The Shema and Bar Kochba: *the false messiah and 666*

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March 2018

Abstract

This article serves as an introduction to a new commentary on the book of Revelation; P. Wyns, *Pattern Recognition in the Apocalypse*, (Biblaridion Media, 2018).[1] The offered commentary discovers recurrent patterns in the first and second centuries that are destined to repeat in the near future. The following article demonstrates that Nero and Kochba are both portrayed in the Apocalypse as 666. The association of Nero with 666 is well known [2] and will not be treated here; less apparent are connections between the false messiah Bar Kochba, the "Shema" and the number 666 (*and* 616). Both protagonists are not the "final manifestation" of the "man of sin" but they form archetypes of abusive and persecuting imperial and religious powers. As such they aid us in recognizing future patterns. As Mark Twain reputedly said, "*History doesn't repeat itself but it often rhymes".* The view taken in this article (and in the recommended commentary) is that none of these prophecies are *ex eventu*. They were all written **before the fact** – with the Apocalypse dated close to the commencement of the Nero persecution.

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[1] Henceforth *Pattern Recognition in the Apocalypse* is abbreviated as **PRITA**, available online or as a PDF download here: http://www.biblaridion.info/index.html **PRITA** has a companion commentary **GID** (God is Judge) on the book of Daniel (available on the same website).

[2] Although one cannot speak of a "consensus" view, Nero (as 666) is supported by the following scholars; "Fritzsche ,Benary, Hitzig, Reuss, Ewald, Baur, Zeller, Hilgenfeld, Volkmar, Hausrath, Krenkel, Gebhardt, Renan, Abbe, Reville, Sabatier, Davidson, Stuart, Bleek, Beyschlag, Farrar, and Cowles. Other scholars who have affirmed this view include: J. Stuart Russell, Shirley Jackson Case, George Edmundson, B. W. Henderson, Arthur S. Peake, Martin Kiddie, Charles C. Torrey, John Bright, Austin Farrer, G. Driver, D. R. Hillers, BoReicke, J. P. M. Sweet, BruceM. Metzger, and John A. T. Robinson. On this see Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation: An Exegetical and Historical Argument for a Pre-A.D. 70 Composition,(Dominion Press, 1989),193-203. http://www.biblaridion.info/resources/gentry_full.pdf and John A. T. Robinson ,Redating the New Testament (1976), 210 http://www.biblaridion.info/resources/redating-testament.pdf

Bar Kochba

The revolt against Rome was undertaken by a messianic revolutionary leader with the sobriquet **Bar Kochba** which was not the pretender's actual name but rather an epithet assigned by the chief Rabbi Akiba (Rabbi Aqiva ben Josef) taken from Num 24.17 and meaning "son of a star". Supposedly[3], after the failure of the revolt Kochba was renamed by many within the Jewish community to Simon bar Koziba, meaning "the son of a lie" (the s changed to z to reflect the Hebrew root for "lie" *kzb*). Bar Kokhba's actual name was likely Shimeon Bar Kosiba.[4] In the Aramaic alphabet, the letters Samekh or Simkat (ס pronounced as "s") and Shin (ש pronounced as "sh") interchange, for example, the name "Simon" is written in two ways - Shimeon (ש) and Simon (ס). In the Bar Kokhba letters (written in Aramaic), Yadin demonstrates that Kosiba was written as either *ksba* (with Samekh or Simkat - "s") or *kshba* (with Shin - "sh"). Sometimes, the final letter of *ksba* is "h" instead of "a". Several of Simon's letters found at Naḥal Ḥever read: "From Simon ben [*or* bar][5] Kosiba..." (בן [בר] כוסבה סמעון). Two letters spell Kosiba with ש; and among the letters and documents of Murabba'at it is sometimes spelled כוסבא. One letter is written in Greek, and spells the leader's name, Σιμων Χωσιβα, thus possibly settling the question of which vowel (e or i) or consonant (z or s) was used.[6]

The linguistic situation seems to have been fluid and Yadin believes that during the revolt a transition occurred from Aramaic to Hebrew (including the introduction of Mishnaic Hebrew forms) and of course we also have Greek, the *lingua franca* of Diaspora Jews. In Greek we only have Χωσιβα which is a transliteration of the name (what it sounds like in Hebrew or Aramaic) and not a translation. Of course, with so many Hebrew/Aramaic variants we would also expect a number of different Greek transliterations but they are unfortunately lost to us. Variants (unpointed) are tabulated below:

[3] It is more likely that Jewish-Christians invented the pun **during the revolt.**

[4] Guggenheimer translates the name with a double "s" in English: "By Roman sources, the war of *Bar Kossiba* (that is his true name revealed by his letters found in the Judean desert) started in 132 C.E." Heinrich Walter Guggenheimer, Seder Olam: The Rabbinic View of Biblical Chronology, (Rowman & Littlefield, 1998),p.263

[5] **Bar** is Aramaic for "son" - the Hebrew form is **Ben**.

[6] cf. Yadin, "Expedition D, 11 (1961), 36-52; *Bar-Kokhba*, 132; Lifshitz, "Papyrus grecs."248.

Known Variants of patronymic and epithet

Variants	SBL Translit	Anglicized	Meaning
בר כוכב	br kwkb	bar Kochba, Kokhba, Kokhva	"son of [a] star."
בר כושבה	br kwšbh	bar Kochba,Kokhba, Kokhva	"son of [a] star."
בר כוזיב	br kwzyb	bar Kozib	"son of [a] lie"
בן כוסבה	bn kwsbh	ben Koussaba	
בר כוסבא	br kwsbʾ	bar Koseba/ Kosiba (Kossiba)	
שמעון	šmʿwn	Shimon, Shimeon	
סמעון	smʿwn	Simeon, Simon	
Σιμων Χωσιβα	Simōn Chōsiba	Simon Kosiba	

Deceiver, liar *and* pretender

Bauckham identified the false Messiah in ApoPt (*The Apocalypse of Peter*: second century?) as Bar Kochba. Peerbolte [7] summarises as follows; "There are three elements which would point especially towards identification with Bar Kokhba.[8] Firstly, Bar Kokhba appears to have been hailed as a messiah by rabbi Akiba.[9] Secondly, it is reported that Bar Kokhba persecuted those Christians who did not deny Jesus or refused to partake in Bar Kokhba's rebellion against Rome.[10] Thirdly, the false messiah is characterized as 'a liar' (tr. Elliott: 'deceiver'), while Bar Kokhba also became known as 'Bar Koziba', 'son of a liar' (= a liar). Furthermore, as Bauckham states, 'We know of no other Jewish messianic pretender who persecuted Christians in the period AD. 80-160'[11]".

[7] L. J. Lietaert Peerbolte, The Antecedents of Antichrist: A Traditio-Historical Study of the Earliest Christian Views on Eschatological Opponents,(BRILL, 1996, 58 [including footnotes 10-11]

[8] For the history of the interpretation of the false messiah as Bar Kokhba, see Bauckham, 'Fig Tree Parables', p. 286, n. *58.*

[9] See Schürer *et al, History.* vol. 1, pp. 543-544.

[10] Just., *Apol.* 1,31,6: Eus., *Chronicle,* Hadrian's Year 17 (A.D. 133).

[11] Bauckham, 'Fig Tree Parables', p. 286.

Simon S. Lee[12] observes; "Following Heinrich Weinel, Buchholz argues that this false messiah, or the end-time deceiver, must refer to Bar Kokhba, who later became known as Bar Koziba "son of a liar." When the Jewish Christians refused to take part in his revolt against Rome, Bar Kokhba persecuted and killed them. According to Buchholz, ApoPt is written in this context in order to explain the issue of theodicy regarding punishment of the evil persecutors as well as vindication of the righteous martyrs. It is, however, Bauckham who has become champion of this Bar Kokhba hypothesis by publishing a series of articles.[13] Bauckham presents five major reasons why he sees in this parable references to Bar Kokhba and Jewish Christian martyrdom and moreover, to the origin of ApoPt in Palestine." [14]

Particularly interesting is how this ties in with the curse against the heretics (*mînîm*) i.e., Christians who refused to deny that Christ was the messiah. They were asked to publicly join in with the congregation and repeat the curse in the synagogue and refusal resulted in ex-communication (or worse). Baukham argues that the setting for the curse was the messianic claims made by Kochba.

Simon S. Lee[15] continues by saying, "Bauckham claims that ApoPt was written in the milieu of the Jewish revolt in Palestine around 132—35 CE and the persecution of the Jewish Christians by Bar Kokhba. He also reads the two major themes of ApoPt., as the punishment of the persecutors (chs. 3-24) and the vindication of the righteous martyrs (chs. 15-17), from the perspective of another important rabbinic movement in Palestine, which is well shown in the so-called *birkat ha-mînîm* (benediction of God for cursing the *mînîm* [heretics or sectarians]. In the version known from the Cairo Genizah manuscripts, it reads:

> For the apostates let there be no hope, and uproot the kingdom of arrogance, speedily and in our days. May the *Nazarenes* and the sectarians perish as in a moment. Let them be *blotted out of the book of life, and not, be written together with the righteous.*

[12] Simon S. Lee, Jesus' Transfiguration and the Believers' Transformation: A Study of the Transfiguration and Its Development in Early Christian Writings(Mohr Siebeck, 2009),149 [including footnotes 13-14 below]

[13] Bauckham, "The Two Fig Tree Parables in the Apocalypse of Peter", 269 -87; *idem*., "The Apocalypse of Peter: A Jewish Christian Apocalypse from the Time of Bar Kokhha," 7- 111; *idem*., "Apocalypse de Pierre. Introduction," in *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, ed. François Bovon and P. Geoltrain (Paris: Gallimard, 1997); Bremmer, "Bibliography of the Apocalypse of Peter," 200-03; and *idem*., *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, 160-258.

[14] Bauckham, "The Apocalypse of Peter: A Jewish Christian Apocalypse from the Time of Bar Kokhha," 36-43.

[15] Lee, *Transfiguration*, 150

In this benediction, the cursing of the *mînîm,* including the *Nazarenes,* is linked with prayer for the downfall of the kingdom of arrogance, i.e. the Roman Empire. Jewish Christians who resisted supporting Bar Kokhba's movement for the liberation from the Gentile power could be seen as taking the side of the kingdom of arrogance and consequently their names would be removed from the book of life. According to Bauckham, while the punishment scene (chs. 3-14) is a Christian response to Bar Kokhba's persecution, the Transfiguration with Paradise is their counter response to *the birkat ha-mînîm".*

Harlow states, "Richard Bauckham has convincingly argued that the author of the *Apocalypse of Peter* did not derive this parable from Luke but from an independent tradition…"[16] Of course, we cannot argue for a consensus view on ApoPt as scholars will forever debate the extent of the Kochba persecution and whether or not terms such as "liar" or "deceiver" are intended generically, [17] however, what we can do is demonstrate that the Apocalypse **also** identifies Kochba as the false messiah. The weight of cumulative evidence makes it likely that Bauckham's approach to ApoPt is correct and strengthens our argument which follows directly. Unlike the Apocalypse (given to John before the fall of the temple in 70) ApoPt was most certainly an *ex eventu* second century writing. Therefore, ApoPt had plenty of material (John's Apocalypse) to work with.

Jacob the deceiver

The prophecy on which Kochba's sobriquet is based comes from Num 24.17 (NKJ);

> I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; **A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel**, and batter the brow of Moab, And destroy all the sons of tumult.

This prophecy was employed by Rabbi Akiba to herald the messianic status of Shimeon Kosiba and he became Shimeon **Bar Kochba** (Simon the Son of a star). Kochba took the epithet seriously and during the revolt he had coins struck

[16] Daniel C. Harlow, Studia in Veteris Testamenti pseudepigrapha, (Brill, 1996),203

[17] So Peerbolte, *Antecedents*, 59-60; "Next, the false messiah is presented as 'a liar'. The term 'liar' is used in the same non-titular way as in 1 John 2,22 and John 8,44 Since it is a common derogatory word it can neither be taken as evidence of any influence of the tradition of the Antichrist as found in 1 John 2,22 nor as a link to Bar Kokhba".

depicting "his star" elevated **above the Ark of the Covenant** in the temple. Of course, the temple no longer existed as it had been destroyed in 70 but Kochba was undeterred in his ambition to introduce temple worship. Scholars debate whether or not his intention came to fruition but he undoubtedly made preparations for a permanent building and we can speculate that in the meantime he pitched a tabernacle and reintroduced sacrifice on a purpose built altar. There is no collaboration from archaeological or literary evidence to support such a hypothesis (historical information from that troubled revolt is sparse) – however, the messianic status conferred on Kochba, his support by important rabbi's and priests and his pretentious coins all point to the conclusion that some form of temporary worship existed. Here then was the "messiah" come to destroy the Romans, liberate Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

The eponymous forefather **Jacob**, who is mentioned in the prophecy of Num 24.17, carried a name that meant, "Trickster, supplanter or deceiver" he was only renamed "Israel" after his confrontation and wrestling with God. All his life Jacob practiced guile to advance his ambitions, namely, to obtain the blessing through his own might. Kochba was known for his physical strength and charisma. The word **guile** (δόλος) is used in Jesus' encounter with Nathaniel (John 1.47); "Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and said of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, **in whom is no guile!** (NKJ: Deceit)".[18] In other words – there is no "Jacob" in this "Israelite".

This Johannine passage (vv.45-51) is notable for several reasons (1); for association with **Jacob's ladder**, (2); for the mention of **Nazareth** (think here of the *Nazarene* Jewish-Christian community) and (3); chiefly for the way in which Nathaniel openly **declares Christ as the messiah, the Son of God.**[19] The same word (δόλος) is employed to describe the triumphant martyrs of Rev 14.5; "*And in their mouth was found no guile*", a vision that contains a prophecy concerning the fall of Jerusalem *and* Kochba's fortress in Betar. Whether wittingly, or unwittingly rabbinical writings of

[18] The background to this incident is Nathaniel's upcoming Nuptials (in John 2). Nathaniel was contemplating how Jacob was deceived on his wedding night (the deceiver was himself tricked!) – Jesus effectively read Nathaniel's mind! For the background on this see H. A. Whittaker, Studies in the Gospels, (Biblia, 2nd ed., 1989), chapter 20, pp. 78-82.

[19] Think here of *"putting out of the synagogue"*, (John 9.22) and ex-communication of the *mînîm* (heretics) i.e., the *Nazarenes*; it was dangerous to declare that Jesus was the messiah, especially during the Kochba revolt.

that era assimilate *the very language of the Apocalypse* when describing the horror and devastation of the failed rebellion.[20] The triumphant martyrs have no guile (Jacob) in their mouths because they refused to accept Kochba (the "star out of Jacob") as their messiah, or to endorse his **shema** (put his words [lie] in their mouth as a sign of allegiance). Instead they paid with their lives as witnesses to the true messiah.

The Shema and 666

The **Shema** is of course the well know monotheistic statement of Israelite faith expressed in Deut 6.4 that commences with the famous words;

Hear, O Israel…..

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד׃

It is called the "Shema" for short and every Jew would know that "Shema" was shorthand for their statement of faith. Shema is the first word of the sentence שְׁמַע rendered by SBL transliteration as šĕmaʿ - anglicized as **shema**. The correspondence of shema with the first name of Kochba – Shimon (שמעון) is no coincidence as both words have the same root.

The sobriquet of Bar Kochba can also be expressed as a statement of faith and no doubt this was encouraged by the priests and rabbi's who saw Kochba as the legitimate messiah:

[20] For the similarity in language, See, **PRITA**, ch.14 page 301: *Rabbinical accounts and the trumpets.* For the table of contents (TOC) see; http://www.biblaridion.info/Rev_TOC.html After the rebellion Israel was cast off and renamed *Palestine* –Jerusalem was officially declared a gentile city by Hadrian in fulfilment of Rev. chapter 10, see **PRITA**, *The Post 70 CE history of the Jews*, *Ploughing the city* - Digression 6, 99-114,pp.103 http://www.biblaridion.info/Digressions/post70.pdf

Hear, Son-of-star

שמעו בר כוכב

SBL: kwkb br šmʿw

In the *Hebrew Gematria* system the value of this statement equals **666** with number 6 representing the number of man (created on day six). It is the integer of the false messiah. Moreover, with a slight emendation the Hebrew reflects the alteration to "son of a lie" and this *may* well explain the variant reading 616[21] : שמעון בנ כוסיב (Simeon ben Kosyb /SBL: šmʿwn bn kwsyb)[22] equates to 616. Similarly the Greek Isopsephy system equates to 616 in a version where the Hebrew "Kozib" (liar) is *transliterated* into Greek as Κοζιβ [23] and placed in the statement Κοζιβ ὁ πλάνος (SBL: Koszib ho planos) giving the meaning; "liar that deceiver", or "that deceptive liar" mimicking the derogatory accusation levelled at Christ (Matt.27.63) during his trial, ἐκεῖνος ὁ πλάνος ("that deceiver said..").

Supporters of Kochba belonged to the "Synagogue of Satan; *"When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own: for he is a liar and the father of it"* (John 8.44) and *"if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive"* (John 5.43). The pronouncements of Christ in the Fourth Gospel and in the Apocalypse are so prophetically accurate that it is tempting to evaluate first century arguments as *ex eventu* prophecy – as belonging to a later era (after the Kochba revolt). However, the woof-and-weave of the Apocalypse is embedded throughout the NT and this would necessitate pushing the dating of the whole NT beyond 150, a position that is unsustainable.[24] What then of the Apostle Paul's pronouncements on the "man of sin" in Thessalonians, (an epistle that even hardened critics date pre-70)? "Who opposes and exalts himself above all that is

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[21] On the variant reading 616, See, Michael, MG, 666 or 616 (Rev . 13, 18), Bulletin of Biblical Studies, 19, July-December 2000, 77-83 http://www.biblaridion.info/resources/666.pdf

[22] The patronymic Kosiba (כוסבא) was altered to Kozib כוזיב (kzb=lie) by replacing **S** with **Z** and dropping the almost silent **A** (or **H**); the suggestion here is that rather than replacing **S** with **Z** the addition of a Yod would give the softer sounding כוסיב Kosyb (rather than Kozib), thus changing his surname to "liar". The full phrase "Shimon son of a liar" (שמעון בנ כוסיב) equals 616 in the *Hebrew Gematria* system. Note that "ben" is used rather than the Aramaic "bar". We can imagine that Jewish Christians forced to pledge (in Aramaic) "Hear-son-of-Star"(666) instead replied (in Hebrew) "Hear-son-of-Liar"(616) or (in Greek translit- Koszib) "Liar-that-Deceiver" (616)

[23] One would expect Χωζιβ or Χοζιβ for Χωσιβα (Chōsiba) rather than Κοζιβ the Χωσ has been substituted by Κοζ. The transliteration Κοζιβ sounds like the Hebrew Kozib (lie) but does not correspond with any ancient or modern Greek word that I am aware of (although Google translate renders it as "captain"- probably due to a faulty algorithm).

[24] See, **PRITA**, "Dating matters" http://www.biblaridion.info/Digressions/Dating_matters.pdf

called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (2 Thess 2.4). [25] This was certainly the intention of Kochba who had the temerity to depict **his star** elevated above the resting place of the *Shekinah* in the temple. What a contrast with Christ who thought equality with God was not something to be grasped? Kochba was the messiah who asked God not to interfere in his affairs (Do neither good nor bad, i.e., mind your own business). The "lying wonders and powers" that Paul speaks of are described in Revelation 13.[26]

Followers of Kochba, "did not receive the love of the truth"(v.10), truth being a Pauline technical term for the *covenants of promise* concerning messiah vouched safe to the forefathers (Micah 7.20) and embodied in the anointed, who declared, "I am the truth"(John 14.6). Jesus was the messiah there would be no other –certainly not an arrogant, self-appointed, shallow leader such as Bar Kochba who wrought ruin on the nation. They were indeed *"sent a strong delusion and believed the lie"* (v.11) ….the lie of the ancient serpent *that man can be God.* It could be argued that Paul received his own independent revelation (In Arabia? Gal.1.17; 2 Cor.12.3-7), however, it is undeniable that the Apocalypse was delivered to the first century church (before the fall of the temple in 70).

Conclusion

Scholars have noted that the Greek form of Neron Caesar transliterated into Hebrew characters is equivalent to 666 and the Latin form of Nero Caesar transliterated into Hebrew script is equivalent to the variant 616. Similarly the "Shema" of Bar Kochba is 666 and his patronymic that was "modified" in order to reflect his true nature (that of a deceiver/liar/false messiah).[27] We have then **two archetypes** of the persecutor of the church in the first and early second centuries and both of them are associated with 666/616 – a distinct pattern. The first (Nero) was an imperial despot no doubt manipulated by the Jews (his wife/mistress was a proselyte) to scapegoat Christians, the second archetype (Bar Kochba) a false messiah supported by Babylonian Jewry, Palestinian priests and Rabbi's, also persecuted Jewish Christians. These are repeat patterns – we must learn how to read biblical patterns correctly in order to recognise the last and final manifestation of the deceiver that will shortly be upon us.

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[25] Paul certainly had "Lucifer" the "morning star" from Isa 14.13 in mind, "You said in your heart, `I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north".

[26] **PRITA**, http://www.biblaridion.info/Rev_TOC.html Great Wonders (Rev 13.13-15) Ch.13, 280-284

[27] In the immortal words of Monty Python, "He's not the messiah; he's *a very naughty boy!"*