

# The Book of Revelation



# The Recipients



# The Author

## *Internal Evidence*

- “John” (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8)
- A Jewish Christian
  - Familiar with OT
  - Apocalyptic genre was mainly Jewish
  - Familiar with the Temple
  - Allusions to Palestine
  - Semitizing Greek

## *External Evidence*

- Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 81 (155 AD)
  - Written by John
- Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5:30:3 (180 AD)
  - At the end of Domitian’s reign
- Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6:25 (320 AD)
  - Gospel, Revelation, 3 epistles

# 1<sup>st</sup> Century Roman Emperors

- Augustus – 27 BC-AD 14
- Tiberius – AD 14-37
- Caligula – AD 37-41
- Claudius – AD 41-54
- Nero – AD 54-68
- Galba – June 68-Jan. 69
- Otho – Jan. 69-April 69
- Vitellius – April 69-Dec. 69
- Vespasian – Dec. 69-June 79
- Titus – AD 79-81
- Domitian – AD 81-96
- Nerva AD 96-98
- Trajan – AD 98-117

# Interpretive Schemes

- Historical-Background: Rome is the enemy; they will fall; all who follow in the pattern of Rome will likely fall; advantage is it fits context best
- Continuous Historical: Events occur in successive eras of the Christian future; main antagonist is the RCC; weaknesses are subjectivity and irrelevance to original readers
- Historical & Preterist: Connects to destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD; Roman persecution in the mid-60s by Nero
- Futurist/Premillennial: Yet still future events; haphazardly applied to any and all current events of the interpreter; has repeatedly been discredited due to failed predictions, flawed theology, and poor applications of Scripture

Martius

Aprilis

Maius

Iunius

Iulius

Augustus

September

October

November

December

Ianuarius

Februaris

# The Date

- Early Date: early/mid-60's AD
  - Conflict with Jews (*contra 17:1, 9, 18; 18:11, 19*)
  - Conflict with Rome: persecution under Nero
- Late Date: late 90's AD
  - Conflict with Rome: persecution under Domitian
  - Conflict with Rome: imperial cult in Asia Minor
- Middle Date?
  - e.g., Jim McGuiggan, *The Bible Speaks Today Commentary on Revelation*

# Christian Persecution by Nero

*"But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind.*

# Christian Persecution by Nero

*"Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed."*

(Cornelius Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44)

# Christian Persecution by Domitian and Trajan (Pliny #96)

*"It is a rule, Sir, which I inviolably observe, to refer myself to you in all my doubts; for who is more capable of guiding my uncertainty or informing my ignorance? Having never been present at any trials of the Christians, I am unacquainted with the method and limits to be observed either in examining or punishing them. Whether any difference is to be made on account of age, or no distinction allowed between the youngest and the adult; whether repentance admits to a pardon, or if a man has been once a Christian it avails him nothing to recant; whether the mere profession of Christianity, albeit without crimes, or only the crimes associated therewith are punishable in all these points I am greatly doubtful.*

# Christian Persecution by Domitian and Trajan (Pliny #96)

*"In the meanwhile, the method I have observed towards those who have been denounced to me as Christians is this: I interrogated them whether they were Christians; if they confessed it I repeated the question twice again, adding the threat of capital punishment; if they still persevered, I ordered them to be executed. For whatever the nature of their creed might be, I could at least feel no doubt that contumacy and inflexible obstinacy deserved chastisement. There were others also possessed with the same infatuation, but being citizens of Rome, I directed them to be carried thither.*

# Christian Persecution by Domitian and Trajan (Pliny #96)

*"These accusations spread (as is usually the case) from the mere fact of the matter being investigated and several forms of the mischief came to light. A placard was put up, without any signature, accusing a large number of persons by name.*

*Those who denied they were, or had ever been, Christians, who repeated after me an invocation to the Gods, and offered adoration, with wine and frankincense, to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for that purpose, together with those of the Gods, and who finally cursed Christ none of which acts, it is said, those who are really Christians can be forced into performing these I thought it proper to discharge.*

# Christian Persecution by Domitian and Trajan (Pliny #96)

*"They affirmed, however, the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food but food of an ordinary and innocent kind. Even this practice, however, they had abandoned after the publication of my edict, by which, according to your orders, I had forbidden political associations. I judged it so much the more necessary to extract the real truth, with the assistance of torture, from two female slaves, who were styled deaconesses: but I could discover nothing more than depraved, excessive superstition.*

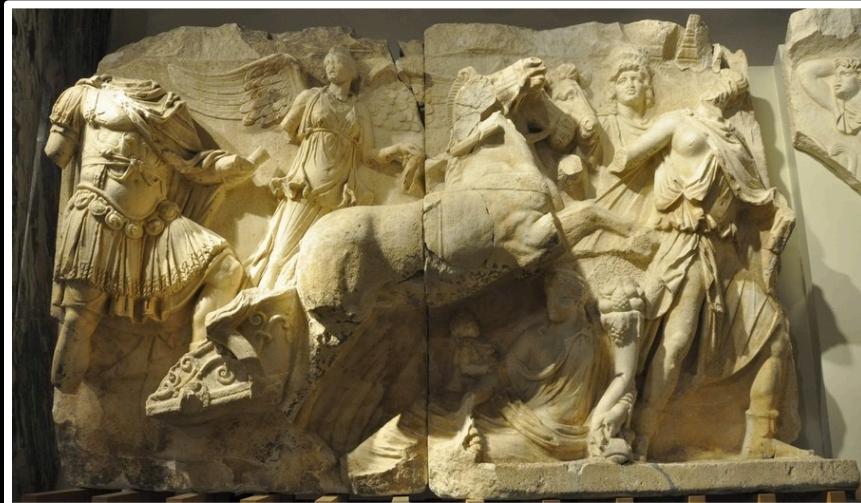
# Christian Persecution by Domitian and Trajan (Pliny #96)

*"I therefore adjourned the proceedings, and betook myself at once to your counsel. For the matter seemed to me well worth referring to you, especially considering the numbers endangered. Persons of all ranks and ages, and of both sexes are, and will be, involved in the prosecution. For this contagious superstition is not confined to the cities only, but has spread through the villages and rural districts; it seems possible, however, to check and cure it. 'Tis certain at least that the temples, which had been almost deserted, begin now to be frequented; and the sacred festivals, after a long intermission, are again revived; while there is a general demand for sacrificial animals, which for some time past have met with but few purchasers. From hence it is easy to imagine what multitudes may be reclaimed from this error, if a door be left open to repentance."*

# Imperial Cult Worship



Tiberius Caesar, son of  
the divine Augustus

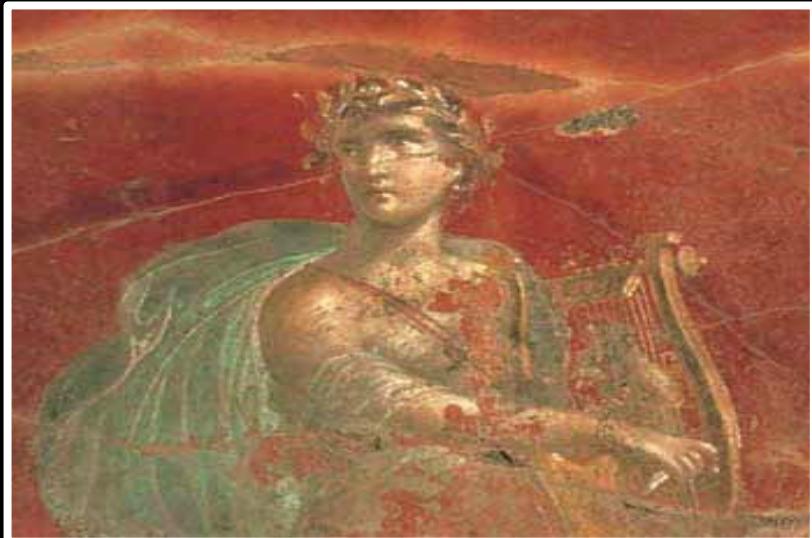


Apotheosis of Roman  
Emperor Lucius Verus  
in the chariot of Sol,  
led by the goddess  
Victory

# Imperial Cult Worship

Roman emperors often depicted themselves as Apollo

*Nero depicted as Apollo*



*Augustus statue at Prima Porta  
with Apollo on a griffin*



# Imperial Cult Worship



Inscription in biblical  
Pergamum deifying  
Emperor Trajan:

Emperor, Nerva,  
Caesar of God, son of  
Nerva, Trajan Ariston  
Germanicus Dacicus,  
Lord of earth and sea.

# Imperial Cult Worship



Inscription in biblical Smyrna designating the city as neokoros. The inscription particularly honors a man who took the lead in enforcing worship of the emperors and reads:

Cl[audius] Aristophanes  
Aurelianos Neokoros of  
Sebaston [i.e. Emperor]

# Imperial Cult Worship

*“The signal development, first manifest in the dedications of the Temple of the Sebastoi but reflecting broader trends in society was the use of neokoros as a technical title for a city with a provincial temple of the emperors. The power of this innovation was explosive. In a matter of years it changed the public rhetoric of empire in Asia. Within a century it had transformed the discourse of Roman imperialism in the eastern Mediterranean. From the late first century onward, the most prestigious self-designation that could be employed by a city in Asia was neokoros, indicating the presence of a provincial temple where the emperors and their relatives were worshipped” (Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins*, p.150).*

# Imperial Cult Terminology

- Benefactor (euergetes)
- God (theos)
- Son of God (theou huios, filus divi)
- Lord (kurios)
- Father (pater)
- Savior (soter)
- Gospel (euangelion)
- Peace (pax)

*“The churches of the Book of Revelation were located geographically, organizationally, and culturally where the imperial cult was most heavily distributed.”*

- Thompson, The Book of Rev.: Apocalypse and Empire 160.

# The Overall Message

- In spite of how things look from an earthly perspective, God's people and their stand for righteousness will always be victorious and the enemies of God will be vanquished.
- This does not mean God's people won't suffer, or that triumph will come quickly. But at the end of the day the rule of Christ and the church still stand – and where is Rome??
- Just work toward a better understanding in this class



In the end;  
**GOD WINS**