore, as long as Christians remained a "sect" with Judaism they were afforded certain protections as they were not regarded as a "separate" religion. However (as always), this is probably an oversimplification of a very complex and fluid situation as the Jews themselves had to constantly fight to maintain their rights, particularly against "mad" emperors such as Caligula and the situation where "Christians" were under the "protective umbrella" of Judaism (we speak here of legal Roman protection) lasted only until the 60s as the Jews themselves fell out of favour (but not entirely) because of their revolt against Rome.

At this point it is interesting to digress somewhat and ask what Paul's intention was as Luke (Paul's biographer in Acts) presents an *apologia* which some see as favourable to Rome and as his epistle to the Roman church, particularly Rom 13 urges submission to the Roman authorities, "Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment" (Rom 13.2)²⁶ similarly many early commentators concluded that Acts is an *apologia* written to demonstrate that Christianity was no threat to Rome and that Paul wished to run a "test case" in Roman law in order to have Christianity recognised as a *religio licita* in its own right.

Tellbe²⁷ produced a book on this subject which an abstract summarises as follows; "When first-century gentile Christians withdrew from the traditional and civic Graeco-Roman cults and increasingly began to be identified by the Romans as not belonging to mainstream or common Judaism, they soon found themselves pressed "between synagogue and state".

On the one side, the fact that they did not observe the Torah elicited hostility from Jews who did not want to be identified with a movement that in Roman eyes could be interpreted as seditious and thus jeopardize their own political and religious privileges. On the other side, the Roman authorities were well known for their suspicion of upstart religious movements and potentially subversive organizations. Did Christians in this situation make any attempt to claim Jewish identity and rights in order to operate under the privileges of the Jews and to avoid potential conflicts with the wider civic community and the governing authorities? And how did the apostle Paul respond to this socio-political dilemma of the early first-century Christian movement?"

The international standard Bible sums it up thus; "The first persecutions for the infant church came entirely from exclusive Judaism, and it was the Jews who first accused Christians before the Roman courts. Even so, the Roman government not only refused to turn persecutor, but even protected the new faith both against Jewish accusations and against the violence of the populace (Ac 21:31 ff). And the Christian missionaries--especially Paul--soon recognized in the Roman Empire an ally and a power for good. Writing to the Romans Paul counsels them to submit in obedience to the powers that be, as "ordained of God." His favourable impression must have been greatly enhanced by his mild captivity at Rome and his acquittal by Nero on the first trial. The Roman soldiers had come to his rescue in Jerusalem to save his life from the fanaticism of his own coreligionists. Toward the accusations of the Jews against their rivals the Romans were either indifferent, as Gallio the proconsul of Achaia, who "cared for none of those things" (Ac 18:12 ff), or recognized the innocence of the accused, as did both Felix (Ac 24:1 ff) and Porcius Festus (Ac 25:14 ff). Thus the Romans persisted in looking upon Christians as a sect of the Jews. But the Jews took another step in formulating a charge of disloyalty (begun before Pilate) against the new sect as acting "contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus" (Ac 17:7; compare Ac 25:8). Christianity was disowned thus early by Judaism and cast upon its own resources. The increasing numbers of Christians would confirm to the Roman government the independence of Christianity. And the trial of a Roman citizen, Paul, at Rome would further enlighten the authorities".²⁸

Once again, the above summary is oversimplified and analysis of the reasons for Acts as *apologia* is still discussed in scholarship and other valid insights have been proposed.²⁹ The reader is encouraged to pursue the subject at their leisure. It is probable that the *apologia* had multiple objectives and by narrowly focusing on a single reason to the exclusion of all else a biased picture can emerge.

However, we need to take note of a few things. Firstly, Jesus told his followers to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's – but this did not include worshipping him as a “god” because believers were made in the image of the true God and therefore could only render worship to the one whose image they represented. Therefore cooperation with the authorities had certain boundaries that could not be crossed. Secondly, it made strategic sense for the Jews to distinguish themselves from Christians by declaring their allegiance to Caesar “we have no king but Caesar” and by portraying Jesus as “king of the Jews” they could drive a wedge between Judaism and Christianity. This was a strategy that had proved successful at Jesus' trial and so they perused the same strategy against Paul saying that there is “another king, one Jesus” (Acts 17.7; compare Acts 25.8). The Romans did not perceive this as an idle threat as they had put down “messianic rebellions” in the past and a “rabble” that followed another king was a challenge to Roman authority. So one reason for the *apologia* may have been to quell such fears and demonstrate that the “Christians” were no threat to Roman authority. In any case, it is with the utmost irony that we observe that the Jews did accept the person of “Bar Kochba” who was declared the “messiah” by the rabbi's and the war that ensued destroyed the Jewish state completely (and nearly destroyed the Roman Empire). The Romans knew not to “mess” with the Jews after all the priestly Maccabee³⁰ family had defeated the Greek Seleucid Empire as a reaction to Antiochus' desecration of the temple and proscription of Jewish laws. So driving a wedge between Rome and Christianity was a good strategy (from a Jewish view point) because it would make Rome aware of the troublesome Christians and would lead to them to being declared an illegal sect. Kraybill³¹ comments; “The great revolt of 66-70 CE could have put Diaspora Jews in a precarious political position, but ultimately little changed in their relations with Rome. In 71-72 CE, however, Emperor Vespasian made one change that affected Jews throughout the Mediterranean world: he ordered Jews to send their annual temple tax (δίδραχμον cf. Mt. 17.24) to Rome instead of Jerusalem. Money that traditionally supported the Yahweh cult at Jerusalem now officially went to the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, the god who triumphed through Roman armies over the Lord of Israel. Smallwood notes the symbolic importance of this change.

The effect of this measure was that Judaism remained a *religio licita* only for those people who declared their allegiance by paying the *didrachmon*, soon to be known as the ‘Jewish tax’, to Rome, and thus purchased the privilege of worshipping Yahweh and contracting out of the imperial cult by a subscription to Jupiter”.³²

Dunn observes; “The crisis of 70 CE did not settle the matter, then. There is other evidence, however, which strongly suggests that the following period, the period between the two Jewish revolts (66-70 and 132-131) was decisive for the parting of the ways. After the first revolt it could be said that all was still to play for. But after the second revolt the separation of the main bodies of Christianity and Judaism was clear-cut and final, whatever interaction there continued to be at the margins”.³³

The conclusion of this section is that to the Roman mind there was little to distinguish the Jews from the Christians in the period 40 - 60s. This was a squabble between different Jewish “sects” about questions concerning their law and religion. As long as it did not encourage rebellion or challenge the authority of Rome – so what? In this period the decisions that Rome made were usually ambivalent – they tacitly agreed with the ruling elite (Sanhedrin) for diplomatic reasons all the while knowing that the charges against Christ (and later Paul) were exaggerated. They were not seen as enemies of the state as such (until a later period) and they (as part of Judaism) would have been exempt (during this period) along with the Jews from the imperial cult.

Michael F. Bird³⁴ comments, “The Christ-believers who were persecuted under Nero in the mid-60s CE, including the probable executions of Peter and Paul,³⁵ were motivated by complex factors. It is certainly true **that abstention from the imperial cult is not treated as the reason for the Neronian persecution in any of our sources**”.

It is true that Tacitus (56 CE-120 CE) history is less than flattering when describing Christians but he was born at the beginning of Nero’s reign and his opinion was obviously biased by the great fire of Rome (ca. 64 blamed on the Christians) they were despised for their “abominations,” as a “mischievous superstition,” they were typical of things “hideous and shameful” that make their way to Rome, and for their “hatred of mankind.”³⁶ For a Roman resident to profess faith in Jesus as an alternative to Roman religion lent itself to accusations of atheism and hatred of the human race, and was interpreted as a rejection of the *mos maiorum* (ancestral customs) and committing *maiestas* (affronting the majesty of Caesar). The conclusion from the evidence gathered so far is that the seven letters are early 50s-60s as they do not reflect a situation where the main problem was “Emperor Worship”. The letters reflect a historical setting where Jews and Christians were still closely affiliated, not least in the minds of the Roman authorities. Scriptural evidence from the letters themselves will be presented to demonstrate that the correct time period for these letters is 50-65 CE, after which common objections will be considered.

The Seven Letters

Can we state with any confidence that the letters to the seven churches have been removed from any explicitly Jewish context and placed solely within a Christian context? In other words, should we say that the warnings should be viewed as warnings against apostate Christianity and not as a warning against reverting to Judaism? Such a view goes along with a late (post-70) date for Revelation—i.e. when the temple cult was already destroyed, the Jewish nation in disarray, and the apostles (with the exception of John) were already dead. In fact even if the Apocalypse is dated to ca. 96 CE it still does not preclude the danger of apostatising to Judaism as the “parting of the ways” did not occur in any definitive sense until after the Bar Kochba rebellion which ended in 135CE .

It is that rebellion in particular that was the focus of Jesus’ warnings; “If another comes in his own name, him you will receive” (John 5.43) and “For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Lo, I have told you beforehand” (Matt 24.24-25). Unlike other “messianic rebellions” Bar Kochba was recognised as the messiah by the leading rabbi of his day and supported by the ruling Jewish elite. Many Christians refused to accept Bar Kochba as the messiah and were therefore persecuted. Some Christians were deluded because they did not heed the warning of Christ. Therefore up until 135 CE (at the very least) the problem was Judaism. After 135 CE Jerusalem was declared a “gentile city” by Hadrian and Jews were prohibited and certain Jewish rites were proscribed. By the third century Jewish-Christianity had all but disappeared and Christianity had become predominantly a gentile religion. That is not to say that paganism was not a temptation (especially to gentile converts) or that the Imperial Cult did not pose any problems (before 135CE) but they were problems shared by both Jews and Christians (many of whom were Jewish) and they were marginal problems in comparison to the far greater attack launched by Judaism.

It is only after 66 that a true distinction between Jews and Christians emerged as Christians refused to take up arms against Rome (in both wars). By the 70’s the Jews were already pushing Jewish-Christians out of the synagogue and it is at that point that Emperor Worship would have become a problem for Christians. It is ironic that Christians who did not revolt in 66 were treated as pariahs and Jews who did revolt were still shown a measure of leniency regarding “Emperor Worship”.

For clarity, let us state once more that no evidence for the Imperial cult is found in the seven letters. In order to explore the position that Christians are being warned about apostate Christianity that appeared at a later age, we will accept the premise of a late date (although we believe internal Scriptural evidence demonstrates the opposite). This premise is accepted in order to highlight the weakness of the argument that believes that the OT symbology in the Apocalypse has been “Christianized” and has therefore no application to Judaism.

This argument pre-supposes that the Jewish cult no longer exists—therefore there is no danger of Jewish-Christians reverting to Judaism. Judaism and Christianity have parted ways—first-century Christianity is vindicated and the threat from Judaists has disappeared. Therefore, the use of OT symbol holds no direct reference to the Jews but should be understood in the sense of a contrast such as ‘the Jews played the harlot with the Old Covenant/Christians are now playing the harlot with the New Covenant’. This approach regards the language and symbol of the OT as reconfigured and adapted for a new purpose, namely, to address a new threat—false Christianity.

Smyrna -The blasphemy of those who say they are Jews

This is a strange turn of phrase to use against false Christians at Smyrna especially when we add the observation that they belong to the “Synagogue of Satan”. Interestingly, the same writer (the apostle John) notes that the “Jews” made similar claims in John 8.39; “Abraham is our father” (i.e., we are real Jews and you are not) and Jesus replies in v. 44; “You are of your father the devil” (i.e., the Synagogue of Satan).

It is hardly credible that John echoes the same polemic against two different groups, especially as Christians were already familiar with his Gospel which was directed against the “Jews; “Which say they are Jews but are not, and do lie”. These “Jews” were antagonistic towards the church at Philadelphia, they were “liars”, or “deceivers”, who practised guile (note; John 8.44, where Jesus says to the Jews who claim Abraham as father; “...your father the devil... he is a liar and the father of it”).

However, the New Israel consists of those in whose “mouth was no guile” (Rev 14.5), a play on the name of Jacob and a reference to Nathaniel in the Fourth Gospel, “Behold an Israelite in whom is no guile”(John 1.47). Faithful Jews were those who (like Nathaniel) acknowledged Christ as the messiah—the twelve tribes of the New Israel follow the Lamb (Rev 14.4;cf. John 1.24, 36-37, 43); they are protected/sealed (Rev 14.1;cf. Rev 3.10) and bear the Father’s name (Rev 14.1;cf. Rev 3.12). Note the time frame, “I come quickly” (Rev 1.11). This is hardly a message against “false Christians” particularly considering how much of Revelation echoes the polemic of the Fourth Gospel (by the same writer) where false Jews are the enemy.

Ephesus, Remove the Lamp-stand

It is accepted by most scholars that at some stage John lived in Ephesus and had close contact with the church there. In previous eJournal articles the case was made that the Epistle to the Hebrews was written to the church at Ephesus and it was demonstrated that the warnings in the Apocalypse are echoed throughout Hebrews. It is perhaps useful to give a brief summation of the evidence presented there to demonstrate that Hebrews was written to the “Hebrews (Jews) dwelling in Ephesus”. If Acts 19 is examined alongside the epistle to the Hebrews the correspondence becomes apparent. John the apostle was initially a disciple of John the Baptist and it is in Acts 19 that Paul finds disciples of the Baptist who were unaware of the messiah. Once they had been instructed they were rebaptised as the Baptism of John (“baptism of repentance”) was not sufficient. The theme of baptisms and the impossibility of being renewed to repentance (again) is a motif picked up by Hebrews. Moreover the rare occurrences of aspects of the word “theatre” point to Acts 19 where the riot occurred.³⁷ Furthermore, the ascendancy of Christ and the decrease of the Baptist is a theme dear to the 4G (also written when John resided in Ephesus).³⁸ The comparison table on the page below demonstrates that the author of Hebrews was aware of the Apocalypse;

Hebrews (c. 67)	Revelation 2:1-7
“But call to remembrance the former days, in which after ye were illuminated ye endured a great fight of afflictions” (Heb.10: 32).	“ Remember from whence thou art fallen...will remove thy lampstands (illumination)I know thy works and thy labour” (v. 1-7).
“God is not unrighteous to forget your work and the love, which ye showed towards his name” (Heb.6: 10).	“I know thy works and thy labour and thy patience”(v.2).
“That ye wax not weary fainting in your souls”(Heb.12: 3).	“And hast borne, and hast patience and for my names sake hast laboured and hast not fainted ”(v.3).
“That no man fall after the same example of disobedience” (Heb.4: 11 cf. 6:6).	“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen ” (v.5).
“...how much more shall we not escape, who turn away from him that warneth from heaven ”(Heb.12:26).	“Revelation is the only message from Jesus spoken from heaven to the churches.”
“And this word, yet once more signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken ” (Heb.12: 27).	“I will remove thy lampstand.... ” (v.5) (= Spirit gifts & dependence on the temple).

Of course if late-daters are presented with such clear echoes they either push the dating of Hebrews beyond 96 or argue that the Apocalypse is dependent on Hebrews! This smacks of desperation and is a “last resort” argument made in order to maintain a late date for Revelation. The direction of dependency is very obviously from Revelation to Hebrews. The epistle to the Hebrews is dependent on the Apocalypse for its message and this is further explored in a separate chapter called “Dating Matters”.

Suffice to say that if we limit ourselves specifically to the seven letters and ignore the rest of the Apocalypse it can be demonstrated that Christ did not copy Hebrews but Hebrews drew on Christ’s words. The warning to Ephesus alludes to the fall from grace in the Garden of Eden. It mentions the *tree of life in paradise* (Rev 2.7// Gen 3.22) which is synonymous with the *candlestick* (lampstand) in the sanctuary (Ex.25.1-39). God walked amongst the trees in the cool of the day similarly Jesus walks amongst the lampstands /candlesticks/trees (Gen 3.8//Rev 2.1).

Adam had left his first love and his eyes had been opened (Gen 3.7) but his disobediently acquired “illumination” (from the serpent) only served to expose his wretched condition and complete vulnerability. Similarly the Jews had received a law that they could not keep (don’t eat) because they also wished to become “like the Elohim” through their own process of self-divinization; the original *causa sui* project.

Let us accept the premise (for the sake of argument) that the Apocalypse was written after Hebrews (i.e., that Revelation was written post-70 and is echoing Hebrews). To what was the church at Ephesus in danger of falling away? They had lost their first love (Christianity) and were in danger of reverting back to Judaism: “If they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame” (Heb 6.6). They were warned not to do this because they had not come to Mt. Sinai but to Mt. Zion (Heb 12.18-23) and to “better” things. Why warn the church at Ephesus (here we think particularly of the Jewish-Christian element) against reverting to Judaism if the temple cult was already destroyed and the nation in disarray? It would be self-evident to Jewish-Christians that the nation had suffered divine judgement.³⁹ Allusions to Genesis in Rev 2.1-7 are so deeply embedded in the argument of their context that they cannot be suspected of being later interpolations or allusions to Hebrews.

The author of Hebrews was obviously aware of the warning issued by Jesus to Ephesus and felt the need to remind his readers at Ephesus by weaving those warnings into the “woof and warp” of the fabric of his epistle. If readers are unaware of the existence of Rev 2.1-7 then the multiple allusions would be pointless – now they form a powerful argument to the Hebrews – you (Jewish Christians at Ephesus) have already been warned from heaven by Jesus.....therefore repent! Don’t lose your first love. Don’t go back to Judaism.⁴⁰

Most synagogues included a lampstand or Menorah as part of the furniture or part of the external decorations (carvings) and the Menorah in the second temple was eight feet high and made of solid gold. As the temple of Herod contained no Ark the Menorah took on extra significance. This Menorah had been made by Herod but the flame (light) had supposedly been kept burning for centuries (everlasting flame) the priests had purportedly kept (and hidden) the flame during the Babylonian exile.

The “oil” that the lamp used was a holy recipe that took seven days to prepare and the miracle of the “feast of lights’ (Hanukkah) is that although the Maccabees only had one day of oil left (when they rededicated the temple in the time of Antiochus) - the lamp kept burning for a week until the next batch of oil was ready. This is a bit like driving 200 km on a nearly empty petrol tank.

This was important to the Jews because according to legend the flame represented the everlasting covenant between God and the Jewish people. It was therefore not allowed to be extinguished and (supposedly) it was kept burning during the Babylonian captivity and used to relight the menorah of the Maccabees and then the menorah of Herod. How ironic then that the menorah is depicted on the shoulders of Roman soldiers on Titus triumph arch. The Jews had literally lost their lampstand and any Ephesians who turned back to Judaism would face the same fate. This is so obviously not about false Christianity that it is difficult to comprehend how it could ever have thought to have been so.

Pergamum and the doctrine of Balaam

Pergamum is warned against the doctrine of Balaam which specifically involved “eating things sacrificed to idols and committing fornication”. However, this was not a new doctrine, as it is already condemned by Peter as “following the way of Balaam” (2 Pet 2.15), and by Jude as “the error of Balaam” (Jude v. 11). The prophetess Jezebel at Thyatira taught the doctrine of Balaam, “to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed unto idols” (Rev 2.20). So the doctrine of Balaam was pervasive (found in more than one church) and early (found in pre-70 epistles). Robinson comments as follows;

“In both, the false teachers are accused of the error of Balaam (Jude 11; II Peter 2.15; Rev.2.14), which in Revelation is closely associated with the teaching of the Nicolaitans (2.6, 15). In both Christians are described as being lured into immorality (II Peter 2.14, 18; 3.17; Rev.2.20), into contaminating their clothing (Jude 23; Rev.3.4), and into disowning their Master (Jude 4; II Peter 2.1; Rev.2.13). There is the same contrast between the true and false γν•σις (Jude 8; II Peter 1.2f., 16; Rev. 2.17,24). The heretical teachers are claiming to be shepherds and apostles of Christ's flock (Jude 1.1f.; Rev.2.2), and there is a similar appeal to remember the teaching of the true apostles (Jude 17; II Peter 1.12; 3.if.; Rev.3.3), who are the foundation of the church and of its faith (Jude 3; Rev.21.14). The eschatological symbolism too shows remarkable parallels, with the day of Christ being likened not only, as in the common Christian tradition, to the thief (II Peter 3.10; Rev.3.3; 16.15) but uniquely in these two documents to the morning star (II Peter 1.19; Rev. 2.28; 22.16). In both the existing heavens and earth disappear (II Peter 3.10; Rev. 6.14; 16.20; 20.11) to be replaced by new (II Peter 3.13; Rev.21.1); in both the fallen angels are chained in the depths of hell (Jude 6; II Peter 2.4; Rev.20.1-3, 7), and appeal is made to the theme of a thousand years (II Peter 3.8; Rev.20.2-7). All this could doubtless have come from almost any period, and if II Peter and Jude are not early the argument falls. Yet there is good reason to suppose that the Apocalypse too presupposes a time when the final separation of Christians and Jews had not yet taken place”.⁴¹

It was also a deliberate wresting of the apostle Paul's teaching about liberty in Christ; “And why not say; “Let us do evil that good may come? (as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say). ‘Let us do evil that good may come?’ Their condemnation is just” (Rom 3.8).

These opponents of the Gospel were Jews (Gal 2.4) who followed the strategy of Balaam in promoting promiscuity with the ultimate aim of encouraging pious Jewish-Christian converts back to Judaism; “And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage).” Idol worship and fornication were an abomination to pious Jews (despite the syncretism practiced in some synagogues)⁴², and Jewish-Christians would soon revert back to Judaism if confronted with such blatant idolatry. Of course, Paul preached no such thing!

However, the point needs emphasising that the doctrine of Balaam (also preached by Jezebel) was not a heresy promoted by Christians but a heresy promoted by ‘Jews’ (false brethren) in order to damage early Christianity and discredit Christianity in the eyes of Jewish-Christian converts and pious Jews. Such a strategy was underway long before 70 and would not have been necessary after 70—after all, once God had removed the temple cult, the Jews could hardly claim to be the chosen ones by right of their heritage.

Thyatira- Jezebel

Jezebel was a foreign queen who corrupted Israel ⁴³ – the name Jezebel is obviously not the real name of the “prophetess” of Thyatira but it points to a woman of foreign aristocratic provenance who wielded considerable influence in both synagogue and church. No better candidate than Julia Severa suggests itself and if it is not actually her then it was someone like her. She was a pagan priestess with considerable influence in the synagogue that she patronized (and built). She would have been a bad example to the “God fearers” as she sacrificed to idols, practiced the Imperial cult and also worshipped at the synagogue – she was proof that you could “serve two masters”. Any Jewish-Christians who still attended that synagogue (as well as gathering in their homes) were in danger of being seduced into apostasy by her. However, the church at Thyatira ceased to exist by 95 CE. We know this because Tertullian (about 145-200 CE) says that leaders of certain heretical sects, such as Cerdon (c.138 CE) and Marcion, (c. 85 – c. 160 CE) rejected the Apocalypse on the ground that it could not have been written by John inasmuch as (among other reasons) that there was no Christian Church in existence at Thyatira in the time of John (assuming John wrote in 96 CE).⁴⁴ Epiphanius (c. 367 CE) deals with the Alogi, a sect which disputed the genuineness of the Apocalypse, and on the same grounds. He quotes their words: “moreover, some of the [the Alogi] again seize on this passage in this same Apocalypse [Rev. 2.18]. And they allege, by way of opposition, that it is again said: “write to the angel of the Church which is in Thyatira,” although there was no Christian Church in Thyatira. How then could he write to a church which was not in existence?”⁴⁵

They may well have been heretics but they have done historians a service by pointing out the absence of a church in Thyatira in the period when the Apocalypse was supposedly written down by John. Marcion was actually born c.85 therefore he would have been about 11 years old if John received the apocalypse in 96 CE – but no church existed at Thyatira because by the time of Marcion it had already disappeared. The church was not a building (as so many assume) but a group of believers and they ceased to exist. This is what Jesus warns:

Revelation 2:21-23 And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and **she repented not**. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. **And I will kill her children with death**; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

The short existence of the church⁴⁶ at Thyatira ran from its founding by Paul probably during his second journey (c.51-53 CE) until c.66-70 CE, therefore it existed for only about 20 years.⁴⁷ Its first member was a woman (Lydia and her household cf. Acts 16:14-15) and it was brought to ruin by a woman. Evidently a woman claiming to be a prophetess had been influencing some in this church to join the local trade guilds without which a tradesman could not work in Thyatira. This meant participation in the guild feasts that included immoral acts and the worship of idols. Whether or not Jezebel was Julia Severa and whether or not her influence was felt beyond the synagogue in Akmonia (by the lucrative traders in purple at Thyatira) cannot be known but is certainly a possibility.

Whoever she was, the problem was one of Jewish syncretism which would have rubbed off on first century Jewish-Christians. Her punishment is to be put to bed (v. 22), “a bed of sickness in contrast with the bed of adultery” (Beckwith 1922:467). Her followers at Thyatira (those who commit adultery with her) still have time to repent, but are similarly in danger of intense, though unspecified, sufferings (v. 22). As for her children, that is, anyone who perpetuates her teaching, they will be struck dead by a plague (v. 23). Like Jezebel of old, her name and her influence will disappear from the earth (cf. 2 Kings 10.1-28). This is the only time in the book of Revelation that the expression “Son of God” appears; an allusion to “Son” in Ps 2.7 where the son is given the gentiles as his inheritance and he will “break them with a rod of iron” (Ps 2.9 cf. Rev 2.27). This gentile queen will be judged as Christ has eyes like flames (Rev 2:18 cf. 1.14-15 and 19.12) which speaks of judgement. Nevertheless those who persevered and kept the faith (even unto death) would become conquerors like him.

Pergamon – Satan’s throne

In the case of Pergamon we can do no better than cite Robinson’s argument;

“Even in Pergamon, which is stated to be 'Satan's throne' (2.13), there is no compelling evidence that the allusion is to emperor-worship. In so far as Satan is characteristically for this writer 'the old serpent' (12.9; 20.2), the allusion may well be to the snake-worship associated with the shrine of Asclepius, of which the city was a centre. [So Hort, *ad loc.*; Zahn, *INT III*, 411f.] Even if, as later commentators tend to argue, the reference is to the temple consecrated there to 'the divine Augustus and the goddess Roma', [I.T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, New York 1919, 456, notes that Pergamon was the first place in the province of Asia to have such a temple. Yet Augustus also sanctioned temples in Ephesus and Nicea with the inscription 'To the goddess Roma and the divine Julius' (Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 51.6.) this had been founded in 29 bc [Tacitus, *Ann.* 4.37; cf. 3.63; 4.55; and Suetonius, *Aug.* 52.] and does not of itself require a late date. Yet though emperor-worship can be read into the letters to the seven churches it is not demanded by them (in strong contrast with the visions that follow). Even if a gigantic statue of the Emperor Domitian was indeed erected in a temple at Ephesus, [Cf. Reicke, *NT Era*, 279, for the references.] there is absolutely nothing in the letter to the Christians there to suggest that this was the issue they faced: their struggle was not with the state but with false apostles, the Nicolaitans, and loss of fervour within the church (2.1-7). This is not, of course, to deny that for the seer the final battle with the 'beast' underlay everything else. But the development of emperor-worship in the province of Asia cannot be used for determining the historical context into which the letters fit”.⁴⁸

Objections Considered

Objection 1: There was too little time for the churches to apostatize – if founded in between 40 and 50 how could they have fallen away in twenty years or less? Once more we turn to Robinson;

“While on the subject of the letters to the churches, it will be appropriate to consider the objection often raised that they presuppose a state of affairs so far beyond that of Paul's time as to point to a later generation.[So e.g. Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 207, who refers vaguely to 'a considerably long interval'.] This is one of those contentions that it is very difficult to handle. How much time is required for the Galatians 'so quickly' to have followed a different gospel (Gal. 1.6), or for the church of Ephesus to have lost its early love (Rev. 2.4), or for the church of Laodicea to have grown lukewarm (Rev.3.i5f.)? - especially since what we can tell about the state of the last from the epistle to the Colossians (2.1; 4.13-16), our only other source, amounts to precisely nothing. It is obviously impossible to set any firm figure. Yet considering all that we know happened to the only well-documented church, that of Corinth, in the seven and a half years between late 49 and early 57, the ten and a half years from mid-58 (on our reckoning, the date of Colossians) to late 68 (the earliest date for the *Apocalypse*) could surely have seen quite as many changes in the Asian churches - changes indeed which, according to Acts 20.29 and II Tim. 4.31., Paul himself clearly foresaw, and of which the Petrine epistles have already given us more than a glimpse. And, as we have said, there is nothing to suggest that there is any great interval between where these last leave off and the letters of Rev. 1-3 begin.

One objection however can be dismissed, which is constantly repeated from one writer to another. [E.g. Zahn, *INT* III, 4121.; Moffatt, *Revelation*, EGT, V,317; ILNT, 507; Charles, *Revelation* I, xciv; McNeile-Williams, *INT*, 262; Kummel, *INT*, 469; and • most recently even the conservative L. Morris, *The Revelation of St John* (Tyndale NTC),1969,37.] This is that Polycarp in his epistle to the Philippians (i 1.3) states that his own church at Smyrna had not been founded till after the death of Paul - so that it could not therefore be addressed as it is in Rev. 2.8-11 as early as the late 60s. But, as Lightfoot [AF, 166.] observed long ago, all that Polycarp actually says [His words are (in Lightfoot's translation): But I have not found any such thing in you, neither have heard thereof, among whom the blessed Paul laboured, who were his letters from the beginning. For he boasteth of you in all those churches which alone at that time knew the Lord; for we knew him not as yet. Other editors prefer to supply a word in the difficult phrase 'qui estis in principio epistulae eius' and take it to mean 'who are praised (or mentioned) in the beginning of his Epistle'; but this does not affect the issue of dating.] is that 'the Philippians were converted to the Gospel before the Smyrneans - a statement which entirely accords with the notices of the two churches in the New Testament'. [This is recognized by Torrey, *op. cit.*, 78f., and also by Guthrie, *NTI*, 955.] It is astonishing that so much has continued to be built on so little”.⁴⁹

Robinson offers good counterpoints but few commentators touch on the fact that a campaign was waged by Judaist to deliberately sabotage the early church. There was no slow drift into apostasy over an extended period of time – there was a headlong rush, encouraged and promoted by “false brethren” a fifth column within the church with a “wrecking strategy”. As quickly as Paul put a patch on a leaking boat another boat sprung a leak. Paul was worn out by the constant burden of his pastoral work. In *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (Appendix 3) Whittaker reconstructs the Jewish plot.⁵⁰ A brief synopsis of the most important passages follows:

Galatians: False brethren (Gal 2.4-5), tried to confuse/persuade Peter (Gal 2.11-14). **Thessalonica:** Forged letter attributed to Paul claims of messages from the Holy Spirit (2 Thess. 2.1-2). **Corinth:** Personal attack on Paul’s character (2 Cor. 10.9-10, 11.6), Satan disguised as an apostle (2 Cor.11.22-23). **Jerusalem:** Accusation that Paul taught all to forsake Moses (Acts 21.20-21). **Rome:** Christ preached out of envy and strife (Philip 1.15-17), Divisions (Rom 16.17-18), misrepresent Paul’s teaching (Rom 3.8) **Ephesus and Colosse:** Sleight of men and craftiness (Eph 4.14), Beguile you with enticing words (Col 2.4). **Timothy and Titus:** Jewish fables commandments of men (Tit 1.14) deceivers of the circumcision (Tit 1. 9-10) seducing spirits [claim of Holy Spirit gifts], doctrine of demons, hypocrisy (1 Tim 4.1-2). **Peter and Jude:** False teachers, damnable heresies (2 Pet 2.1), led to error by the wicked (2 Pet 3.3-4, 17), they distort Paul’s teachings (2 Pet 3.16), for there are certain men crept in unawares (Jude 1.4) **John:** False prophets, sprit of antichrist [this was not Gnosticising Christianity but Judaism] (John 4.1-5). There was an orchestrated campaign to undermine Paul’s work so much so that Paul said in despair “This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me” (2 Tim 1.15). They had lost their first love (warning to Ephesus), their “first love” being the Pauline gospel of justification through faith. Many of the churches had become irredeemably corrupted by Judaism and some (like Thyatira) were swept away when Christ judged Judaism in 66-70. However, even in those churches there were still some faithful and if they preserved to the end, (even if it meant death i.e., the Nero persecution cf. Rev 6.11), their reward would be waiting for them in the kingdom (when it arrived in the future). So Judaism was judged and also the Jewish-Christian churches and this occurred before the fall of the second temple in 70 CE.

Objection 2: Laodicea destroyed by an earthquake in c.60 yet described as “rich” (Rev 3.17) how is this possible as an earthquake would disrupt trade and require decades of repairs thus impoverishing the city –clearly this cannot refer to the church in the 60’s but must come from a later period (90s) allowing time for recovery.

Gentry [1989:320] comments, “Some suspicion is immediately cast on the argument when it is noted that it is avoided by such noteworthy late date advocates as conservative scholars Swete and Guthrie, and such liberal proponents as Charles and Moffatt. The refusal of these scholars to make reference to this argument is not necessarily destructive to the cause, of course. But it is at least curious that such vigorous liberal and conservative advocates do not deem it to be of merit”.⁵¹

There are a number of objections to this hypothesis and Gentry discusses them all. Firstly, are the “riches” material or spiritual? Secondly, the region was prone to earthquakes and many minor quakes occurred but it depends on where the epicentre was. Perhaps the Church (i.e., their trades) was not damaged at all. Thirdly (and most importantly), the Laodicians were so rich that they didn’t even require government subsidy to do the repair work. Gentry [1989:321], responds;

Most ruinous to the entire argument is the documented fact of Laodicea’s apparently effortless, unaided, and rapid recovery from the earthquake. Tacitus reports that the city did not even find it necessary to apply for an imperial subsidy to help them rebuild, even though such was customary for cities in Asia Minor. As Tacitus records it, Laodicea “arose from the ruins by the strength of her own resources, and with no help from us”. [Tacitus, *Annals* 1427] This is as clear a statement as is necessary to demonstrate that Laodicea’s economic strength was not radically diminished by the quake. Despite the quake, economic resources were so readily available within Laodicea that the city could easily recover itself from the damage. Interestingly, both Morris and Mounce make reference to this statement by Tacitus, despite their using the argument to demand a late date [Morris, *Revelation*, p. 37; Mounce, *Revelation*. p. 123].

Further considerations and resources

Did Domitian Persecute Christians? (An investigation: Opposing viewpoints and discussion by Aurthur M. Ogden and Ferrell Jenkins).⁵² This debate is gracefully and intelligently conducted and cites all the relevant historical and scholarly sources. Reading both sides of the argument one cannot help but find agreement with Ogden that Domitian may have persecuted Christians but the case is overstated (not proven).

If there was a Christian persecution it certainly did not match the Nero persecution for ferocity and unlike Nero (1 Pet 5.8) the Domitian persecution (?) is not mentioned in the bible and this is a heavy point weighing against such a persecution ever having occurred. Another point not considered by either debater is that it was Domitian who introduced a very repressive form of the *Jewish tax* which was humiliating and discriminatory even to the point where Jews (and “God fearers”) had to drop their pants (or should I say lift their robes?), in order to prove that they were uncircumcised.

This tax would not have been levied against Gentile Christians of that period as they were uncircumcised. The tax was so abhorred that Domitian’s successor Nerva repealed the onerous elements of it and produced a coin⁵³ to celebrate the fact. Many scholars have argued that later historians have confused Domitian’s stance toward the Jews with his attitude towards Christians. There is certainly no account of Domitian throwing Christians to the lions or setting them alight and using them as human torches to illuminate his garden parties. The whole drive to see Domitian as the persecutor is a damp squib produced to give substance to the testimony of Irenaeus in the push for a late date.

The “late date” (c.96 CE) for the Apocalypse is solely established on two planks of external evidence; --- the Domitian persecution and the testimony of Irenaeus; the first is debatable [Robinson, 1976: 207 onwards] and the latter has been challenged. The tradition in Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* 5.30.3) states: “But **it** was seen not long ago, but almost almost in our own day, at the close of the principate [reign] of Domitian”. However, what is **it**? Is **it** “John” or the “Apocalypse” or “the beast” [Robinson, 1976:197-202]?

Moreover, Domitian ruled eleven months in Rome in 70 until his father Vespasian returned from the Jewish War; perhaps Irenaeus, wrong on other dates was confused. This means that John could have been banished by Domitian and restored by Nerva, as the tradition says-but in 70 instead of during the 90s [Robinson, 1976: 223-228]. But even if 70 is accepted that would still be too late for the internal evidence presented throughout the Apocalypse.

Whether or not Irenaeus was confused or is just misunderstood his credibility as a witness must be questioned for as Duncan W. McKenzie observes; “Irenaeus, a source that should be a Rock of Gibraltar in terms of the date of Revelation, is not the sure foundation one would expect. On a date of much greater significance than that of Revelation (the age of Jesus at his death), Irenaeus is out in left field, if not totally out of the ballpark. Irenaeus asserts that Jesus was at an elder age (which he defines as “after the fortieth and fiftieth year” of life) when he died.”⁵⁴

The Seven churches in the Olivet Prophecy

Perhaps the most interesting piece of evidence in support of an early date for the seven letters is an allusion to them in the Olivet prophecy. With the exception of v.38 and v.43 most of the allusions come from five verses grouped together ---

Matthew 24:9-13 ⁹ Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. ¹⁰ And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. ¹² And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. ¹³ But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

Church	Matthew 24	Revelation 2-3
Smyrna	...deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you	Tribulation...faithful unto death (2.10)
Sardis	And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. ⁵⁵ ...in what watch the thief would come (v.43)	...that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.(3.1) ...come on thee as a thief (3.3)
Thyatira	...false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.	Jezebel false prophetess seduce my servants(2.20)
Pergamos	And because iniquity shall abound	...doctrine of Balaam to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication (2.14)
Ephesus	...the love of many shall wax cold	...thou hast left thy first love(2.4)
Philadelphia	But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved	Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation (3.10)
Laodicea	...eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage (v.38)	...Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing (3.17)

Of course it could be argued that the language that Jesus uses is generic and therefore can be applied to any number of church situations in any century. A generic understanding can be countered by demonstrating that the Olivet prophecy is extensively linked to many other passages in Revelation (not just to the seven churches) and it is exactly those passages that saw a partial fulfilment in 70.

Most scholars (even critical scholars) would agree that Matthew was composed before the Apocalypse, somewhere between 80 and 90 CE, with a range of possibility between 70 to 110 CE. A pre-70 date for Matthew remains a minority view because many critical scholars regard the prophecies concerning the fall of Jerusalem as *ex-eventu* (written after the event). However, the date of composition makes little difference to our argument because even if Matthew was writing in 100 CE, and was recording earlier prophecy for posterity --- it was prophecy that was concerned with the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE (that much is clear from the context). In that case Matthew is alluding to the Apocalypse because his audience was already familiar with that work. However, it makes little sense for both Matthew and the Apocalypse to be composed after 70 and for them both to warn about an imminent judgement that was already an event that lay in the past.

It is far more likely that the Olivet prophecy was given in ca 30 CE by Jesus himself and recorded in synoptic tradition by his disciples between 40-60. Jesus is then building on his own words uttered on the Mount of Olives concerning the fate of Jerusalem and his churches; therefore when Jesus gives the Apocalypse in c.65 he is expanding upon and explaining his earlier prophecies. This makes sense as both the Olivet prophecy and the Apocalypse point to the same events – the state of the churches and the fall of Jerusalem in the period 66-70.

It is both surprising and confounding that many conservative scholars who do not accept a late date for the Gospel tradition or for the Epistles of Paul and Peter so easily capitulate regarding dating the Apocalypse beyond 96 –especially when exactly the same issues are addressed as in the earlier material. Are we to believe that during the most catastrophic and difficult period for the Jewish-Christian church – the Nero persecution, Jewish War, fall of the temple, Judaist attack corrupting the churches etc....there was absolute silence from the Lord? For 66 years (30-96) there was absolute silence – only when all the church leaders (except John) were dead did Jesus deign to give his message to the churches – because (maybe) they faced a persecution (???) by Domitian(???)

A debt of gratitude is owed to Robinson for presenting a cogent argument for the dating of the whole New Testament before 70 CE. He rightly points out that the dates of NT writings have consistently been revised downwards over the last two centuries (even the 4G after a papyrus fragment found in Alexandria was dated to 130).⁵⁶

When the bible talks about “eyewitness” testimony that is exactly what it means. Much of the writing of the NT and other early Christian writings has been assigned to the reign of Domitian by critical scholars causing Robinson to remark; “Is there not some danger of Domitian’s reign becoming rather overloaded with otherwise undated bits of Christian literature? The Apocalypse, Hebrews and I Clement, to say nothing of Barnabas and the Didache, have all been ascribed to this period. It has in fact become the favourite dumping-ground for doubtful writings with a hint of persecution about them”⁵⁷.

Conclusion

While it is true that the messages to the seven churches contain local elements such as warnings against reverting to paganism,⁵⁸ or the dangers of materialism, they also embrace an overarching theme; namely, warning Jewish-Christians that Judaists would soon get their just rewards (so don't go back to Judaism like a dog to vomit; 2 Pet 2.22). Even if we accept a late date for Revelation there are no specific warnings in the Apocalypse against systematic false teachings of Christianity (such as occurred in later centuries). In the first epistle of John we have a warning that is supposedly directed against Gnosticizing Christianity, but (even if that assumption is correct, but that is doubtful) —those false prophets left the true church (“they went out from us”). The situation in Revelation is one of enmity and persecution within the church by those who lay claim to a Jewish heritage. It is not Christian-on-Christian persecution such as we find in later centuries, or persecution engendered by refusal to participate in the Imperial cult but problems between Jews and Christians (mainly Jewish-Christians). All this would become largely irrelevant if Revelation were written after 70. The Apocalypse continues the theme of the whole NT where the Jews stirred up trouble all over Asia Minor, so much so that Paul despaired; “...that all those in Asia have turned away from me”(2 Tim 1.15). Therefore, early date advocates find no need to reconfigure OT symbols—the meaning is consistent across the Testaments – Israel was the harlot in the OT and she still plays the harlot in the NT.

The seven churches of Asia Minor were seven contemporary churches that existed side-by-side during the period 45-65 CE. Some individuals were spared the coming tribulation, other faithful members were killed; corrupt churches completely disappeared. The seven churches do not describe “seven church ages” nor do they describe later apostasy in the Christian church (although the lessons are timeless) they describe the historical situation found in Asia Minor just before the first Jewish war. The “seven churches” were supposed to be the “new Menorah” in the temple of God built out of faithful people. Unfortunately, by the time of the first Jewish war most of the churches had become utterly corrupted by the pernicious campaign waged by the Judaists. However, there were still faithful elements and those who preserved until the end (even if it meant death) would have their names written in the book of life.

End Notes Pages 23-59 of Chapter 2&3

¹ This observation is valid whether you believe in a pre-70 CE or post-96 CE dating of the Apocalypse. For a comparison of the standard arguments see the following chart [Access here](#)

² The term is used 70 times in the 4G to symbolize the Sanhedrin.

³ James D.G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem: Christianity in the Making*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing,2009),625

⁴ Brian Knowles, 'The Influence Of The Home and The Synagogue On Early Church Structure', [Access here](#) [Retrieved June 2017]

⁵ Lee I. Levine, *The Pre-70 Diaspora in The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years*, (Yale University Press, 2000), 115-116 *Op.cit.*, for footnotes. Chapter 4: The Pre-70 Diaspora, pp. 81-134 [Access here](#) [Retrieved June 2017]

⁶ After discussing the relationship between Jewish synagogues and other associations Dunn says “The points of comparison with the churches established by Paul should already be obvious and already suggest answers to the questions which opened this chapter. They were not obviously like a neighbourhood association or trade guild. But since they met in the house of a (probably) prominent citizen, they could be likened to an extension of his (or her) household — a household association”. James D.G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem: Christianity in the Making*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing ,2009), 620

⁷ Often referred to is Brown's categorization of the diversity within the varying types of 'Jewish/Gentile Christianity' — at least four diversities; Group 1 — 'Jewish Christian and their Gentile converts *who insisted on full observance of the Mosaic Law, including circumcision*'; Group 2 — 'Jewish Christian and their Gentile converts, who did not insist on circumcision but did require converted Gentiles to keep *some Jewish observances*'; Group 3 — 'Jewish Christian and their Gentile converts, who *did not insist on circumcision and did not require observance* of the Jewish (“kosher”) food laws'; Group 4 — 'Jewish Christians and their Gentile converts, *who did not insist on circumcision or observance* the Jewish food laws *and who saw no abiding significance in Jewish cult and feasts*'. Raymond Edward Brown, John P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome*,(Paulist Press, 1983):1-9

⁸ **Acts 13:42** And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. These “Gentiles” had not just accidentally wandered into a Jewish synagogue, they were “God fearers” who regularly attended “church” and they were the ones who approached Paul afterwards because their world view was not clouded by bias. In fact, the message was probably understood with clarity and received with great joy...what an opportunity...they could become full members of the people of God. It is known that many Greek women converted. This was all seen as a threat to Judaism as they would lose their privileged position. No longer were they a guide to the blind (to the Gentiles). Paul said that God did this to provoke them to envy through those who were “not a people” or a “foolish nation” but instead it provoked rage.

⁹ Dunn [2009:624] notes that this was largely due to the Greek Septuagint (LXX) translation of the OT. Greek was the “Lingua Franca” of the day, just as English is nowadays and “God fearers” were obviously versed in Scriptures because they attended the synagogues – there were probably special “classes” held to teach “interested friends” – so Paul had a receptive and knowledgeable audience –low hanging fruit ready for harvesting.

¹⁰ James D.G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem: Christianity in the Making*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), 623. Speaking of the churches at Corinth, Dunn concludes; “So once again, we have to envisage mixed congregations, perhaps one or two predominantly Jewish in composition, but, overall, within a predominantly Gentile church” [*Ibid*, 624].

¹¹ Pieter W van der Horst, *Studies in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*,(Brill, Leiden, 2014;143-159),147-148 Chapter 15 [Access here](#) [Retrieved June 2017]

¹² Levine, *Ibid*,119

¹³ Paul R. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor*,(Cambridge University Press,1991),59

¹⁴ Poppaea Sabina (30 CE – 65 CE)

¹⁵ The Inscription: [145] Honors by a Judean Synagogue for Julia Severa and Others (ca. 100 CE) || Akmonia – Phrygia: ID number: 821,Short link address [Accessed May 2017]:[Accessed here](#) [Retrieved June 2017]

¹⁶ Acmonia. (2017 , May 24). In Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Retrieved 03:13, June 1, 2017, from [Accessed here](#)

¹⁷ Map of the seven churches Jesus Christ addressed in Revelation 2 and 3 (artwork by Kelly Cunningham). [Accessed here](#) [Retrieved June 2017]

¹⁸ T. Drew Bear, DARMC, R. Talbert, Sean Gillies, Johan Åhlfeldt, Jeffrey Becker, and Tom Elliott, 'Akmonia: a Pleiades place resource', Pleiades: A Gazetteer of Past Places, 2015 [Accessed here](#) [accessed: 31 May 2017]

¹⁹ Sardis is believed to have gained its Jewish community in the 3rd century BCE, as that was when King Antiochus III (223–187 BCE) encouraged Jews from various countries, including Babylonia, to move to Sardis. Sardis Synagogue. (2017, March 30). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 10:04, June 4, 2017, [Access here](#). This is a photo of an exhibit at the Diaspora Museum, Tel Aviv - Beit Hatefutsot a model of the Sardis Synagogue. This is a cutaway model – the synagogue had a trussed roof. “The upper walls and roof of the Synagogue would have been

clearly visible rising above the shops and road colonnades, and citizens walking past would have been able to look directly inside, when the doors were open, through the entire length of both rooms” (Seager and Kraabel 1983: 168). The Forecourt may even have contained a “municipally licensed fountain” that could have been accessible to the population at large (Kraabel 1983: 184).

²⁰ N. T. Wright, *Revelation for Everyone*, (Presbyterian Publishing Corp, 2011), 34

²¹ *Ibid*, Horst, 154-155, See there for references

²² Imperial cult (ancient Rome). (2017, May 2). In Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Retrieved 08:41, June 1, 2017

[Access here](#)

²³ On the imperial cult in Palestine, see James S. McLaren, “Jews and the Imperial Cult: From Augustus to Domitian,” *JSNT* 27 (2005): 257-78; idem, “Searching for Rome and the Imperial Cult in Galilee: Reassessing Galilee-Rome Relations (63 B.C.E to 70 C.E.),” in *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult*, eds. J. Brodd and J. L. Reed (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011) 111-136; Monika Bernett, “Der Kaiserkult in Judäa unter herodischer und römischer Herrschaft: Zu Herausbildung und Herausforderung neuer Konzepte Jüdischer Herrschaftslegitimation,” in *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World*, eds. J. Frey, D.R. Schwartz, S. Gripentrog (*AJEC* 711; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 219-51; Werner Eck (ed.), *Judäa – Syria Palästina: Ein Euseinandersetzung ein Provinz mit römischer Politik und Kultur* (*TSAJ* 340; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2014).

²⁴ John A. T. Robinson - *Redating the New Testament* (1976), 202. Section on churches [pages 202-206] for excerpt [Access here](#) or the complete book [here](#) [Retrieved May 2017]

²⁵ The “image worship” of Rev 13 is not the remit of this current article but will be dealt with elsewhere. Suffice to say that there are scholars who have questioned the application of the language employed in Rev 13 to the Imperial cult. On this see; Tonstad, Sigve. “Appraising the Myth of Nero Redivivus in the Interpretation of Revelation” *Andrews University Seminary Studies (AUSS)* Vol. 46. Iss. 2 (2008). [Access here](#) [Retrieved May 2017]

²⁶ However, in reality the situation is far more complex on this see, James R. Harrison, *A Survey of Recent scholarship on Romans 13:1-7* [pp.271-277]; in *Paul and the Imperial Authorities at Thessalonica and Rome: A Study in the Conflict of Ideology*, (Mohr Siebeck,2011). Harrison investigates the collision between Paul’s eschatological gospel and the Julio-Claudian conception of rule. He begins his survey by saying; “Among New Testament scholars, Romans 13:1-7 remains one of the most hotly debated passages of the Pauline corpus, with seemingly little hope of a consensus emerging in the future. However, this result is not as negative as it first seems. There have been advances in our understanding of the text”.

²⁷ Tellbe, Mikael LU (2001) In *Coniectanea Biblica, New Testament Series* 34; *Paul between Synagogue and State: Christians, Jews, and Civic Authorities in 1 Thessalonians, Romans, and Philippians*

²⁸ **The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)** eds., James Orr, John Nuelsen, Edgar Mullins, Morris Evans, and Melvin Grove Kyle (1939) [Accessed here](#) [Retrieved June 2017]

²⁹ Yoder commences by offering a short history of research into Luke’s Political Views and Intentions [p.5], breaking it down into (Traditional view): Political Apology for the Church to Rome (*Apologia Pro Ecclesia*) [p.6], Apology for Rome to the Church (*Apologia pro Imperio*) [p.14], Equipping the Church for Witness [p.18], Legitimation for the Church’s Identity [p.21], No Definite Political Aim [p.25], Postcolonial Readings and Other Recent Work [p.30], and includes a discussion on the Problems with Previous Research [p.38]. Joshua Yoder, *Representatives of Roman Rule: Roman Provincial Governors in Luke-Acts*, (Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2014)

³⁰ The term Maccabees as used to describe the Jewish army is taken from the Hebrew word for “hammer”.

³¹ J. Nelson Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, (A&C Black,1996),183-184

³² Smallwood, *The Jews Under Roman Rule*, p. 345. Tertullian observed that the *fiscus judaicus* won the Jews a 'tribute-liberty' that enabled them to worship freely. *Apol* 18.

³³ J. Dunn, *The partings of the ways: between Christianity and Judaism and their significance for the character of Christianity*, (SCM, 2006), 312

³⁴ Michael F. Bird, *Patheos Blog, Why Did the Romans Persecute Christians?* (2015) [Access here](#) [Retrieved June 2016]

³⁵ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 2.25.5-8

³⁶ Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44

³⁷ The noun θέατρον (theatron) translated “theatre” is employed in Acts 19.29, 31. Hebrews 10.33 employs the verb (passive nominative aspect) θεατριζόμενοι (theatrizomenoi) translated as “gazingstock” (KJV) or “spectacle” (NKJ) the noun θέατρον is used by Paul in 1 Cor. 4.9 probably in reference to the same event (i.e., Acts 19.29-31) as 1 Corinthians was composed at the end of his stay in Ephesus (1 Cor.16.8,19).

³⁸ We cannot present evidence for this in such a short summary but Ephesus has traditionally been associated with the 4G by the early church. As for language and syntactical differences present between the 4G and the Apocalypse my own stylometric research employing only function words finds the Apocalypse in the same cluster as the 4G. Any differences are therefore superficial and the result of the 4G being redacted and smoothed by John’s helpers (the Johannine school?). Obviously, John did not have the luxury of that option when he was imprisoned as he needed to send the Apocalypse out post-haste as a warning. Preliminary work indicates that within the Apocalypse Rev 2-3 and 21-22 have slightly different clustering aspects and that may indicate that the beginning and end of the

book may have been “polished” by John’s disciples before sending out but the differences are minimal and more work is required before drawing any solid conclusions.

³⁹ Charles seems to realise this as he regards the letters to the churches as having been written “at a much earlier date than the Book as a whole...In the closing years of the reign of Vespasian (75-9) but hardly earlier”. Charles, *Revelation 1*, 43-6 (44). However, his date is still stubbornly post-70 and the reasoning is subjective; on this see Robinson [*Ibid*, 206].

⁴⁰ See the following articles by P. Wyns; "The Destination and Purpose of the Fourth Gospel", *CEJBI*, Vol. 3. No. 2. Apr 2009, pp., 2-11 [Access here](#) "The Importance of the Ecclesia at Ephesus" *CEJBI*, Vol. 6, No. 3, Jul 2012 , pp.,12-19 [Access here](#) "The Fourth Gospel and Hebrews" and the "Fourth Gospel and Revelation" *CEJBI*, Vol. 3. No. 3. Jul 2009 pp.,39-55nbsp; [Access here](#).

⁴¹ Robinson, *Ibid*, 203

⁴² We must not fall into the fallacy of believing that Judaism was homogenous. There were “good” and “bad” synagogues and “good” and “bad” groups within each synagogue.

⁴³ Jezebel was a foreign queen, identified in the Book of Kings (1 Kings 16:31) as the daughter of Ithobaal I of Sidon and the wife of Ahab, King of Israel. Jezebel incited her husband King Ahab to abandon the worship of Yahweh and encourage worship of the deities Baal and Asherah instead. Jezebel persecuted the prophets of Yahweh, and fabricated evidence of blasphemy against an innocent landowner who refused to sell his property to King Ahab, causing the landowner to be put to death.

⁴⁴ Contr. Marcion i. 1.

⁴⁵ (...) Epiphanius *Adversus Haereses*, Book II., Vol. I. Haeres li. Sec. xxxiii. (Migne’s Ed. Vol. xli., p.948)

⁴⁶ Interestingly, both the Alexandrian codex and Tertullian have expunged the word church (ekklēsia, ἐκκλησία); in those cases Rev 2.18 simply reads; “to the angel of Thyatira write”.

⁴⁷ In the second century (the year 156 according to Epiphanius, or if we follow Eusebius, in 172) this area was overrun with the Cataphrygian heresy but this heretical sect can hardly be called a “church”. By the fourth century a measure of Christianity emerged (but no longer Jewish-Christian in nature) as there was a bishop from Thyatira at the council of Nice. So to all intents and purposes there was no church at Thyatira during the period 70-156 when the Apocalypse was supposedly written and received by the members of Thyatira.

⁴⁸ Robinson, *Ibid*, 204

⁴⁹ Robinson, *Ibid*, 204-205

⁵⁰ H. A. Whittaker, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, (Biblia, 1985),393-399

⁵¹ See there for footnotes and references. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., Th.D., BEFORE JERUSALEM FELL: Dating the Book of Revelation: An Exegetical and Historical Argument for a Pre-A.D. 70 Composition,(Dominion Press, 1989):318-330.Chapter 19 [Access Excerpt here](#) [Retrieved May 2017] or [Complete book here](#) [Retrieved May 2017]

⁵² Arthur M. Ogden and Ferrell Jenkins, (Ogden’s Biblical Resources and BibleWorld by Ferrell Jenkins,1999) [Accessed here](#) [retrieved June 2017] or directly [here](#)

⁵³ A coin issued by *Nerva* reads *fisci Judaici calumnia sublata*, "abolition of malicious prosecution in connection with the *Jewish tax*". The *fiscus Judaicus* (Latin for "*Jewish tax*") or *fiscus Judaicus*

⁵⁴ Duncan W. McKenzie, *The Antichrist and the Second Coming: A Preterist Examination*, (Xulon Press, 2012), 22

⁵⁵ Whoever hates his brother is dead (1 John 2.9-11)

⁵⁶ Over the last century the dating of the 4G has come down in steps from about 170 to 130 and now to about 90-100.

⁵⁷ Robinson, *Ibid*, 140

⁵⁸ This may be specifically directed at Gentile converts but is possibly also a warning to Jewish-Christians against pagan syncretic practices.