

HAVE THE PROPHECIES IN REVELATION 17–18 ABOUT BABYLON BEEN FULFILLED? PART 1

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PRETERISTS CONTEND THAT THE EVENTS IN REVELATION 4–22 were mostly fulfilled in the events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. They believe that the book of Revelation was penned in the mid 60s and predicts God’s judgment in AD 70 on national Israel because of her rejection of Christ. At that time God was also at work creating the new universal church to replace disgraced and judged Israel (John 4:21; Gal. 3:9, 28–29; 6:16; Eph. 2:14). However, “partial” preterists are quick to distinguish themselves from “full” preterists by still holding to a future bodily return of Christ and final judgment (Rev. 20:7–15).¹

Preterists believe that the harlot in Revelation 17–18 represents first-century Jerusalem and that the beast represents first-century Rome. Thus the beast’s destruction of the harlot (17:16–17) represents Rome’s sacking of Jerusalem in the events surrounding AD 70. Gentry states, “I am convinced *beyond any doubt* that this Harlot is first-century Jerusalem.”² Hanegraaff similarly explains,

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¹ Kenneth L. Gentry, “A Preterist View of Revelation,” in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 46 n. 25; 86.

² Kenneth L. Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1997), 392 (italics added).

“What has puzzled me over the years is not the identity of ‘the great prostitute,’ but how so many could mistake her historical identity. . . . In biblical history only one nation is inextricably linked to the moniker ‘harlot.’ *And that nation is Israel!*”³

A number of commentators (along with Gentry and Hanegraaff) embrace this interpretation. Older commentators who hold this view include Philip Carrington, J. S. Russell, and Milton Terry. More recent commentators who hold this view include David Chilton, Massyngberde Ford, Kenneth Gentry, Scott Hahn, Hank Hanegraaff, R. C. Sproul, and N. T. Wright. Recently several books have defended the notion that the Babylonian harlot represents first-century Jerusalem.⁴ The purpose of the present series of articles is to analyze whether the details of Revelation 17–18 fit the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. An older strain of preterism identifies the Babylonian harlot as Rome, which fell in AD 410.⁵ However, this series focuses on the currently more popular form of preterism that identifies the Babylonian harlot as first-century Jerusalem.

This first article (in this series of six) begins by focusing on Babylon’s harlotry and alliance.

BABYLON’S HARLOTRY (REV. 17:1–2, 15; 18:3, 9; 19:2)

Preterists are confident that the harlot of Revelation 17–18 represents first-century Jerusalem since, they claim, harlotry can only transpire if one has a preexisting covenant with God. And only Israel/Jerusalem had a preexisting covenant with God through the Mosaic covenant. Russell explains why harlot imagery is inapplicable to a Gentile city. “Rome was not capable of violating the covenant of her God, of being false to her divine Husband, for she never was the married wife of Jehovah.”⁶ Preterists seek to buttress their

³ Hank Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code* (Nashville: Nelson, 2007), 118–19.

⁴ For example, Joseph Balyeat, *Babylon, the Great City of Revelation* (Servierville, TN: Onward, 1991); and Don Preston, *Who Is This Babylon?* rev. ed. (Ardmore, OK: JaDon, 2006).

⁵ Moses Stuart, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse* (London: Wiley and Putnam, 1845), 2:295, 325.

⁶ J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: A Critical Inquiry into the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord’s Second Coming* (London: Unwin, 1887; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 489; cf. 491. See also David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Expo-*

position by noting that harlot imagery in the Old Testament is associated with Israel and/or Jerusalem.⁷ Ford enumerates several Old Testament texts that refer to Jerusalem or Israel as a harlot (Isa. 1:21; Jer. 2:20; 5:7; Ezek. 16; 23; Hos. 2:5; 3:3; 4:15; Mic. 1:7).⁸

Preterists contend that the background for Revelation 17–18 is Ezekiel’s condemnation of harlotrous Jerusalem just prior to the 586 BC judgment predicted in Ezekiel 16.⁹ Preterists point to parallels between the harlot of Ezekiel 16 and the harlot of Revelation 17–18: expensive adornment (Ezek. 16:12; Rev. 17:4), international influence (Ezek. 16:14; Rev. 17:18), harlotrous behavior (Ezek. 16:15; Rev. 17:2), destruction at the hands of former lovers (Ezek. 16:35–43; Rev. 17:16), destruction by fire (Ezek. 16:41; Rev. 17:16), and being left stripped and naked (Ezek. 16:39; Rev. 17:16).¹⁰

Despite these seemingly convincing parallels, the following five reasons show that the harlot imagery does not identify Babylon of the Apocalypse with first-century Jerusalem. First, preterists overstate their case when they argue that Old Testament harlot imagery applies exclusively to Israel. Both Tyre (Isa. 23:16–17) and Nineveh (Nah. 3:4), two Gentile cities, are also identified as harlots.¹¹ Aware of the association of harlot imagery with these two

sition of the Book of Revelation (Tyler, TX: Dominion, 1987), 421; D. Ragan Ewing, “The Identification of Babylon the Harlot in the Book of Revelation” (ThM thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2002), 75; Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion: A Post-millennial Eschatology*, 394; Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, 235; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 285; Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics: A Study of the Most Notable Revelations of God and of Christ* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1898; reprint, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1988), 427, 435; and Cornelis Vanderwaal, *Hebrews–Revelation* (St. Catharines, ON: Paideia, 1979), 102.

⁷ Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, 421.

⁸ Ford, *Revelation*, 283.

⁹ Philip Carrington, *The Meaning of Revelation* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1931), 276; Ford, *Revelation*, 283; Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, 235; and Russell, *The Parousia*, 490.

¹⁰ Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, 121–23; and Preston, *Who Is This Babylon?* 103–4.

¹¹ David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 929; R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: Clark, 1920), 2:62; Charles H. Dyer, “The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17–18 (Part 2),” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144 (October–December 1987): 434; Thomas A. Howe, *Breaking the Apoca-*

Gentile cities, some preterists attempt to incorporate them into their argument. For example Chilton notes:

It is noteworthy that Tyre and Nineveh—the only two cities outside of Israel that are accused of harlotry—had both been in covenant with God. The kingdom of Tyre in David and Solomon’s time was converted to the worship of the true God, and her king contracted a covenant with Solomon and assisted in building the temple (1 Kings 5:1–12; 9:13; Amos 1:9); Nineveh was converted under the ministry of Jonah (Jon 3:5–10). The later apostasy of these two cities could rightly be considered harlotry.¹²

However, preterists overstate their case by contending that Tyre and Nineveh were “in covenant with God.” First Kings 5:12 and Amos 1:9 refer only to a covenant between Solomon and Hiram, rather than a covenant between Tyre and God. Only Israel can be said to be in an actual covenant relationship with God (Gen. 15:18; Ps. 147:19–20). While God’s entrance into the Abrahamic covenant with national Israel was marked by the solemn ancient Near Eastern covenant ratification ceremony (Gen. 15),¹³ this ceremony is not hinted at in the passages Chilton cites. Chilton confuses contact with Israel, as in the case of Tyre, or conversion to the God of Israel, as in the case of Nineveh, with a formal covenant with God. If Chilton’s logic were followed, this would lead to the conclusion that all nations that were impacted by Israel (Gen. 12:3b) also had a formal covenant with God. Thus it is possible for Gentile cities to be noted as harlots simply by apostasizing from the spiritual truth they once embraced, without being in a formal covenant with God.

Second, if John intended to communicate that Babylon the harlot represents Israel’s violation of the Mosaic covenant, the term “harlot” (πόρνη) does not adequately convey this meaning.

lypse Code: A Critical Examination of Hank Hanegraaff's New Book (Matthews, NC: Howe, 2007), 129; Jim McGuiggan, *The Book of Revelation* (Lubbock, TX: International, 1976), 255; and Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., *New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 308.

¹² Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, 424, n 2. See also Steve Gregg, ed., *Revelation: Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville: Nelson, 1997), 456, n 6; Ford, *Revelation*, 283–84; and Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, 256 n. 68.

¹³ John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Findlay, OH: Dunham, 1959), 150–51.

Thomas explains:

Since the angel never uses the term “adultery” (μοιχεῖται [*moicheia*])—a more restricted term implying a previous marital relationship—in connection with the woman, she need not be representative of apostate Israel or the apostate church. *Pornēs* can include *moicheia*, because it is broader. So this woman represents all false religion of all time, including those who apostasize from the revealed religion of Christianity.¹⁴

Hauck and Schulz concur when they say, “μοιχεύω is narrower than πορνεία . . . and refers solely to adultery.”¹⁵ Aune similarly observes that harlot imagery need not automatically identify Israel. He acknowledges that “prostitute” “is frequently used in a figurative sense of Israel’s faithless behavior through frequent lapses into idolatry, a judgment based on the larger metaphor of ‘marriage’ between Yahweh and Israel presupposed in so many OT texts.”¹⁶ He then concludes, “However, since Yahweh and Babylon have no such ‘marriage’ relationship, this language has nothing to do with the author’s condemnation of Babylon-Rome.”¹⁷ Rather than using the word “harlot” (πόρνη) to describe Israel, the New Testament uses the word μοιχαλῖς, “adulteress” (Matt. 12:39; 16:4; Mark 8:38; James 4:4). Thus the existence of harlot imagery in Revelation 17–18 does not preclude Gentile identification of Babylon.

Third, the Old Testament texts that preterists use to associate Jerusalem with harlotry actually teach the *restoration* of Jerusalem. This restoration language is in the immediate context (Isa. 2:1–4; Jer. 3:17–18) or the extended context (Jer. 30–33; Ezek. 33–48; Hos. 14; Mic. 7:7–20). Such restoration contradicts the replacement motif prevalent in the preterist system. Ezekiel 16 is a case in point. Despite the connections that preterists draw between

¹⁴ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 283; see also Alan F. Johnson, “Revelation,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 563.

¹⁵ Friedrich Hauck and Siegfried Schulz, “πόρνη, πόρνος, πορνεία, πορνεύω, ἐκπορνεύω,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 581.

¹⁶ Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 988.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

this chapter and Revelation 17–18, the chapter’s final verses contradict the presupposition of replacement theology by predicting Jerusalem’s ultimate restoration (Ezek. 16:53–63).

Preterists claim that this restoration language refers to the eternal state (Rev. 21–22) rather than to the terrestrial restoration of Jerusalem,¹⁸ but this is unpersuasive. If the earthly city is in view early on in the chapter (Ezek. 16:2–3), then the end of the chapter pertains to the same subject. Such terrestrial restoration seems inconsistent with the eternal state, which will involve a new earth (2 Pet. 3:10–13; Rev. 21:1) rather than the present earth. In addition the restoration spoken of by Ezekiel involves sin but to a limited degree. Even the high priest in the restored temple will have to offer up sacrifices for his own sins (Ezek. 45:22). But no sin will be present in the eternal state (Rev. 21:4–5, 27; 22:15). Fruchtenbaum questions whether the concept of the eternal state is found in the Old Testament. He notes:

The majority of the things found in the first twenty chapters of the Book of Revelation are found elsewhere in the Old Testament. Only the last two chapters deal with things totally new. . . . The value of the Book of Revelation is not that it provides a lot of new information, but rather it takes the scattered Old Testament prophecies and puts them in a chronological order so that the sequence of events may be determined. . . . However, the material found in the last two chapters is totally new material which describes the Eternal Order. The Old Testament prophets never foresaw anything beyond the Messianic kingdom. Indeed the kingdom was the high point of Old Testament prophecy and no prophet ever saw anything beyond that. But the Eternal Order is the high point of New Testament prophecy, and Revelation 21 and 22 provide new information, as they describe the Eternal Order.¹⁹

Additional differences between Ezekiel 16 and Revelation 17–18 may be noted. For example, as alluded to previously, while Ezekiel predicted the restoration of the harlot (Ezek. 16:53–63), Revelation predicted the harlot’s ultimate defeat (Rev. 18:21–23). Moreover, while Ezekiel called the harlot by the name “Jerusalem” (Ezek. 16:3), Revelation called the harlot by the name “Babylon” (Rev. 17:5). And while Ezekiel 16 called the harlot “daughter”

¹⁸ Ewing, “The Identification of Babylon the Harlot in the Book of Revelation,” 76.

¹⁹ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah*, rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel, 2003), 10–11.

(Ezek. 16:45), Revelation called the harlot “mother” (Rev. 17:5).²⁰ Such differences should cause the interpreter to look elsewhere for the background of Revelation 17–18. In summary, “while there are some parallels between these two texts, the Old Testament passage that most clearly parallels Revelation 17–18 is Jeremiah 50–51, not Ezekiel 16.”²¹

Fourth, the religious influence of first-century Israel falls short of the text’s requirement that Babylon exercise a universal, harlotrous influence (Rev. 17:1–2, 15). Preterists seek to localize the text’s requirements by interpreting the word $\gamma\eta$, used twice in Revelation 17:2, as either the known world of the first century or the local land of Israel.²² While $\gamma\eta$ can sometimes be given a localized interpretation (e.g., Matt. 2:6), it also has a global meaning in other contexts, such as Genesis 1:1 in the Septuagint and Matthew 5:18. In fact the global use of the word is prevalent in the Apocalypse (Rev. 1:5; 21:1). Interestingly partial preterists admit that $\gamma\eta$ is global in 20:11.²³ Since $\gamma\eta$ can be local or global, the word must be defined by its context.

The context of Revelation 17–18 favors a global understanding of $\gamma\eta$, since the harlot’s influence is pictured as her sitting on many waters (17:1). These waters are later defined as $\lambda\alpha\omicron\iota$, $\delta\chi\lambda\omicron\iota$, $\epsilon\theta\nu\eta$, $\gamma\lambda\omega\sigma\sigma\alpha\iota$ (“peoples, multitudes, nations, tongues,” 17:15). These words with minor variations occur repeatedly throughout the Apocalypse (5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6). In the first reference John used them to refer to those for whom Christ died (5:9).²⁴

²⁰ This mother-daughter distinction, as well as the inability of preterists to provide a convincing reason why the words “Babylon” and “Jerusalem” should be equated, will be explored in the next article in this series.

²¹ Mark Hitchcock and Thomas Ice, *Breaking the Apocalypse Code* (Costa Mesa, CA: Word for Today, 2007), 170–71. For a survey of the many parallels between Jeremiah 50–51 and Revelation 17–18 see Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 983; Dyer, “The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17–18 (Part 2),” 441–43; and Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 307.

²² Balyeat, *Babylon, the Great City of Revelation*, 80–83; Ralph E. Bass, *Back to the Future: A Study in the Book of Revelation* (Greenville, SC: Living Hope, 2004), 376–79, 400; Carrington, *The Meaning of Revelation*, 276–77; Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, 438–39; and Russell, *The Parousia*, 503.

²³ Kenneth L. Gentry, “A Preterist View of Revelation,” 46 n. 25; 86.

²⁴ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 303. Revelation 5:9 uses $\phi\upsilon\lambda\lambda\eta$, “tribe,” rather than $\delta\chi\lambda\omicron\iota$, “multitudes.”

Mounce explains the universal nature of Revelation 5:9 when he notes, “The seer is stressing the universal nature of the church and for this purpose piles up phrases for their rhetorical impact.”²⁵ If these terms connote universality in 5:9, then surely their similar use in 17:15 must also convey universality rather than locality. The universality of the initial reference (5:9) is buttressed by noting John’s propensity to mention the universality of the atonement elsewhere (John 3:16; 1 John 2:2).

Interestingly one of these terms (ἔθνη) appears in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19), which Gentry interprets universally.²⁶ If this single term leads Gentry to a universal interpretation, then how much more should the presence of the same term plus three additional terms (λαοὶ, ὄχλοι, γλώσσαι) also communicate universality in Revelation 17:15.

Universality rather than locality is also evident in chapters 17–18 through the use of the phrases τὰ ἔθνη (18:3) and οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς (17:2; 18:3, 9). Because preterists believe that the eternal state is a present, universal reality²⁷ and because both of these expressions appear in John’s depiction of the eternal state (21:24), consistency also mandates a universal understanding of chapters 17–18.²⁸ Prigent summarizes the matter of the universality of Babylon’s influence in this way: “The author intends to point out that the empire has won to its cause everything that exerts authority in this world; there is no realm that escapes his diabolical sovereignty.”²⁹ In short, preterists commit the hermeneutical error of “illegitimate totality transfer” by reading a local understanding of the word γῆ as defined by a foreign context into the global context of Revelation 17–18.

Preterists also appeal to both biblical and extrabiblical sources in an attempt to show the universal, harlotrous influence of first-

²⁵ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 136.

²⁶ Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, 256, 265, 269.

²⁷ Gentry, “A Preterist View of Revelation,” 86–89.

²⁸ The latter expression οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς also has a global parallel in 1:5.

²⁹ Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, trans. Wendy Pradels (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 486.

century Israel.³⁰ However, none of the sources they cite satisfy the global requirements of the text. For example they employ the description of the many nations that congregated in Acts 2:5–11 on the day of Pentecost to demonstrate Israel’s first-century influence.³¹ However, these verses fall short of the text’s global standard, since they represent only fifteen nations in the local area. Furthermore Bass seeks to prove first-century Israel’s universal reach by appealing to the fact that Jesus said the Pharisees traveled land and sea to win a single convert (Matt. 23:15). However, in his very next sentence, Bass admits that this verse pertains only to the known world of the Roman Empire.³²

Moreover, preterists appeal to Philo in an attempt to show the international colonization of first-century Jews. However, this source, like Acts 2:5–11, falls short of the text’s global requirement, since Philo names the regions from the known or “habitable world” (οἰκουμένη) that the Jews colonized.³³ Preterists also refer to Josephus, who indicated that “Jerusalem as the capitol is supreme, dominating all the neighborhood as the head towers over the body.”³⁴ However, the term “neighborhood” as well as the enumeration of the local areas that first-century Jerusalem presided over disqualifies Josephus’s statement from satisfying the universal requirements of Revelation 17:15. Ogden similarly appeals to Josephus’s description of Jewish colonization:³⁵ “This people has already made its way into every city and it is not easy to find any

³⁰ Bass, *Back to the Future*, 375–79.

³¹ Bob Emery, *An Evening in Ephesus with John, the Son of Zebedee* (Charlottesville, VA: Benchpress, 1998), 105; Arthur M. Ogden, *The Avenging of the Apostles and Prophets: Commentary on Revelation*, 3rd ed. (Pinson, AL: Ogden, 2006), 327. Russell, *The Parousia*, 503; and Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics*, 434.

³² Bass, *Back to the Future*, 376.

³³ Philo, *On the Embassy of Gaius* 36.281–84. The Greek word οἰκουμένη is often translated “the inhabited earth” or “the world” (Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 699). Though οἰκουμένη can sometimes have a global meaning (Acts 17:31), it has the localized meaning in the Philo citation, since in the context Philo enumerated the local areas the Jews colonized.

³⁴ Josephus, *The Jewish Wars* 3.3.5.

³⁵ Ogden, *The Avenging of the Apostles and Prophets*, 45.

place in the habitable world which has not received this nation and in which it has not made its power felt.”³⁶ Yet because the word οἰκουμένη (“habitable earth”) is used and because the context of Josephus’s statement identifies the surrounding local areas where the Jews settled, this statement too lacks the global dimensions of Revelation 17:15.

The preterist notion that first-century Israel was guilty of exporting harlotry throughout the known world (17:1–2, 15) seems inconsistent with the high calling of national Israel. Because it is God’s intent to bless the world through the Jews (Gen. 12:3; Isa. 42:6; 49:6), virtually all spiritual blessings, including the Savior (John 4:22; Rom. 9:5) and the Scriptures (Rom. 3:2), have come to the world through the Jewish nation. These blessings hardly constitute the exported harlotry spoken of in Revelation 17:2. While first-century Israel did lapse into unbelief and apostasy (Matt. 23:15), Paul explained that God still used the nation, even in its apostate condition, to bring riches and reconciliation to the world (Rom. 11:12, 15). For reasons such as this, Court is reticent to equate Zion (Jerusalem) with the Babylonian harlot.

Is it possible on the basis of the details examined to isolate any one figure as the model for the Seer’s picture of the harlot? Can we consider among the possibilities the Old Testament figure of Babylon, the personification of evil, to whom much of this imagery is applied; the Daughter of Zion who plays the harlot and revels in luxury. . . . It seems better to regard this as a type of evil, namely idolatry, which is included within the epitome of evil, rather than attribute to the figure of the Daughter of Zion a more active and formative role, as the basic pattern of imagery. By making Israel the epitome of evil, one is wrenching out of its total context one aspect of Old Testament ideas about Israel.³⁷

Fifth, rather than seeing first-century Jerusalem as the background for the harlot in Revelation 17–18, it is better to look no further than Old Testament descriptions of Babylon (Jer. 50–51) for this background. These two sections of Scripture are united through the use of the name “Babylon” (Jer. 50:1; Rev. 17:5; 18:10), and several conceptual parallels. For example the harlot’s involve-

³⁶ Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 14.7.2.

³⁷ John M. Court, *Myth and History in the Book of Revelation* (Atlanta: Knox, 1979), 147–48.

ment with and corruption of the kings of the earth with the wine of her fornication (Rev. 17:2) has a direct parallel in Jeremiah 51:7. The water imagery (Rev. 17:1, 15) corresponds with Jeremiah 51:13. These parallels with Jeremiah 50–51 show that Babylon in Revelation 17–18 does not mean Jerusalem. In conclusion the preceding five reasons show that the harlot imagery in Revelation 17–18 does not identify Babylon as first-century Jerusalem.

BABYLON'S ALLIANCE (REV. 17:3b, 8–9, 11)

Preterists believe that the woman of Revelation 17 represents first-century Israel and/or Jerusalem. They also believe that the beast of the same chapter represents Rome. According to preterists these two figures portray Israel's relationship with Rome (17:3b) that was later broken in the events of AD 70 (17:16–17). However, at least three problems are associated with interpreting the beast as Rome in relation to first-century Israel. These problems are Rome's alliance with Israel, Rome's revival, and Rome's seven hills.

ROME'S ALLIANCE WITH ISRAEL

The first problem pertains to whether Israel and Rome were actually in an alliance at the time preterists date the composition of Revelation. Preterists appeal to various lines of support for their view that most of Revelation 17 portrays a first-century alliance between Israel and Rome.³⁸ For example they note Israel's dependence on Rome for her national existence (John 11:48–50).³⁹ They also observe how Israel's leadership worked "hand in glove"⁴⁰ with

³⁸ Balyeat, *Babylon, the Great City of Revelation*, 83; Bass, *Back to the Future*, 380; Alan James Beagley, *The "Sitz im Leben" of the Apocalypse with Particular Reference to the Role of the Church's Enemies*, Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1987), 110; Carrington, *The Meaning of Revelation*, 277; Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, 429; idem, *Paradise Restored* (Tyler, TX: Reconstruction, 1985), 187–88; Emery, *An Evening in Ephesus with John, the Son of Zebedee*, 103; Gentry, "A Preterist View of Revelation," 78; idem, *He Shall Have Dominion*, 426; Gary DeMar, *End Times Fiction: A Biblical Consideration of the Left Behind Theology* (Nashville: Nelson, 2001), 127; Ogden, *The Avenging of the Apostles and Prophets*, 328; and Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics*, 428.

³⁹ See also Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 14.10.7.

⁴⁰ Bass, *Back to the Future*, 378.

Rome to accomplish the crucifixion of Christ (John 18:28–32; 19:12–16) and the persecution of the early church (Acts 4:26–28; 12:1–3; 17:7; 18:12–13).

However, Beale questions whether the alliance represented by the woman and the beast in Revelation 17 is consistent with what is known of first-century Israel's relationship with Rome. He notes, "Jerusalem was never a full-fledged ally with Rome. Of course, the two were on the same spiritual side in their opposition to the church, but what is portrayed in Revelation 17 is a much stronger spiritual, political, and economic alliance than Jerusalem ever had with Rome."⁴¹ Moreover if the AD 65 dating of the book of Revelation by preterists is correct,⁴² then any alliance Israel had with Rome was either crumbling or on the verge of decaying by the time Revelation was written. Such relational disintegration between the two entities was a reality at that time because of Rome's lengthy siege of Jerusalem. Thomas observes, "Rome's prolonged siege and destruction of Jerusalem from the late 60s to 70 hardly gives the impression of any alliance between the Jews and the Romans."⁴³

The preterist interpretation runs into further problems when Revelation's futuristic emphasis is considered. The book purports to be a prophecy (Rev. 1:3; 22:7, 10) whose predictions are to be fulfilled subsequent to the time of writing (1:19; 4:1). Even Gentry admits that Revelation consists of "real prophecy."⁴⁴ Yet the beast's destruction of the woman is portrayed in a mere two verses (17:16–17). If the dissolution of the relationship between Jerusalem and Rome began after Revelation was written, the preterist view converts most of Revelation 17, which supposedly is speaking of a harmonious relationship between Rome and Jerusalem, into a *vaticinia ex eventu* prophecy. The passages outside the Apocalypse relied on by preterists to convey an alliance between first-century Jerusalem and Rome (John 11:48–50; 18:28–32; 19:12–16; Acts

⁴¹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 887.

⁴² Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2002), 245.

⁴³ Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New versus the Old* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 458.

⁴⁴ Kenneth L. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), 145.

4:26–28; 12:1–3; 17:7; 18:12–13) transpired decades before AD 65. Thus Hitchcock asks, “How can Revelation be a real prophecy of events ‘soon’ to be fulfilled, as Gentry alleges, if some of the events in the book have already begun to be fulfilled?”⁴⁵ While it is true that the futurist interpretation occasionally incorporates events that have already transpired (Rev. 5:6; 12:4–5), the preterist interpretation far exceeds this norm by converting virtually an entire chapter into history rather than prophecy.

ROME’S REVIVAL

The second problem with interpreting the beast of Revelation 17 as first-century Rome pertains to how preterists understand the verses speaking of Rome’s revival (17:8, 11). Preterists use three theories in an attempt to explain these revival texts. However, none of them offers a satisfying explanation of the texts’ details. First, Russell relies on the *Nero Redivivus* myth,⁴⁶ which is the rumor that after Nero’s alleged death “he had not died but had gone to Parthia where he remained in hiding to return someday at the head of a mighty army to regain his lost dominion.”⁴⁷ However, the problems associated with the *Nero Redivivus* myth as an explanation for these revival texts have led to its dismissal even by most modern preterists. Such problems include the fact that Irenaeus, who was a disciple of Polycarp, who in turn was discipled by the apostle John,⁴⁸ shows no knowledge of the *Nero Redivivus* myth.⁴⁹ Moreover, because the text predicts a revival and Nero never rose from the dead,⁵⁰ this view “ascribes to John a false

⁴⁵ Mark Hitchcock, “A Defense of the Domitianic Date of the Book of Revelation” (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2005), 105.

⁴⁶ Russell, *The Parousia*, 462. See also Foy E. Wallace, *The Book of Revelation Consisting of a Commentary on the Apocalypse of the New Testament* (Nashville: Wallace, 1966), 369.

⁴⁷ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 248. See also Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 17. Classical sources describing the rumor include Suetonius, *Nero* 57; Tacitus, *Histories* 1.2, 78; 2.8–9; and *Sibylline Oracles* 4.137–39.

⁴⁸ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.20.4–7.

⁴⁹ B. M. Newman, “The Fallacy of the Domitian Hypothesis: Critique of the Irenaeus Source as a Witness for the Contemporary-Historical Approach to the Interpretation of the Apocalypse,” *New Testament Studies* 10 (October 1963): 136.

⁵⁰ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation* (Columbus, OH:

prophecy based upon a silly superstition.”⁵¹ Second, Gentry attempts to explain Nero’s revival in terms of similar characteristics of Nero found in subsequent emperors.⁵² However, even Gentry admits that such parallels would not be sufficient to “cause the world to ‘wonder’ after the beast (Rev. 13:3).”⁵³

Third, the most prevalent explanation of the revival texts among modern preterists pertains to the political revival Rome enjoyed under the reign of Vespasian (69–79) after the tumult and civil war that the empire experienced when the Julio-Claudian line of Roman Caesars disappeared after Nero’s suicide in AD 68.⁵⁴ Despite its popularity among preterists, this view also exhibits inadequacies. For example the notion that the empire experienced extinction between Nero’s suicide and Vespasian’s accession appears overstated.⁵⁵ Tacitus described Nero’s death as being “welcomed with outbursts of joy.” He observed, “It is true that armed forces had fought before in this city, twice when Lucius Sella gained his victories and once when Cinna won. There was no less cruelty then than now; but now men showed inhuman indifference and never relaxed their pleasures for a single moment.”⁵⁶ Hanegraaff cites Tacitus who characterized this era as a time when “Rome was devastated.”⁵⁷ However, as Howe observes, “This was a near destruction of the city of Rome, not the Roman Empire.”⁵⁸ Even Gentry concedes that Rome did not experience destruction that matches what is predicted in Revelation 17:8, 11. He notes, “From June, AD 68, through December, AD 69, the Roman Empire suffered through

Lutheran Book Concern, 1943; reprint, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963), 394.

⁵¹ J. Ritchie Smith, “The Date of the Apocalypse,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 45 (April–June 1888): 311. See also Daniel K. Wong, “The Beast from the Sea in Revelation 13,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160 (July–September 2003): 346 n. 27.

⁵² Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 308–9.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 309.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 310–16; Bass, *Back to the Future*, 388–89; Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, 89–99; Ford, *Revelation*, 289; and Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, 149–50.

⁵⁵ Howe, *Breaking the Apocalypse Code*, 150–51.

⁵⁶ Tacitus, *Histories* 1.1, 4; 3.83.

⁵⁷ Tacitus, *Histories* 1.2, quoted in Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, 150.

⁵⁸ Howe, *Breaking the Apocalypse Code*, 151.

a gruesome and severe Civil War that *almost* brought the Empire down, and that had reverberations throughout the Empire.”⁵⁹

In addition the preterist view is inconsistent with the number of emperors given in 17:11. According to this verse the emperor who experienced the revival is the eighth king. This count does not fit Gentry’s scheme, since he understands Nero as the sixth emperor (v. 10a), Galba as the seventh emperor, who reigned for a short time (v. 10b),⁶⁰ Otho and Vitellius as the eighth and ninth emperors respectively, and Vespasian as the tenth emperor. In other words to make Vespasian the eighth king Gentry must skip both Otho and Vitellius. Ladd observes the arbitrariness of this type of reckoning. “Otho and Vitellius, unimportant as they may have been, were bona fide emperors and were recognized as such by ancient historians.”⁶¹ Bell similarly observes that “an ancient writer could no more have omitted them from his list of emperors than a modern American historian could omit William Henry Harrison, the ninth president, who caught pneumonia at his inauguration in 1841 and died a month later.”⁶² Gentry justifies skipping Otho and Vitellius by noting that the first seven kings are articular (v. 10) and the eighth king is anarthrous (v. 11).⁶³ However, this approach prompts Hitchcock to ask, “Would a reader, without a particular viewpoint to defend, really make the shift from Galba to Vespasian just based upon the lack of the definite article? One cannot simply ignore or skip Otho and Vitellius to arrive at Vespasian to fit a predetermined outcome.”⁶⁴

Hitchcock also notes:

⁵⁹ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 144 (italics added).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁶¹ George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 229.

⁶² Albert A. Bell, “The Date of John’s Apocalypse: The Evidence of Some Roman Historians Reconsidered,” *New Testament Studies* 25 (October 1978): 99.

⁶³ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 315–16. Not all preterists follow Gentry’s scheme of making Vespasian the eighth king. For example Ogden skips Galba, Otho, and Vitellius in order to make Vespasian the seventh king who reigned for a short time (Rev. 17:10), and Titus, the eighth king who returned or was revived (v. 11) (*The Avenging of the Apostles and Prophets*, 330–31).

⁶⁴ Hitchcock, “A Defense of the Domitianic Date of the Book of Revelation,” 162.

The mention of the eighth king seems to take the reader to the end. There is no mention of a ninth or tenth king. The eighth king is the final manifestation of the beast. The eighth brings the reign of the beast to its end. Speaking of the eighth and final form of the beast's rule, Rev 17:11 says, "and he goes to destruction." For Gentry, this is a reference to Vespasian. Two chapters later in Rev 19:20 this final destruction of the beast is described [when] the beast and the false prophet are cast alive into the lake of fire. Contextually, this must be the same destruction of the final head of the beast that is described in 17:11. Yet, Gentry interprets Rev 19:20 as a reference to Christ's providential destruction of Nero.⁶⁵

Other inconsistencies arise when 17:8, 11 are viewed as presenting a political revival. Revelation 13:3, 14; 17:8, 11 all seem to indicate that the beast that is wounded will be the same beast that is revived.⁶⁶ If the beast's death was personal and individual (in the death of Nero), as Gentry contends,⁶⁷ then his revival must also be personal and individual rather than national and impersonal. Therefore preterists are interpreting the prophecies regarding the beast's death as being fulfilled in Nero's individual, personal death while also interpreting the prophecies regarding the beast's revival as finding their fulfillment in Rome's political revival. "The big weakness of this proposal is its failure to recognize that the pronoun αὐτοῦ (*autou*, 'his') in the phrase τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ (*tou thanatou autou*, 'of his death') [in Rev. 13:3] limits the wounding and healing to one of the heads, a king, and cannot apply to the whole kingdom."⁶⁸

Moreover, many commentators have seen a connection between the revival texts (17:9, 11) and John's description of Christ's resurrection (1:4, 8, 17–18; 4:8).⁶⁹ Perhaps such deliberate paralleling may indicate that the revival spoken of in 17:9, 11 will also be personal and individual like Christ's resurrection, rather than

⁶⁵ Ibid., 163. For Gentry's association of Revelation 19:20 with the demise of Nero see Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, 426.

⁶⁶ Gentry relates all four passages to the beast's death and revival (*The Beast of Revelation*, 89–99).

⁶⁷ Ibid., 89–90.

⁶⁸ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 158.

⁶⁹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 864–65, 875–77; Johnson, "Revelation," 558; and Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 314.

merely impersonal and national. This notion of a personal resurrection of the beast is buttressed by the recognition that the same verb ἔζησεν is used to depict both Christ's resurrection and the beast's revival (2:8; 13:14).⁷⁰

Also it seems better to attach a global meaning to some of the terms mentioned in 17:8, rather than a localized meaning as mandated by the preterist AD 70 interpretation. While “world” (κόσμος) can have a localized meaning in some Johannine contexts (e.g., John 12:19), the word can also take on a global meaning in other contexts (e.g., 1:29; 3:16; 1 John 2:2). Thus context determines which meaning of the word should be embraced. The global rather than local meaning seems to work better in Revelation 17:8, given the global features in the chapter (v. 15).

Similarly the phrase βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς (17:8) is also found in 20:12, 15; and 21:27. According to Gentry's partial preterist system, 20:7–15 represents the futuristic section of the book⁷¹ and 21:27 is part of the eternal state, which he says is a present reality.⁷² Thus the nearly identical expression βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς has a global, universal meaning in these other contexts. If this expression has a universal, futuristic nuance in 20:12, 15; and 21:27, why should it not also have the same universal and futuristic meaning in 17:8?

ROME'S SEVEN HILLS

The third problem with interpreting the beast of Revelation 17 as first-century Rome pertains to difficulties related to understanding the seven mountains as the seven hills of Rome (v. 9). While some earlier preterists, such as Russell, sought to equate these seven mountains with the seven hills of Jerusalem,⁷³ this approach proved unhelpful to the preterist view. Russell identified only four

⁷⁰ Gregory H. Harris, “The Wound of the Beast in the Tribulation,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156 (October–December 1999): 466. Some futurists object to this interpretation on the grounds that Satan lacks the power to resurrect the dead (e.g., John F. Walvoord, “Revelation,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck [Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983; reprint, Colorado Springs: Cook, 1996], 960).

⁷¹ Gentry, “A Preterist View of Revelation,” 46 n. 25; 86.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 86–89.

⁷³ Russell, *The Parousia*, 492.

hills in Jerusalem.⁷⁴ Moreover, he said the mountains associated with the beast (17:3, 9) represent Jerusalem and the woman named Babylon is also Jerusalem. But this means two images depict Jerusalem. Thus most modern preterists have embraced the idea that the seven mountains associated with the beast represent Rome and the woman named Babylon represents Jerusalem. The woman sitting on the hills represents her influence or control over the hills (i.e., over Rome) rather than the woman being identified with the hills.⁷⁵ Thus preterists are clear in their declaration that the seven mountains represent Rome's famed seven hills.⁷⁶

However, the preterist approach is problematic, since it incorporates the flaws associated with viewing the seven mountains as Rome's seven hills.⁷⁷ First, why do preterists treat Revelation's other numbers (1,000; 12,000; 144,000) symbolically⁷⁸ while simul-

⁷⁴ Gregg, *Revelation: Four Views*, 410.

⁷⁵ Beagley, *The "Sitz im Leben" of the Apocalypse*, 107; Carrington, *The Meaning of Revelation*, 285; Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, 436 n. 14; Ford, *Revelation*, 280; Gentry, "A Preterist View of Revelation," 78; and Ogden, *The Avenging of the Apostles and Prophets*, 331.

Also several nonpreterist interpreters say the woman sitting on the seven hills or on the beast indicates her control or affiliation with these entities rather than her being identical to them. See Dyer, "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17–18 (Part 2)," 437–38; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 429; and John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 245.

⁷⁶ Bass, *Back to the Future*, 390; Chilton, *Paradise Restored*, 188; idem, *The Days of Vengeance*, 435–36; Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 4th rev. ed. (Powder Springs, GA: American, 1999), 359; Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, 426; Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, 113;

⁷⁷ The names of the seven hills are Capitoline, Aventine, Caelian, Esquiline, Quirinal, Viminal, and Palatine. Literature of the ancient world contains multiple references to the seven hills of Rome. See Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 6.5; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 4.13.2–3; Horace, *Carmen Saeculare* 7; Juvenal, *Satires* 9.130; Ovid, *Trista* 1.5.69; Pliny, *Natural History* 3.66–67; Varro, *On the Latin Language* 5.7.41; Virgil, *Georgics* 2.535; and idem, *Aeneid* 6.782–83. The *Sibylline Oracles* also make numerous references to the "seven-hilled Rome" (*Sibylline Oracles* 2:18; 13:45; 14:108; see also 11:113, 116). That Rome was identified with the topographical feature of the seven hills is also evidenced by Suetonius's description of an annual Roman festival known as the *Septimontium* that celebrated these seven hills (see Suetonius, *Domitian* 4).

⁷⁸ Gentry, "A Preterist View of Revelation," 82.

taneously approaching the number seven so literally that it not only identifies the topography of Rome but also identifies the very emperor in power when John wrote? Gentry's explanation that Revelation's large rounded numbers are symbolic while the shorter unrounded numbers are literal⁷⁹ is unsatisfying and leaves readers with the impression that he is basing his view on a predetermined theological outcome.

Second, because the seven mountains (v. 9) are specifically interpreted as kings (v. 10), they are unrelated to Rome's topography.⁸⁰ Most preterists seem to rely on the New King James Version, which translates verse 10 as "There are also seven kings."⁸¹ This translation gives the impression that the seven mountains are a separate entity from the seven kings rather than the same as the seven kings. The New American Standard Bible translates verse 10 as "and they are seven kings," leaving the impression that the mountains and the kings are the same. Preterists seem to prefer the New King James Version translation, since their system requires that Jerusalem was in an alliance with Rome as suggested by the seven hills.⁸² Preterists also argue that Nero was the sixth of the seven kings as evidence for an early date for the Apocalypse.⁸³ However, the New American Standard Bible translation is preferred because the Greek simply reads "and they are seven kings" (καὶ βασιλεῖς ἑπτὰ εἰσιν).⁸⁴ As Bullinger explains:

The "seven mountains" are, according to this, "seven kings." It does not say that "there are seven kings" over and above, and beside the

⁷⁹ Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 163; and idem, *The Beast of Revelation*, 181.

⁸⁰ Johnson, "Revelation," 559; and Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 227.

⁸¹ Balyeat, *Babylon, the Great City of Revelation*, 20, 81; Chilton, *Paradise Restored*, 188; idem, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 436; David B. Currie, *Rapture: The End-Times Error That Leaves the Bible Behind* (Manchester, NH: Sophia, 2003), 323; Kenneth J. Davies, *Babylon the Harlot City* (Bradford, PA: International, 2000), 25; Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, 426; Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, 113; and Ogden, *The Avenging of the Apostles and Prophets*, 331.

⁸² Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 152.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁸⁴ Tony Garland, *A Testimony of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Camano Island, WA: Spirit and Truth, 2004), 2:47.

“seven mountains;” but that the “seven mountains are (i.e., represent) seven kings.” . . . For interpreters to take these literally as “mountains,” in the midst of a context which the same interpreters take to be *symbolic*; and in the face of the *interpretation* actually given by the angel that “they are seven kings,” is to play fast and loose with the word of prophecy.⁸⁵

Third, the symbolic nature of the mountains indicates that they do not represent Rome’s topography. Such symbolism is apparent from the woman who “sits upon or beside the seven mountains (Rev. 17:9), just as she sits upon or beside ‘many waters’ (v. 1). Since the symbol of the ‘many waters’ is explained in verse 15, analogy would dictate that the seven mountains are also symbolic rather than literal hills.”⁸⁶ Similarly since the woman sits on the beast (v. 3), which symbolizes nations (13:2; Dan. 7), consistency dictates that the hills on which the woman sits (Rev. 17:9) are also symbolic. Zuck similarly observes, “A prostitute obviously cannot sit on seven hills at once (17:9) and so we conclude that the hills are symbols.”⁸⁷ Glasgow also notes, “The mountains are, like other terms, to be understood symbolically. If the woman is not literal, then why should the mountains be so thought?”⁸⁸

Fourth, 17:9 is better translated “seven mountains” (ASV, KJV, NASB) rather than “seven hills” (NEB, NIV, RSV, TEV). Johnson explains, “Places in Revelation where ὄρος (*oros*) or *orē* occurs and is translated ‘mountain(s)’ in most all versions are 6:14–16; 8:8; 14:1; 16:20; 21:10.”⁸⁹ Because global catastrophe seems to be described in 6:14–16 and 16:20, these passages cannot be describing the destruction of the “hills” of the earth. Instead they are

⁸⁵ E. W. Bullinger, *The Apocalypse or “The Day of the Lord”* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1909; reprint, London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1972), 532–33. See also Pink, *The Antichrist*, 271–72.

⁸⁶ Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New versus the Old*, 458.

⁸⁷ Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1991; reprint, Colorado Springs: Cook, 1996), 244.

⁸⁸ James Glasgow, *The Apocalypse, Translated and Expounded* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1872), 439.

⁸⁹ Johnson, “Revelation,” 563. See also Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 868; J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse: A Series of Special Lectures on the Revelation of Jesus Christ, with Revised Text* (Philadelphia: Approved, 1865; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 391; and Vanderwaal, *Hebrews–Revelation*, 102.

describing mountains. Moreover, a “mountain” falling into the sea rather than a mere “hill” doing so seems to be the proper meaning in 8:8, given the global magnitude of the ensuing judgment involving destruction of a third of the ocean’s ships and sealife.⁹⁰

Fifth, mere recognition of a well-known topographical reference would not require the special wisdom or insight mentioned in verse 9a.⁹¹ Interestingly, “the word rendered ‘mind’ in 17:9 and ‘understanding’ in 13:18 is the same” (νοῦς).⁹² Thus if skill and knowledge of gematria are needed to calculate the beast’s number and name, then an equal level of sophistication is needed to determine the meaning of the seven mountains.

Sixth, the seven-hills language may not actually identify Rome’s topography. As noted earlier, some writers count eight or nine hills in Rome.⁹³ Interestingly other cities also have seven hills.⁹⁴ Although Russell was able to name only four hills in Jerusalem, others are confident that Jerusalem has seven hills,⁹⁵ making Jerusalem just as viable a candidate as Rome as a city on seven hills.

Seventh, the notion that John’s audience in Asia Minor would have associated Rome with her famed “seven hills” topography may be more of an assumption than a proven fact. Beagely notes, “The references to Rome as ‘the city of the seven hills’ comes from the Western Mediterranean area; we cannot be certain about its use in the East.”⁹⁶ Minear also questions Eastern familiarity with Rome’s

⁹⁰ It is difficult to know if ὄρος in Revelation 14:1 and 21:10 refers to a mountain or a mere hill, since these verses describe heavenly or other-worldly realities.

⁹¹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 867; Johnson, “Revelation,” 558; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 492; and Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 295–96.

⁹² Pink, *The Antichrist*, 271. See also Bullinger, *The Apocalypse or “The Day of the Lord,”* 531–32; and Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 315.

⁹³ For example E. M. Blaiklock mentions *nine* hills (“Rome,” in *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975], 5:162).

⁹⁴ Bullinger, *The Apocalypse or “The Day of the Lord,”* 534; and Vanderwaal, *Hebrews–Revelation*, 102.

⁹⁵ Bullinger, *The Apocalypse or “The Day of the Lord,”* 534; Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, 391; Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics*, 431; and Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (New York: Scribner, 1890; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 2:546.

⁹⁶ Beagley, *The “Sitz im Leben” of the Apocalypse*, 103 n. 343.

topography. He adds, “It is true that secular Roman writers had long associated the city of Rome with its seven hills, but it is doubtful if John and his readers would have been conversant with that literature.”⁹⁷ Thus Ewing warns against reading too much into John’s reference to the seven hills or mountains. He concludes, “It may be hasty therefore to automatically presume that this Roman reference would be a shared understanding in Asia Minor.”⁹⁸ In sum, contrary to the assumption of modern preterists, Kiddle correctly observes that the seven mountains have more in common with “the *scope and nature* of the beast’s power” than they do with Rome’s topography.⁹⁹

In conclusion neither Rome’s alliance with Israel, Rome’s revival, or Rome’s seven hills argue convincingly that a relationship between Jerusalem and Rome in AD 66–70 is portrayed in Revelation 17:3b, 8–9, 11. Thus neither the prophetic information regarding Babylon’s harlotry nor her alliance with the beast is sufficient to equate the Babylonian harlot with first-century Jerusalem.

⁹⁷ Paul S. Minear, *I Saw a New Earth: An Introduction to the Visions of the Apocalypse* (Washington, DC: Corpus, 1968), 238.

⁹⁸ Ewing, “The Identification of Babylon the Harlot in the Book of Revelation,” 63.

⁹⁹ Martin Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John*, Moffatt New Testament Commentary (New York: Harper, 1940; reprint, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963), 296.