

The Seven Churches of Asia Minor (Revelation 1- 3)

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"Meat Offered To Idols" In Pergamon And Thyatira

Colin Hemer, in his book *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (1986), has done an outstanding job of placing the letters to the Seven Churches of Asia Minor (Revelation 1-3) in their historical-geographical setting at the end of the First Century AD. Hemer's book is a reworking of his doctoral thesis at the University of Manchester that was accepted in 1969. He did his research under the supervision of the late Professor F. F. Bruce.

When Hemer deals with the phrase "meat offered to idols" he comments that there are "two aspects of the problem ... at Corinth, the consumption of idol-consecrated meat from the public market, and participation in the idolatrous guild-feast (see 1 Cor. 8:1-13 and 10:20-30). The latter was the particular issue at Thyatira" (1986:91, 92). A year later, Dr. Charles A. Kennedy, who is now professor emeritus at Virginia Tech, in an article in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East*, challenged the standard interpretation and set forth another view of the phrase "meat offered to idols" (1987:227-236). Kennedy contends, "Paul is addressing himself to one of the most pervasive problems faced by Christians anywhere at any time, the proper rites to be accorded their dead. Eidolothuton should be translated as 'memorial meals for the dead'." (1987: 229).

The phrase "meat offered to idols" appears ten times in the New Testament. The first mention is in Acts 15 where the Jerusalem Council issued the decree to the

Gentile believers in the Lord Jesus that they were to “abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourself from these, you do well” (15:29 NKJV). The second time it is used in the Book of Acts is when Paul appears before James in Jerusalem. “But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written and decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality” (21:25 NKJV). Paul addresses this issue in his first epistle to the church at Corinth in chapters 8-11. Paul begins this section, “Now concerning things offered to idols” (8:1). The phrase appears six times in the context (8:1, 4, 7, 10; 10:19, 28). The last two references are found in two of the letters address to the seven churches of Asia Minor (Rev. 2:14, 20).

This paper will examine C. A. Kennedy’s view of the phrase “meat offered to idols” as it relates to the church at Pergamos (2:14) and Thyatira (2:20).

C. A. Kennedy’s View

Dr. Kennedy views the phrase “meat offered to idols” as a memorial meal for the dead. In his article, he begins by looking at the etymology of the word *eidolothuton*, the phrase translated “meat offered to idols” and then the archaeological evidence to support his thesis.

Kennedy points out the presupposition of the usual interpretation “that the word *eidolothuton* is, as it were, self-explanatory. The two elements of the word, ‘idol’ and ‘sacrifice’ combine to form the compound ‘meat/food/things offered to idols.’ The ‘idols’ are taken to

mean the statues of the Greek gods; therefore the sacrifices must be the victims slaughtered at their temples. Such meat, so the argument goes, is not to be eaten by Christians (1 Cor. 10:14; cf. Acts 15:29)" (1987: 228, 229).

However, the word *eidolon* is rarely used in secular Greek in the usual sense of "idol" (i.e. a statue of a god). Kennedy states, "the common meaning of the term is 'image,' 'likeness,' or a range of meanings we today would associate with a photograph. It is the representation of a real person" (1987: 229). He then gives several examples. One example lead him to the second association, that of "the shade or shadow of a person in the sense of the Latin *umbra*, the unsubstantial form and shape of one who had died" (1987: 229).

The second element of the word *thuton* is usually translated "sacrifice" yet this word has a wide range of meanings. Kennedy concludes his study of the etymology of the word by saying, "The combination of *eidolo-* and *thuton* should then be understood to mean 'meal for the image of the deceased' or more simply 'a funerary meal / offering,' 'a memorial meal for the dead'." (1987: 230).

"Funerals in the Graeco-Roman world were conducted according to custom or tradition. Rituals and procedures were carefully detailed to insure the proper burial for the deceased and the purification of the family from the contamination of death. Funeral banquets were prescribed on certain days immediately following the death and on anniversaries of the burial in subsequent annual rites, honored the dead as one of the *divi parentum* or *di parentes*" (Kennedy 1987: 230, 231).

“An important element in the funeral rites was the image of the deceased. Wax masks were made and incorporated into effigies that might be displayed in public” (Kennedy 1987: 231). Painted portraits could be displayed and for the wealthy, a sculptured portrait bust. An example of a Roman patrician carrying the death masks of his deceased relatives can be seen in the Barberini Museum in Rome.

The best archaeological illustration of the memorial meals for the dead can be found in Pompeii, Italy. The city was covered with dust and ash during the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79 that left most of the necropolis intact. A tomb of Gnaeus Vibrius Saturninus exists outside the Herculaneum Gate on the Street of the Tombs. One entered the tomb complex via a small entrance from the street. A triclinium was in the center of the courtyard so the family members could recline while they ate the memorial meal in honor of the deceased relative. Elsewhere in the Pompeii necropolis one can see statues of the deceased person as well as memorial chapels with the image of the dead. Clement of Alexandria probably had similar tombs in Egypt in mind when he said: “Tombs are objects of reverence in just the same way as temples are: in fact, pyramids, mausoleums and labyrinths are as it were temples (naoi) of dead men, just as the temples are tombs of the gods” (Exhortation to the Greeks 4; LCL 111-113).

Kennedy points out the irony of this statement by saying, “In this very nice turn of phrases, Clement manages to criticize the cult of the dead and the pagan gods at the same time. If men set up shrines (i.e. tombs) to dead men, they tacitly admit that the gods venerated in shrines (i.e. temples) are just as dead” (1987: 233).

Whenever “meat offered to idols” is mentioned in the Scriptures, it is always associated with sexual immorality. Apparently, at times, the funerary meals would degenerate into orgies because the drinking got out of hand. This connection is evident in the two letters to the churches of Asia Minor.

Funerary Meals in Pergamos (Rev. 2:14)

The Lord Jesus instructs the Apostle John to write to the angel (or church representative) of the church in Pergamos (Rev. 2:12-17). John describes the Risen Lord Jesus as the One with the “sharp two-edged sword” (2:12). This metaphor is used elsewhere in the New Testament for the Word of God (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12; cf. Rev. 1:16). He commends them for holding fast to the Name of the Lord Jesus and not denying Him in spite of the persecution in the city “where Satan dwells” (2:13). However, the Lord had a few things against the church at Pergamos. First, there were some in the church that held to the “doctrine of Balaam” which is described as the “stumbling block before the Children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality” (2:14). Second, there were also some in the church that held to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans (2:15). This error was in the Church at Ephesus, but the leaders of that church took a stand against this heresy (2:6).

Dr. Robert Thomas, in his commentary on the book of Revelation, points out that these are two separate groups within the church. The word houtos (“thus”) in verse 15 “reflects that they were like, but not identical with, those who held the Balaamite doctrine. The introduction of the Nicolaitans with kai (‘also’) and

homoios ('thus' or 'in like manner') also argues for two separate groups. The most consistent deduction is that there were two different but similar groups in this church, both of which had disobeyed the decision of the Jerusalem council in regard to idolatrous practices and fornication (cf. Acts 15:20, 29)" (1992: 193).

The earliest witness to the Nicolaitans is the Church Father, Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (ca. 115 – ca. 202). He was a disciple of Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna in Asia Minor. Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John. In his work *Against Heresies*, chapter 26, Irenaeus wrote: "The Nicolaitanes are the follower of that Nicolas who was one of the seven first ordained to the diaconate by the apostles (Acts 6:5). They lead lives of unrestrained indulgence. The character of these men is very plainly pointed out in the Apocalypse of John, [when they are represented] as teaching that it is a matter of indifference to practice adultery, and to eat things sacrificed to idols. Wherefore the Word has also spoken of them thus: 'But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate' (Rev. 2:6)" (1994:352). Tertullian, a North African Christian apologist writing around AD 200, in his *On Prescription Against Heretics*, chapter 33, associates a form of the Nicolaitan error with "meat offered to idols" and fornication (1994: 259).

Dr. Thomas takes the kai ("also") in verse 15 as a comparison between two groups within the church, and that both held similar false doctrines. He renders verse 15 as "You have also [in addition to those who hold the teaching of Balaam] those who hold in like manner [to the way the Balaamites hold their teaching] the teaching of the Nicolaitans" (1992: 194). The two groups "arrived

at the same goal, that of eating meat sacrificed to idols and fornication, but they followed different paths to get there” (1992: 194).

In order to understand the “doctrine of Balaam” one must go back to the account found in Numbers 22-25, 31. Balaam, a prophet of the LORD (Num. 22:18), was invited by Balak, king of Moab, to curse the nation of Israel. At first, Balaam refused to go to Moab, but later went to Balak. He went, however, with strict instructions from the Lord to say only what the Lord told him to say. Each time Balak asked Balaam to curse the Israelites, he turned around and blessed Israel (23:7-10, 18-24; 24:3-9, 15-19; cf. Gen. 12:1-3).

But what is the “doctrine of Balaam”? The doctrine of Balaam is the same as the counsel of Balaam (Num. 31:16). Apparently what happened was Balaam told Balak he could only bless the nation of Israel but not curse it. As he departed, he counseled Balak on how to get the God of Israel angry with His people. The plan was quite simple: get the Moabite women to commit harlotry with the men of Israel (Num. 25:1-3).

How does this incident relate to the “meat offered to idols” and sexual immorality as well as the Nicolaitans in the church at Pergamos? The books of Numbers and the Psalms give us the answer. In Numbers 25:2; the Moabites invited the people of Israel to “the sacrifice of their gods”. The psalmist reflects on the incident in Numbers 25 by saying, “They joined themselves also to Baal of Peor, and ate sacrifices made to the dead. Thus they provoked Him to anger with their deeds, and the plague broke out among them” (Ps. 106:28, 29).

Kennedy observes that M. Dahood translates this as

“banquet of the dead,” and the “sacrifices of their gods” in Numbers 25:2 is “the idolatrous meals introduced to the Israelites by the Moabite women. These meals were apparently funeral banquets in honor of their ancestors. The dead are described as gods in 1 Sam. 28:13 and Isa. 8:19, two situations where men wish to know about the future and seek out the dead for answers. In a text from Ugarit, Anat addresses her deceased brother Baal with these words: ‘Your comrades are the gods, the dead your comrades.’ Since Baal was already a god in life, the change of status brought about by his death put him in a new company of gods, the dead” (1987: 230).

The Lord Jesus commands the church to repent of their tolerance for those in the church that followed the doctrine of Balaam as well as the Nicolaitans. If they did not, He said He would come quickly and fight against them with the sword of His mouth (2:16). This sword may have a dual reference. First, to the Word of God, and second, to the sword of judgment. In the Balaam account, the Angel of the LORD appears before Balaam with a drawn sword (Num. 22:23, 31). In the Hebrew Scriptures, the Angel of the LORD is a theophany, or a pre-incarnate appearance, of the Lord Jesus Christ (Walvoord 1969: 51-54). After the sin at Baal Peor, Moses commanded the judges of Israel to kill all those involved in the sin (Num. 25:5). Eventually, Balaam was killed with the sword (Num. 31:8).

The message to the church at Pergamos was clear, if you do not take care of the sins caused by those that followed the “doctrine of Balaam” and the Nicolaitans, the Lord would judge the church very severely, even to the point of death. The book of Hebrews quotes Prov. 3:11, 12: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the

Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives" (Heb. 12:5,6). The New Testament demonstrates that God's chastening of His children can be very severe, even to the point of death. The Apostle John, in his first epistle, says, "there is a sin leading to death" (5:16).

The Apostle Paul wrote that many believers "sleep" in Corinth because they abused the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:30). Earlier in the same context concerning "meat offered to idols", Paul uses the event at Baal Peor as an example of God's chastening and an admonition to the Church (1 Cor. 10:8-11). For the individual believer, Paul admonishes, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has over taken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:12,13).

There were some people in the church at Pergamos that did not engage in the memorial meals to the dead. For them, the Overcomers, the Lord promised He would "give some of the hidden manna to eat" (2:17). The contrast is quite obvious. Those in the church who were not walking according to the Word of God were eating at the banquets for the dead, thus enjoying the "pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. 11:25). The Overcomers "disciplined" their bodies and "brought it into subjection" so that they could "win the prize" (1 Cor. 9:24-27). In the context of the letter, the prize would be the "manna" and the "white stone" on which would be written a new name that no one knows except the one

who receives it (Rev. 2:17). Those that followed the “doctrine of Balaam” and the Nicolaitans would be “disqualified” from the race (1 Cor. 9:27).

The “hidden manna” is most likely the manna that is in the Ark of the Covenant in Heaven (Rev. 11:19, cf. Ex. 16:32-34) and refers to a Banquet in the Kingdom. This manna will be the reward for the Overcomers, in contrast to the unhallowed food at the memorial meal for the dead. An interesting observation is that whenever the Bible records the Children of Israel eating something other than the manna during the forty years, death by plague resulted (quail - Num. 11:31-34; Ps. 106:14,15; cf. 1 Cor. 10:6; sacrifice to the dead at Shittim - Num. 25:1-3; cf. 1 Cor. 10:8). The manna did not stop until they entered the Land (Ex. 16:35; Josh. 5:12; Neh. 9:20, 21).

The other promise to the Overcomer was a “white stone” with their new name written on it. This is probably an allusion to the victor’s name placed on a monument of white marble, in contrast to the Pergamos granite, placed around the gymnasiums of Pergamos (Sauer 1956:63-65; Hemer 1986: 102). The athletic victors were afforded a special banquet (Thomas 1992: 201; cf. Rev. 19:9).

Funerary Meals in Thyatira (Rev. 2:20)

The church at Thyatira had the same problem as the church at Pergamos. Hemer notes that this is the “longest and most difficult of the seven letters [and] is addressed to the least known, least important and least remarkable of the cities.” He goes on to say that “the letter was not obscure to the church at Thyatira; the

problem lies in our remoteness from the contemporary facts" (1986: 106).

Most commentaries, when discussing the "meat offered to idols" and sexual immorality in the church at Thyatira, attribute the practices to the membership rites of the local trade guilds (trade unions). Each guild had a patron deity and banquets with food offered to that deity as well as immoral activity. In order to have a position in the guild the Christian would have to participate in such activities. In the case of the church at Thyatira, one prophetess was saying it was all right to be involved in these events. I do not believe the phrase "meat offered to idols" has anything to do with the guilds.

John begins this letter with the threefold characteristics of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God, the One who has eyes like a flame of fire and feet like fine brass (2:18). The Lord commends them for two works, their faith and their love. As Thomas points out: "love is demonstrated in service to others and faith is shown through endurance of hardship imposed through persecution" (1992: 211). Gene Getz in his book, *Sharpening the Focus of the Church* points out three marks of a mature church: faith, hope and love (1 Cor. 13:13; 1974: 53-61). The church at Thyatire was missing one of the three marks, i.e. hope, or a joyful anticipation, in the return of Christ. When one examines the problem in the church - immorality, it becomes obvious why hope is missing. The last Person the church wanted to see was the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle John describes the hope of the return of Christ as a "purifying hope" because some day believers in the Lord Jesus shall see Him as He is (I John 3:1-3). On the other hand, some believers will be "ashamed" at His coming (I John 2:28).

The church at Thyatire lacked hope because they tolerate the immorality that was going on in the church.

Like previous churches, the Lord had a few things against this church. The problem was that the elders of the church “allowed that women Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and beguile My servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols” (2:20). Apparently there was a strong woman in the church who considered herself a prophetess, was nicknamed Jezebel, and took an active teaching role in the church. She taught an “alternative lifestyle” to the Lord’s servants by advocating that they attend memorial meals for the dead and engage in sexual immorality. Several things should be noted here. First, there were godly prophetesses in the early church and women that exercised the gift of prophecy (Anna - Luke 2:36; the daughters of Philip - Acts 21:9; 1 Cor.11: 5). Second, Jezebel’s teaching was clearly contrary to the clear injunction by the Apostle Paul for women not to teach and have authority over men (1 Tim. 2:12). Third, whether this woman was a believer or not is debatable. If she was a believer, she was about to come under the severe hand of God’s chastening (1 Cor. 11:30; Heb. 12:5, 6).

The parallels between this unknown woman and her namesake Jezebel are striking. This woman had an unusually strong influence in the church at Thyatira just as Jezebel had a strong influence over her husband Ahab as well as over Israel’s public policy (1 Kings 16:31-33; 21:25,26). Both women lead their people into idolatry (1 Kings 18:4, 19), and both women lead their people into sexual immorality (2 Kings 9:22,30; cf. Jer. 4:30; Nah. 3:4).

The Lord had given this woman time to repent of her immoral sexual behavior, but she refused. She enjoyed the pleasures of sin ... for a season. The Lord lowered His heavy hand of chastening upon her and threatened her with death. "Indeed, I will cast her into a sickbed" (2:22). Some have taken the word "sickbed" to mean "funeral bier or bed laid on a bier" (Hort 1908:30). If the reference is indeed to the funeral bier the Lord, in essence, is saying: "Jezebel, since you like going to memorial meals for the dead so much and engaging in sexual immorality, fine. Now all the pagans in Thyatira and the surrounding villages will attend your memorial meal for the dead! Prepare to die!" A number of Roman sarcophagi depict the funeral bier on them. Two examples are one that was excavated in Antioch-on-the-Orontes and another that is in the Vatican Museum.

The Lord will use this severe chastening as an example to the other churches in the area (and us today). The One who had the "eyes like a flame of fire" (2:18) is the "one who searches the mind and heart" (2:23). He encourages the rest of the church to "hold fast what you have till I come" (2:24). The hope of the Lord's return should be a purifying hope (I John 3:1-3). He then holds out the promise to the Overcomers that they will reign with Christ and have authority over the nations (2:26-29; cf. Ps. 2:8, 9; 2 Tim. 2:11-13).

Conclusion

This article dealt with understanding the phrase "meat offered to idols" in two of the letters that the Lord Jesus addresses to seven churches in Asia Minor at the end of the First century. Dr. Charles A. Kennedy has set forth, in my opinion, the best explanation for the phrase "meat

offered to idols". The phrase should be understood as a memorial meal for the dead that sometimes degenerates into an immoral affair. If this understanding is correct, the interpretation will help clarify the message of the letters to the churches at Pergamos and Thyatira.

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The King and I: John in Ephesus --Part 1

THE KING AND I: JOHN IN EPHESUS The King

And I:The Third Seal (Rev. 6:5, 6)--Part 3 (Part 1)

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Emperor Domitian, the self-proclaimed "Lord and God" and ruthless dictator, reigned from AD 81 to 96. He was the son of Emperor Vespasian and the brother of Titus, the conquerors of Jerusalem and the Judean people. During the last few years of his life, Domitian became very superstitious. In fact, on the day before he was murdered, he consulted an astrologer. During this time he also consulted Apollo, the god of music and poetry, as well as the god of light, truth and prophecy! To commemorate his superstition, the emperor-minted coins depicting Apollo on one side and a raven, a bird associated with prophecy, on the reverse side (Jones 1990:266). It was believed one could tell the future by watching this bird's flight (Kanitz 1973-74:47), so Domitian looked to it to foretell his immediate future. Ironically, Suetonius, a Roman historian and senator, records, "A few months before he (Domitian) was killed, a raven perched on the Capitalium and cried, 'All will be well,' an omen which some interpreted as follows: '... a raven ... could not say, "It is well," only declared "It will be well."' (Domitian 23:2; 1992:385).

Emperor Domitian died soon after and all was well!

The Apostle John, exiled on the island of Patmos about AD 95, received a more sure word of prophecy. Not from a raven, nor Apollo, but from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

The Book of Revelation begins, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants – things which must shortly take place” (Rev. 1:1). He goes on to say, “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near” (Rev. 1:3).

The Book of Revelation is a polemic (a controversial argument, against some opinion, or doctrine) against Emperor Domitian and the Roman world. While Domitian looked to Apollo and the raven to foretell the immediate future, the Lord Jesus Christ, omniscient and infinitely greater than Domitian, revealed the future of the world in this book. He instructed John to “write the things which you have seen [the vision of the glorified Son of Man (Rev. 1)], and the things which are [the situation of the seven churches in Asia Minor at the end of the first century AD (Rev. 2 and 3)], and the things which will take place after this [all the future events recorded in Rev. 4-22]” (1:9). This paper will examine several aspects of Domitian’s reign and John’s exile to Patmos.

In the nineteenth century, Bible scholars, linguists, pilgrims, travelers and military intelligence officers from America, England and the Continent began to visit the Holy Land and explore the Land of the Bible. In their books they described sites, recorded manners and customs, drew maps and sketched landscapes. This research began to open up the world of the Bible, a

Book which was no longer a theological treatise, but a Book about real people, real events and real places.

These explorers added a third dimension to Bible study for students back home. In addition they provided intelligence information for the countries of Europe awaiting the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

In the late 19th and early 20th century Sir William Ramsay explored, excavated and wrote about Asia Minor. One of his monumental studies is his book, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*. A more recent study on the setting of Revelation 2 and 3 is Colin Hemer's Ph.D. dissertation under F. F. Bruce at the University of Manchester in 1969 entitled, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting*.

I have tried to "follow in the footsteps" of these great explorers.

First, by reading the accounts of their travels. Second, by travelling to the places they visited and making my own observations and taking pictures.

These observations will help us consider the historical setting of Revelation 1:9 and understand the apostle John's exile to the island of Patmos. I will begin with the assumption that Revelation was written in AD 95 during the reign of Emperor Domitian, and not in the reign of Nero (Thomas 1994:185-202).

Let us begin with Emperor Domitian.

Emperor Domitian

Self-deified emperor

Emperor Domitian had a definite ego problem! In Imperial Rome the senate would deify an emperor upon

death (Kreitzer 1990:210-217). However, Domitian, like Gaius Caligula, could not wait until death, so he deified himself.

This is well attested to by the ancient writers.

Suetonius (AD 75 – ca. 140), in his book

Lives of the Caesars, wrote,

“With no less arrogance he began as follows in issuing a circular letter in the name of his procurators, ‘Our Master and our God bids that this be done.’” [“Dominus et deus noster hoc fieri iubet.”] (

Domitian 13:2; 1992:367). He also delighted in the adulation of the people in the amphitheater when they shouted, “Good Fortune attends our Lord and Mistress.” [Domino et dominae feliciter!"] (

Domitian 13:1;

1992:367). A reference to himself and his wife.

Pliny the Younger (born AD 61 or 62

– died before 113), wrote in his

Panegyricus, a tribute to Emperor Trajan, “He (Domitian) was a madman, blind to the true meaning of his position, who used the arena for collecting charges of high treason, who felt himself slighted and scorned if we failed to pay homage to his gladiators, taking any criticism of them to himself and seeing insults to his own godhead and divinity; who deemed himself the equal of the gods yet raised his gladiators to his equal.” (33:4; 1992: 395).

Dio Cassius, in his

Roman History, wrote, "For he even insisted upon being regarded as a god [theos] and took vast pride in being called 'master' [despotus] and "god" [theos]. These titles were used not merely in speech but also in written documents" (

Epitome of Book

67:5:7;

1995:329). Elsewhere he wrote, "One Juventius

Celsus, ... [conspired] ... against Domitian ... When he was on the point of being condemned, he begged that he might speak to the emperor in private, and thereupon did obeisance before him and after repeatedly calling him 'master' [despoton] and 'god' [theon] (terms that were already being applied to him by others)" (

Epitome of Book 67:3:4; 1995:349). Later writers repeat the same claim and then go on to embellish it (Jones 1992:108). However, Statius claims Domitian rejected these titles (

Silvae

1:6:83-84; 1982: 69, 71).

There seems to be other contemporary evidence that backs up Domitian's claim to deity. Unfortunately, no inscriptions have been discovered with these titles on them.

Dio Cassius again adds an important detail, when he wrote, "After Domitian, the Romans appointed Nerva Cocceius emperor. Because of the hatred felt for Domitian, his images, many of which were of silver and many of gold, were melted down; and from this source large amounts of money were obtained. The arches, too,

of which a very great number were being erected to this one man, were torn down" (

Epitome of Book 68:1:1; 1995:361).

Upon his death, the Roman Senate was, "... overjoyed ... [assailed] the dead emperor with the most insulting and stinging kind of outcries. ... Finally they passed a decree that his inscriptions should everywhere be erased, and all record of him obliterated" (Suetonius, Domitian 23:1; 1992:385). This decree, the *damnatio memoriae*, destroyed all the statues and epigraphical inscriptions of Domitian. Evidence of this can be seen in the arch at Hierapolis, built by Domitian, [Fig. 2] as well as the dedicatory inscriptions for the Temple of the Sabastoi in Ephesus (Friesen 1993a:34). There are a few exceptions. One is a marble portrait of Domitian with an oakleaf crown, the so-called *corona civica*, in the National Roman Museum (Sapelli 1998:24). This bust, found in Latina, was probably buried before the emperor died.

The only evidence not destroyed was the coins minted by Domitian because it was impossible to recall all of them. Numismatics is able to provide some evidence of Domitian's boast of deity.

The Numismatic Evidence

Dr. Ernest Janzen, of the University of Toronto, in an article entitled, "The Jesus of the Apocalypse Wears the Emperor's Clothes," provides for two lines of evidence from numismatics for Domitian's claim to deity. The first are coins minted in AD 83 called the *DIVI CAESAR* ("divine Caesar") coins.

These coins, minted in gold and silver, had the bust of Domitia, the wife of Domitian, on the obverse with the

inscription, "DIVI CAESAR MATRI" and "DIVI CAESARIS MATER", the mother of the divine Caesar! On the reverse was their infant son who was born in the second consulship of Domitian in AD 73 and died in the second year after he became emperor (AD 82)

(Suetonius,

Domitian 3:1;

1992:345). He is depicted as naked and seated on a zoned globe with his arms stretched out surrounded by seven stars! The inscription surrounding it said "DIVUS CAESAR IMP DOMITIANI F".

Translated it means, "the divine Caesar, son of the emperor Domitian." The infant is depicted as baby Jupiter (Jupiter being the head of the Roman pantheon). "The globe represents world dominion and power, while stars typically bespoke the divine nature of those accompanied. ... the infant depicted on the globe was the son of (a) god and that the infant was conqueror of the world" (1994:645-647). It does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that if he is the son of a god, then who is god? Of course, his father, Domitian! I can not help but use my sanctified imagination and wonder if John did not have this coin in front of him when he penned, "and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to His feet ... He had in His right hand seven stars" (Rev. 1:13,16). He refers back to this vision in the letter to the church at Thyatira when the Lord Jesus identifies Himself as the "Son of God" (Rev. 2:18).

The second bit of numismatic evidence comes from the coins with the fulmen ("thunderbolt") on them. The fulmen is the divine attribute of Jupiter. Janzen points

out; “In 84 Domitian struck reverse type Jupiter holding thunderbolt and spear. The first issue of 85 continued this type but the second issue witnessed the fulmen in Domitian’s hand. He and Jupiter would ‘share’ the fulmen for the years 85-6 after which Jupiter remained as a regular type, only without fulmen. From 87-96 Domitian alone held the fulmen, persuasive evidence of a developing megalomania which place the fulmen in Domitian’s hand and are clearly patterned after the Jupiter with fulmen type” (1994:648, footnote 55). One numismatic expert says this type “clearly suggests a parallel between himself and ‘Jupiter tonans’ (the thunderer) or the father of the gods” (Mattingly, cited in Janzen 1994:648, footnote 55).

Martial, the first century Howard

Stern of Rome confirms this idea in his writings. One of his epigrams, written in AD 94, describing the Gens Flavia (Jones 1992:1,199, footnote 1) says, “This piece of ground, that lies open and is being covered with marble and gold, knew our Lord (domini) in infancy. ... Here stood the venerable house that gave the world what Rhodes and pious Crete gave the starry sky [Helios, the sun god, was born on Rhodes according to some traditions, and Zeus, the chief god, was born on Crete]. ... But you the Father of the High One did protect, and for you, Caesar, thunderbolt (fulmen)

and aegis took the place of spear and buckler” (

Epigrams 9:20; 1993b: 249).

Sometimes Martial even calls Domitian the “Thunderer” (7:99:1; 1993b: 157), a title that usually belongs to Jupiter (Zeus) (

Epigrams 9:91; 1993b: 311)!

Domitian is putting himself on the same level as Jupiter.

Elsewhere in Martial's writings he calls Domitian "lord" (

Epigrams 7:2;

8:82; 9:20, 28, 66; 1993b: 75, 231, 249, 257, 291) and "lord and god" (Epigrams 5:8; 1993a: 361; 7:34; 8:2;

1993b: 105, 161). Interestingly, after the death of Domitian, Martial repudiates these titles attributed to Domitian (Epigrams 10:72; 1993b: 391). However, I think he was reflecting the sentiments of the day while Domitian was alive.

He may not have believed it, but that's what Domitian wanted, so that's what he got.

Another interesting sidelight, on some of Domitian's coins the initials "PM" appears on the inscriptions. These initials stand for "pontifex maximus," the high priest as head of the Roman religion.

This title, Biblically, belongs only to the Lord Jesus (Heb. 4:14).

It appears that in AD 85/86 something triggered Domitian to openly claim deity. What it was, I do not know, but the response in Asia Minor was a temple dedicated to the Sabastoi (emperors).

The Sabastoi

Temple in Ephesus

In 1930, the Austrian archaeologist

Josef Keil, began to excavate an artificial terrace near the southwest corner of the Upper Agora in Ephesus. As

the excavations progressed, it became clear that this terrace, measuring 85.6 x 64.5 meters, supported the foundation of a temple, but which one (Friesen 1993b: 66).

In one of the vaults the “head and left forearm of a colossal, akrolithic male statue” was discovered which lead the excavator to identify it as the Temple of the sabastoi (“emperors”) (1993b:60).

The structure was an octastyle temple of the Ionic order which measured 34 x 24 meters at its base (1993b:63).

“The cella had an interior measurement of about 7.5 x 13 meters” (1993b:64). East of the temple stood an altar (1993b:67). The north side of the terrace had a three-story façade. The top level had engaged figures of various deities supporting the terrace above. Originally the façade probably had 35-40 engaged figures of eastern and western gods and goddesses. Today, only two figures, Attis and Isis, both eastern deities, have been restored (1993b:70,72).

In the last 125 years of research and excavations at Ephesus, 13 inscriptions dedicated to the provincial temple in Ephesus have been discovered. These rectangular marble blocks were set up by various cities of Asia Minor in recognition of Ephesus being the “neokoros” (guardian, or caretaker) of this temple (1993b:29, 35). These inscriptions have the name of Domitian chiseled out and in some cases have “Theos Vespasian” put in its place (1993b:37). The destruction of Domitian’s name was the result of the Roman Senate’s edict to erase any mention of Domitian.

Several questions should be asked regarding this temple. First, to whom was the Temple of the Sabastoi

dedicated? Domitian would have a statue and possibly his wife Domitia (1993b:35). Most likely it also included the rest of the Flavians: Vespasian, who was Domitian's father, and Titus, his older brother.

Second, when was the temple fully functional? Friesen, doing careful detective work with the inscriptions, suggests the date of September AD 90 when the temple was fully functional (1993b:44, 48).

Most likely the people began to build it after Domitian began to express his opinion that he was a god in AD 85/86.

Third, whose head did the colossal statue represent? When this statue was first discovered in 1930, the excavator identified it as Domitian. Georg Daltrop and Max Wegner later questioned this identification. Based on facial features from portraits, they suggested it depicted his older brother Titus. However, other art historians still think it belongs to Domitian (1993b:62).

This akrolithic statue, made of a wooden body, now disintegrated, and stone extremities, stood 8 meters tall (ca. 25 feet) (Friesen 1993b:63; 1993a:32). The left hand had a groove in it in which a spear was placed. This description accords historically with Ephesian coins depicting the Temple of the Sabastoi with a statue in front holding a spear (1993b:63).

Fourth, where was the statue placed in the temple complex? Some have suggested that it was outside in the courtyard.

However, the problem with that suggestion is that the torso was made of wood and would deteriorate in the inclement weather. Most likely it was inside the temple.

Friesen notes that the back of the head was not finished, thus “the statue could only have been displayed in front of a wall where visitors were not expected to go behind it” (1993a:32). The most logical place would be inside the temple. Also inside, most likely, were similar statues of the other Flavians (1993b:62).

Fifth, what was the symbolism of the temple complex? A visitor approaching the Temple of the Sabastoi from the Agora would notice the northern façade with the engaged deities supporting the temenos and wonder what was the intended symbolism. Friesen remarks, “The message was clear: the gods and goddesses of the peoples supported the emperors; and, conversely, the cult of the emperors united the cultic system, and the peoples, of the empire. The emperors were not a threat to the worship of the diverse deities of the empire; rather, the emperors joined the ranks of the divine and played their own particular role in that realm” (1993b: 75). Ephesus, with its harbor, was the major commercial center of Asia Minor. The pilgrims and traders would mix their commercial ventures with their cultic worship of the emperors while in Ephesus. I would like to suggest that first century Ephesus is a prototype of the future religious and commercial center predicted in Rev. 17 and 18 called “Mystery Babylon” controlled by the Antichrist.

Interestingly, F. Farrar, in his monumental work, *The Life and Work of St. Paul* says of Ephesus, “It’s markets, glittering with the produce of world’s art, were the Vanity Fair of Asia. They furnished to the exile [of] Patmos the local colouring of those pages of the Apocalypse in which he speaks of ‘the merchandise of

gold, silver,...' (Rev. 18:12,13)" (1888:355). The first century church could relate to this.

In the midst of all this commercial and cultic activities, the believers in the Lord Jesus Christ took a stand for Him (Rev. 2:2, 3). One of their elders, the apostle John, refused to participate in the emperor worship and preached against it. While on Patmos, he received the revelation from the Lord Jesus that was a polemic against emperor worship and Domitian in particular.

Revelation 1:9 says that John was on the island of Patmos "for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." The serious Bible student knows there are at least three different interpretations for that verse. First, the Lord sent John to the island specifically to receive the revelation.

Second, John voluntarily went to the island to preach the gospel. Third, he was banished by the Roman government because of preaching the gospel (Thomas 1992:88, 89). Most likely the third is the primary interpretation but the other two are correct as well. John was exiled to Patmos because of preaching the gospel and against emperor worship, but the Lord in His sovereignty used this opportunity for him to receive the book of Revelation and while he was there, he had the opportunities to proclaim the gospel.

Conclusions Regarding Domitian

I wonder if the Apostle John had ever seen the statue of Domitian in the Temple of the Sabastoi? If he had, I'm sure he refused to bow down and worship it, or even burn incense on the altar before it. What a contrast between this lifeless stone statue of a mere mortal man

and the vision which John saw of the resurrected and living Savior, the Son of Man, in Revelation 1. On the isle of Patmos he saw, “One like the Son of Man, clothed in a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.

His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as the snow (Domitian was bald!), and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars (as opposed to a spear in Domitian’s left hand), out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and his continence was like the sun shining in its strength” (Rev. 1:13-16). When John saw this One, he fell down as dead (1:17a). He worshipped Someone infinitely greater than the mortal and dead emperors. He worshipped the One who was the “First and the Last,” and the One who lives, and was dead, and is alive forever more (1:17b, 18).

Is it any wonder that John also recorded the statement of the four living creatures, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God (“Kurios ho theos”) Almighty. Who was and is and is to come” (4:8)? The contrast of the “Lord God’s” was obvious for any believer living in the first century.

Domitian tried to legislate public and private morality, yet he himself was immoral: an adulterer, involved in incest, responsible for the murder of his niece. Julia died as a result of a botched abortion after he impregnated her. There were other people murdered by Domitian’s command because he felt they were a threat to his rule. He was blasphemous as well as an animal abuser. He would sit in his room, catch flies, and stab them with a “keenly-sharpened stylus”.

On the other hand, the Lord Jesus Christ is “holy, holy, holy.” The One who could not sin, would not sin, and did not sin (James 1:13; II Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15). He was the spotless Lamb of God (I Pet. 1:19). Domitian called himself Dominus Dues Domitianus (D. D. D.). Yet the Lord Jesus is the “Lord God Almighty”, the One who is El Shaddai! Domitian was born on Oct. 24, AD 51 and murdered on Sept. 18, AD 96. He was cremated and his ashes mingled with his niece Julia and buried in the temple of Gens Flavia, built over the house where he was born.

This house was located on the Quirinal Hill in the sixth Region (Jones 1992:1; Richardson 1992:181). Yet the Eternal Son of God is the One “who was and is and is to come!” Domitian reigned only 15 years (Sept. 13, AD 81 – Sept. 18, AD 96), yet King Jesus will reign for a thousand years as “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev. 20:4-6; 19:16). Believers in the Lord Jesus during the first century would be encouraged (and blessed) by reading the book of Revelation.

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The King and I: Exiled to Patmos - Part 2

The King and I: Exiled to Patmos (Rev. 1:9)

(Part 2)

Gordon Franz

A Misconception

One misconception regarding John's exile to Patmos which has appeared in the commentaries and popular prophetic writings it is that Patmos was a sort of Alcatraz (Swindoll 1986:3); or for the French, St. Helene where Napoleon was exiled (Saffrey 1975:392). Part of this is due to the 19th century travelers who described the island in terms such as "barren, rocky, desolate-looking place" (Newton 1865:223) or as "a wild and barren island" (Geil 1896:70). Unfortunately these nineteenth century realities were imposed on the first century text and island. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In the first century Roman world,

Patmos was a very strategic island on the sea-lanes from Ephesus to Rome. The first stop on this line of communication and commerce for the boat sailing from Ephesus to Rome would have been Patmos, because of its natural and protective harbor. The last stop for a boat traveling from Rome would have been Patmos. This island had a large administrative center, outlying villages, a hippodrome (for horse racing) and at least three pagan temples. It was hardly an isolated and desolate place!

Let us examine the archaeological remains and the literary evidence in order to paint a more accurate picture of first century Patmos.

This crescent-shaped island, 12.5 kilometers long, covers an area of some 34 square kilometers and has a jagged coastline of some 65 kilometers. Pliny the Elder (AD 23-79), in his *Natural History*, says Patmos is 30 miles in circumference (4.12.69; 1989:169). In the center, nearest the narrowest point is the Kastelli, the ancient acropolis. This administrative center is located behind the harbor, called Skela today.

Remains of the wall and three towers can still be seen today. The walls, up to 1.30 meters thick at points, and three towers, still exist (Tozar 1889:194,5; Simpson and Lazenby 1970:47-52). This center has a commanding view of the harbor and the sea-lanes to and from Patmos. I also might add, spectacular sunsets!

The literary sources mention outlying villages, which probably engaged in fishing and agricultural activities. Three temples are known from the sources. There was an inscription found mentioning a temple to Artemis (Diana), the goddess of the hunt. Her main temple was in Ephesus and it was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Patmos was called Artemis' "most sacred island."

The temple was probably located underneath the present day Monastery of St. John near the village of Chora. The threshold stones of the iconostasis in the chapel of the Virgin are thought to be remains from this temple. There is literary evidence of a temple to Apollo, the brother of Artemis. This temple, most likely, was located near the harbor of Skela. One nineteenth

century traveler mentioned, “at the wharf I observed four or five beautiful white marble columns, cut and carved in true Greek fashion, and once very likely standing in the portico of some splendid temple to a heathen god, now used as mooring posts” (Geil 1897:73). Most likely this temple was the one dedicated to Apollo. There is also literary evidence of a temple to Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty. This temple was probably built on the Kalikatsou rock.

Another inscription mentions a hippodrome on the island. This has not been discovered archaeologically, but probably was located near modern day Skela. Again, using my sanctified imagination, I wonder if the Apostle John preached to the inhabitants of Patmos in this circus (hippodrome)?

Unfortunately, most tourists visiting Patmos today, disembark at the port of Skela, hop on a bus, zip up to the Cave of the Apocalypse, zing on up to the Monastery of St. John in Chora, and then zag down to the harbor of Skela for shopping and eating before embarking on their cruise ship to sail off to another destination, all in four hours. Their thought? “Been there, done that!” There are more Biblically significant things to see and experience on this island than the typical four-hour tour wonder. Please do not misunderstand. These are important places to visit, but a serious student should spend a couple of days on the island.

Closely related to the first misconception is another that describes Patmos as a penal colony. Some commentators quote Pliny, *Natural History* 4.12.69 as proof, but all the passage gives is the circumference of the island! It says nothing about whether it was a penal colony or not

(Sanders 1962-63:76; Hemer 1986:221, footnote 1). My impression is that John was exiled to Patmos because of its Artemis/Ephesus connections. The proconsul of Asia Minor wanted to get John away from the city of Ephesus so he sent him to Patmos, which was within his jurisdiction. Hemer suggests the island might be connected with Miletus some 70 kilometers to the Eastnortheast of Patmos (1986:28,222, footnote 8).

The length of John's exile on Patmos differs from tradition to tradition. Most likely he was only exiled for about 18 months. Upon Domitian's death, John was free to return to Ephesus. Dio Cassius wrote, "[Emperor] Nerva also released all who were on trial for maiestas (high treason) and restored the exile" (

Roman

History 68:2; 1995:361). Eusebius adds, "The sentences of Domitian were annulled, and the Roman Senate decreed the return of those who had been unjustly banished and the restoration of their property. ... the Apostle John, after his banishment to the island, took up his abode at Ephesus" (Eccl.

Hist.

3.20.8,9; 1980:241).

"The Travels of St. John in Patmos"

According to church tradition, this book entitled "The Travels of St. John in Patmos"

was written by Prochorus, the secretary to the Apostle John. This is the Prochorus mentioned in Acts 6:5.

Critical scholarship, however, suggests it was written in the 5th century AD. If this book is historically reliable,

then John was just banished to the island, but not imprisoned, so much for the Alcatraz view.

The “Travels of St. John in Patmos” makes interesting reading. On the way over to Patmos, a violent storm arose and a passenger is swept into the sea. John prays and a wave deposited the young man back on the boat.

This miracle gave John the opportunity to preach the gospel. Once on Patmos, the Roman governor, Laurentius, set John free.

“Laurentius’s father-in-law, Myron, offers the Apostle lodging in his house, and soon Myron’s house became the first church on the island. Apollonides, Myron’s son, who was possessed with the devil, was healed by St. John, and this miracle led to the conversion of both Chrysippe, Myron’s daughter, and her husband, the Roman governor” (Meinardus 1979:7). John has a spiritual confrontation with Kynops, a famous magician on the island, in which John is finally victorious. Kynops is drowned in the harbor and today a church is dedicated to that event (1979:9). The result of this victorious confrontation is the salvation of the rest of the island.

Before John left Patmos, the believers asked John to write an account of the life of the Lord Jesus. According to one tradition, the gospel of John was written on Patmos.

Whether these accounts are believable is a matter of debate.

However, there are subtle hints in the book of Revelation that John had freedom of movement while on the island.

What did John see?

While exiled on Patmos,

John experienced things that reflect life on the island. The weather phenomena recorded in Revelation are common to the island. White clouds (14:14); thunder and lightening (11:19; 14:2); great hail (8:7; 11:19; 16:21) and rainbows (4:3; 10:1). From the peak of what is called Mt. Elias today, sitting 883 feet above sea level, a person has a spectacular view of the islands of the Aegean Sea and the mountains of Asia Minor (western Turkey today) to the east. There are at least 22 references to the "sea" in the book of Revelation (4:6; 5:13; 7:1,2,3; 8:8,9; 10:2,5,8; 12:12; 13:1; 14:2,7; 15:2; 16:3; 18:17,19,21; 19:6; 20:13; 21:1). J. C. Fitzpatrick visited the island in the 1880's and observed: "The islands to the west stand out darkly against the brightness of the horizon; and the others are lighted up with the glory of the setting sun, whilst the track of its last rays is a 'sea of glass, mingled with fire'" (Rev. 15:2; 1887:16). In Revelation 6:14 and 16:20 John describes the islands of the Aegean and mountains Western Turkey disappearing. The last time I was on the island, I can personally attest that they are still there awaiting future fulfillment.

Only one spring exists on the island at a place called Sykamia on the road leading from Chora to Groikos. Tradition has it John baptized some of his converts in the baptistery nearby. What a contrast this small spring was to the "pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (22:1) in the New Heaven and New Earth (21:1). Yet John recognized he was to worship the One who

made heaven and earth and the sea and springs of water (Rev. 14:7).

In Revelation 13:1, John wrote that he “stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name” (NKJV). Awhile back, a friend asked me who I thought the beast was in this verse. I responded, “I haven’t the foggiest idea, but I can tell you exactly what beach John stood on when he saw that vision.

It was the Psili Ammos beach.” In

Greek, the word means “fine sand”, and indeed this light, fine golden sand is the only beach on the island which has no stones or pebbles (Stone 1981:83,84). In contrast, the colored pebbles on the Lambi beach impress the visitor to the island. The other beaches have rocks and pebbles on them.

John had the opportunity to walk to this isolated beach some 45 minutes to an hour walk from the harbor of Skela. He probably went to the Psili Ammos beach to get away from the noise and the crowds at the harbor, or to meditate on the Word of God and spend time in prayer.

The impression I am left with is that John had freedom of movement on the island.

The Volcano at Thera (Santorini)

From this beach one could see an eruption of the volcanic island of Thera, also known as Santorini. In 1888, an interesting but highly imaginative article appeared in the journal *The Nineteenth Century* entitled “What St. John Saw on Patmos” by J. Theodore Bent. In it he proposed that the Apostle John saw a volcanic

eruption of Thera (Santorini) in AD 60. This eruption of Thera, as the Greek name implies, was the “beast” of Rev. 13:1.

He suggested that “St. John made use of [this] phenomena which he saw with his own eyes, to prophetically depict a destruction of another kind” (1888:813). What that was, he does not say.

At the outset, there are several major problems with this thesis. First, Bent rejects the AD 95 date for the writing of Revelation and follows the “consensus of modern opinion” (for 1888) that it was written between AD 60 and 69. Second, he assumes there was an eruption of Thera in the year AD 60.

This, however, is based on a secondhand, and probably unreliable, source. The authority, George of Syngelos, probably confused it with the AD 46-47 eruption.

There was a very catastrophic eruption between 1520 – 1460 BC, which some geologists have suggested was the largest eruption in historical times.

This destroyed the Minoan civilization and might be the basis for the “Atlantis” legend. Strabo described an eruption in 197 BC (

Geography I.3.16:

1989:213,215). Pliny mentions one in AD

19 and several Roman historians record the AD 46-47 eruption (Vougioukalakis 1995:13-15).

The student of Bible prophecy should be careful not to “throw the baby out with the bath water” on some of Bent’s observations. In the article he compares “passages in Revelation with extracts from medieval and

modern accounts given by eye-witnesses of the eruptions of Thera” and notes they make “many remarkable parallels” (1888:813). Let us examine three examples.

First, the sixth seal (Rev.

6:12-17). “There was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. ... and every mountain and island was moved out of its place.” All these phenomenon; an earthquake, a dark sun and moon like blood, “stars” falling from heaven and movement of land masses are associated with volcanic eruption. The volcanic cloud in the atmosphere would darken the sun and make the moon appear blood red. The mention of late figs may give us a chronological indicator as to when this eruption takes place, August or September (Boronski 1987:37,38,115).

Second, the first trumpet (Rev. 8:7)

describes hail and fire mingled with blood that was thrown to earth. This destroyed one third of the trees and burned up all the grass. Bent recounts M. Delenda’s account of the eruption of 1707 where “flames ... issued out of the sea, and of the damage done to the vines and trees by the noxious vapours and by the terrible crashing of the volcanic bombs” (1888:817).

Third, the second trumpet (Rev. 8:8,

9). “And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood; and a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.”

Father Richard, observing the eruption of Thera (Santorini) in 1573 writes, “even when the volcano is quiescent, the sea in the immediate vicinity of the cone is a brilliant orange colour, from the action of oxide iron” (Bent 1888:817). M. Delenda observed after an eruption of Thera in 1707 the sulphurous vapours mixed with the sea, turned it white and the fish of the harbor died (Bent 1888:817).

The destruction of one third of the ships would be caused by a tsunami. Interestingly, geologists calculated the tsunami (tidal wave) after the eruption of Thera between 1520-1460 BC, was initially 42 meters high (Pararas-Carayannis 1992:122). That would surely wreck havoc on any navies in the area!

Stothers and Rampino (1983:6357-6371) did a detailed study of volcanic eruptions in the Mediterranean Sea before AD 630 from the written and archaeological sources.

Earthquakes

Earthquakes are always associated with volcanoes. The book of Revelation records at least five earthquakes during the seven years of the Tribulation. The first one during the sixth seal is called a “great earthquake” (6:12). The second, during the seventh seal (8:5). The third is after the resurrection of the two witnesses and it is called a “great earthquake” and seven thousand men were killed (11:13). The fourth earthquake is during the seventh trumpet (11:19). The fifth and final one is during the seventh bowl judgment. It is described as “a great earthquake, such as a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth” (16:18). This last statement would

strike the minds of the reader in Asia Minor of the recollection of the stories that they heard from family and friends of the great earthquake of AD 17. Pliny the Elder, who ironically died studying the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in AD 79, penned these words concerning this earthquake. "The greatest earthquake in human memory occurred when Tiberius Caesar was emperor, twelve Asiatic cities being overthrown in one night" (2:86:200; 1979: 331).

John, writing less than twenty years after Pliny, reminds his readers that there is still a greater earthquake to come. Tacitus, a Roman historian and a contemporary of John, described the horrors of the AD 17 earthquake in very vivid and graphic language (

Annals 2:47; 1992: 459). A careful reading of the text of Revelation seems to indicate that these are major earthquakes in which God directly intervenes in the judgment on humanity.

As any good geologist knows, there has actually been a decrease in the number of earthquakes. A bulletin, put out by the National Earthquake Information Center and arm of the US Geological Survey, asks the question "Are earthquakes really on the increase?" They answer the question this way. "Although it may seem that we are having more earthquakes, earthquakes of magnitude 7.0 or greater have remained fairly constant throughout this century and, according to our records, have actually seemed to decrease in recent years."

They go on to point out, "A partial explanation may lie in the fact that in the last twenty years, we have definitely had an increase in the number of earthquakes we have been able to locate each year. This is because of the

tremendous increase in the number of seismograph stations in the world and the many improvements in global communications”

(www.neic.cr.usgs.gov/neis/general/handouts/increase_in_earthquakes.html).

This should not surprise the student of Bible prophecy because no verse in the Bible says there will be an increase in the number of earthquakes before the Lord Jesus Christ returns!

(Austin and Strauss 1999).

More study needs to be done on the seal, trumpet and bowl judgments in Revelation.

These are all natural phenomenon on a supernatural scale. The Lord is directly intervening in the affairs of human history during the Tribulation. These are not humanly contrived events, be they MX missiles, black helicopters, etc.

Nations can explain, warn and defend against missile attacks. On the other hand, these natural phenomena: volcanoes, earthquakes and weather patterns can not be predicted, nor prevented by scientists. As a result of not having control over them, they will cry out blasphemies toward God (Rev. 16:21).

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The King And I: The Third Seal (Rev. 6:5, 6)--Part 3

The Apostle John describes the opening of the third seal in this way: "When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, 'Come and see.' And I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hands. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, 'A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine'." (6:5, 6 NKJV).

Several prophecy teachers have come up with some interesting interpretations of this passage. For example, in his book, *Days of Hunger, Days of Chaos*, Texe Marrs (1999) suggests that the third seal judgment will be a worldwide famine caused by government and corporate manipulation of the seed supply. He calls this the "Global Seeds Conspiracy." Interestingly, he never deals with the phrase "do not harm the oil and wine."

In a conspiratorial magazine *Paranoia*, it was suggested that the phrase "do not harm the oil and the wine" was fulfilled in November 1992 when President George H. W. Bush "announced that he would NOT triple the tariff on rapeseed oil and Chardonnay wine" (Wallace 1995:21). Wallace believes that this is the only time in history that oil and wine, and only oil and wine, received the attention of the international market.

Another prophecy teacher has observed, "At the opening of the 'third seal,' in Revelation 6:6, basic food staples will be meted out in small amounts and sold at rates that

make possible only a bare subsistence. This is the fate of the common man. Note that the wealthy will still have access to their ‘oil and ... wine.’ As always, during hard times, the division between rich and poor grows wider. Not only the Bible, but the population figures themselves point to a future global famine” (Church 1997: 327).

How credible are these three observations in light of what Revelation 6 states? First, is the third seal judgment talking about a global conspiracy to control the supply of seeds? Second, was the third seal fulfilled in 1992 with President Bush’s announcement? Third, is bread only the food of the poor and the oil and wine only the food of the rich?

Nogah Hareuveni, the founder of Neot Kedumim, the Biblical Landscape Reserve in Israel, has a wise and appropriate statement regarding the interpretation of agricultural passages of Scripture. He says, “Let’s look for the obvious!” There is no need to spiritualize, allegorize, or devotionalize the interpretation of this passage, or any other passage relating to agriculture or nature in the Mediterranean Basin, and the land of Israel in particular.

In this seal judgment, the rider on the black horse is trying to sell wheat and barley at an expensive price due to a shortage of grain, but he is not to touch the oil and wine.

On a visit to the island of Patmos, a combination of an unusual weather pattern and an upcoming Jewish holiday triggered the “obvious” interpretation of this passage in my mind. One afternoon, a rainbow appeared over the eastern end of the island. While that, in and of

itself, was not unusual, because John had seen two rainbows while he was on the island (Rev. 4:3; 10:1), the timing was significant. Rainbows are caused by refraction of sunlight through raindrops. This particular rainstorm occurred on Friday, June 6, 1997, five days before Shavuot. Christians would know Shavuot, the feast of weeks, as Pentecost. For the Jewish farmer, Shavuot was the beginning of the wheat harvest (Ex. 23:16; Num. 28:26). Helen Frenkley, the director of Neot Kedumim, points out; "The Hebrew for Feast of Harvest is Hag Ha-Katzir. Katzir means harvest of grain and since the barley harvest begins on Passover, Shavuot is the start of the wheat harvest" (personal correspondence, Aug. 24, 1997).

Most commentators have interpreted the third seal as famine, which resulted from conflicts and wars, mentioned in the first two seals (Rev. 6:1-4). Some also suggest the oil and wine were luxury items of the rich. The first interpretation is plausible, but the second is not true. There is, however, a better explanation from the agricultural background, weather pattern and Scripture for this seal.

The four foods: wheat, barley, (olive) oil and wine, should draw the Bible students mind to a phrase used throughout the Hebrew Scriptures for the essential foods of daily life for all people. This phrase, "grain, oil and wine" is used at least seventeen times in the Bible (Deut. 7:13; 11:14; 12:17; 14:23; 18:4; 28:51; 32:13,14; I Chron. 9:29; II Chron. 2:15; 31:5; 32:28; Neh. 5:11; Ps. 104:15; Jer. 31:12; Hosea 2:8,9,22; Joel 2:19; Hag. 1:11). These four foods were the most important foods of the "seven varieties" (Deut. 8:7-10). The figs, pomegranates and (date) honey are the other three. These seven foods

all share a common fate that is determined by a delicate weather balance between Passover and Shavuot (Hareuveni 1980:30-45).

An observant Jewish farmer, rich or poor, living in the Land of Israel during the Talmudic period would remember this phrase every time he recited Deut. 11 and had a Shabbat meal. On Friday night the “table of man” would be set with hallah bread made from grains, wine from grapes, and the oil lamp which used olive oil. Each was a reminder that their “daily bread” came from the Lord.

A farmer would pray for the right wind to blow at the appropriate time during the seven weeks, or fifty days, between Passover and Shavuot. The rabbis say, “The northern wind is beneficial to wheat when it has reached a third of its ripening and is damaging to olive trees when they have blossomed. The southern wind is damaging to wheat when it has reached a third of its ripening and is beneficial to olives when they have blossomed. This is symbolized for you by [placing] the table to the north [side of the Tabernacle and the Temple] and the menorah in the south [side of the Tabernacle and Temple] ...” (Baba Batra 147a; cited in Hareuveni 1988:21).

The north wind during the winter months usually brings rains (Prov. 25:23) and is beneficial in the first third of the ripening of the wheat and barley. Yet this same rain would ruin the buds of the olive trees or grape vines if the buds were already opened. In the case of open buds, the rain would wash away the pollen so the tree or vine would not be pollinated and fertilized. The southern wind is good for the pollination process of the olive and

grapes if they come later in the 50 days. If the southern wind comes early, the grain will not fill with starch and the crop will be decimated (cf. Gen. 41:6). The farmer prays to the Lord that the winds would come at the right time. If, however, the winds come at the right time, but the rains come after “its season” the grain crop will still be ruined (Lev. 26:4; Deut. 11:14; 28:12).

Someone once said, “The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself.” Another example of the third seal judgment, albeit on a smaller scale, is recorded in I Sam. 12. Heavy rains during the wheat harvest would bring disaster for the wheat farmer. This occurrence is illustrated in I Sam. 12. “Is today not the wheat harvest? I (Samuel) will call to the LORD, and He will send thunder and rain, that you may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking for a king for yourselves” (12:17 NKJV). The people cried out, “Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, that we may not die...” (12:19 NKJV). People do not die from thunder and rain! However, as Nogah Hareuveni has pointed out, “The ripe, heavy-eared wheat can suffer from a downpour not only through physical damage from the force of the wind-driven rain, but also by rotting from the sudden moisture combined with the high temperature that prevail in Israel by Shavuot (in late May – early June). This is why the Israelites cried out to Samuel to ‘pray ... to save us from death’ (I Sam. 12:19) – from death by starvation that would follow the destruction of the grain crop” (1988:25). Mildew is one of the results of disobedience to the Word of God (Deut. 28:22; I Kings 8:28 // II Chron. 6:28; Amos 4:9; Hag. 2:17; Boronski 1987:158-160).

This author experienced such a phenomenon in June of 1992. For two days, Israel was hit with heavy rains and the wheat harvest was devastated by mildew. Ironically, it was right before the national elections when people were crying out “Itzhaq, melek Yisrael! Itzhaq, melek Yisrael” (Itzhaq, king of Israel) at their election rallies!!!

The third seal judgment of Revelation 6 has nothing to do with a global seed conspiracy, nor was it fulfilled in 1992 by President Bush’s decision not to put a tariff on rapeseed oil and Chardonnay wine. However, the third seal judgment is validation of Adam Smith’s law of supply and demand. Apparently, during the Tribulation, there will be an untimely rainstorm during the wheat harvest that destroyed a great portion of the crop in Israel and the rest of the Mediterranean world. The demand for wheat, plus the shortage in supply, will lead to higher prices for all. The olive trees and grapevines, the “oil and wine”, will not be affected by this rainstorm because they will have already been pollinated. In fact, the water might even help them, thus giving oil and wine for all, rich and poor alike. This is the “obvious” interpretation.

Conclusions

It has been the purpose of this series of articles to put Revelation 1:9 in its proper historical and geographical context (setting). John was exiled to Patmos because he took a stand for the Word of God and the God of the Word. Even with the temple to the self-proclaimed deified emperor in his back yard, John refused to bow down to him. Yet when he saw the glorified Son of Man in a vision on Patmos, he fell down as dead. Because of his proclaiming “Jesus is Lord” and not Domitian, the

proconsul removed John to Patmos. Once on Patmos, John was free to move about the island. I can not help but imagine John standing on the piers in the harbor of Patmos passing out gospel tracts to the sailors coming and going from the island. On at least one occasion he took advantage of a boat heading to Ephesus and sent along the Book of Revelation, which he received while on the island. It probably went back with the seven messengers who came to visit him from seven churches in Asia Minor.

This book would have encouraged the believers in the Lord Jesus who were going through difficult times to take a stand for the Lord and to realize that God has a plan and a purpose for what they are going through. One day He would set things in order. The redeemed, those who have trusted solely upon the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work on Calvary, will one day gather around the Throne of God and worship the Lamb of God by saying, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing” (Rev. 5:12). Might we be encouraged by this same message.

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Propaganda, Power, And Perversion Of Biblical Truths: Coins Illustrating The Book Of Revelation

Introduction

Coins offer a “numismatic window” into the world of the New Testament (Oster 1982: 218). At the end of the First Century AD, the power-hungry Roman emperor minted coins as political propaganda in order to influence his culture. This article peers through that window and examines the imperial coins from the reign of Emperor Domitian. The article also examines how Domitian’s regime attacked some unchanging truths of the Word of God, how the Book of Revelation constructs a subtle polemic against Emperor Domitian, and how the Roman provincial coins can illustrate the messages to the seven churches.

The classic example of the Flavian Dynasty using coins for propaganda purposes is the “Judea Capta” coins. These coins were minted by Emperors Vespasian, Titus and Domitian and depict a Roman soldier standing guard next to a palm tree with a weeping Judea seated under the tree. On the edge is the words “Judea Capta” translated “Judea is captured.” This coin commemorates the end of the First Jewish Revolt and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. There were Jewish people throughout the Roman world and the propaganda message of these coins was clear: “Don’t you, or anybody else, think about revolting again. We will defeat you just as we defeated the Judeans!” For a good discussion of these coins, see Hendin 2001: 303-343.

The

Book of Revelation only mentions one coin by name: the denarius in the third seal judgment (Rev. 6: 5, 6; Franz 2000:9-11). However, monetary exchange is also mentioned in Revelation 13:17, 18: “and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666.” How these transactions will be carried out, either by cash, credit card, microchip or some other technology, I will leave that for the prophetic sensationalists and speculators to figure out! For a First Century AD understanding, see Kraybill 1996.

Two coins illustrate the abuse of numismatics in contemporary sensationalist prophetic studies. The first is a coin issued by the Vatican in 1995 with Pope John Paul II on the obverse and the depiction of the woman and child of Revelation 11 on the reverse. Some of the sensationalist prophecy teachers were not so much interested in the reverse side of the coin as they were the bottoms of the obverse side. Underneath the portrait of the pope were three six-pointed stars. These prophecy teachers were quick to make the association with the number 6-6-6!

The second coin is the 2-euro coin from Greece. On the reverse of this coin is a “woman riding a beast!” Greek mythology says that this woman is Europa, a Phoenician princess, being carried away to the island of Crete by Zeus / Jupiter disguised as a bull (Jones 1990: 110). These coin types are known from ancient times and are also on the coins from modern Cyprus too. They have

nothing to do with the woman riding the beast in Rev. 17:3, 7.

Coins are a neglected area of study for New Testament scholars, yet they are important for Biblical studies. One person points out that “numismatic evidence can ... help shed light on important historical events which had a bearing on the lives of the New Testament writers and their audience” (Kreitzer 1996: 28).

A good coin to illustrate the importance of numismatics for Biblical studies is a coin minted by Antiochus IV with the inscription “theos epiphanies” (“god manifest”) on the reverse. Some have called this the Hanukkah coin because when Antiochus desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem he also claimed deity. Several years later, the Antiochus IV and his Seleucid army were defeated and the temple in Jerusalem rededicated. The festival of Hanukkah commemorates this event. The Lord Jesus goes to the Temple for Hanukkah in John 10, He makes the statement, “I and my Father are one” (10:30), an outright declaration of His deity. This declaration should be seen in the context of Antiochus’ blasphemous claim to being “god manifest” (Franz 1998).

There is a helpful book that illustrates the coins that were encountered by the Apostle Paul and his companions on their travels through the Roman world. It is entitled, *The Pocket Guide to Saint Paul* by Peter Lewis and Ron Bolden (2002). The book contains some interesting theological views that some would disagree with, but the numismatic material is very good.

The Date of the Book of Revelation

The date for the

Book of Revelation is a much debated topic. The two prevailing views are the early date during the reign of Emperor Nero, ca. AD 65. Some advocates of the early date tend to see the Book of Revelation as being fulfilled with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. I do not share these views and see a number of historical inconsistencies with this understanding (Franz 2003).

The second view is the late date for the

Book of Revelation set during the reign of Emperor Domitian, ca. A.D. 95. A good case can be made for this date (Hitchcock 2003; 2005).

The Coins of Emperor Domitian

Self-deified emperor

Emperor Domitian had a definite ego problem! In Imperial Rome the senate would deify an emperor upon death (Kreitzer 1990:210-217). However, Domitian, like Gaius Caligula, could not wait until death, so he deified himself while he was alive. This is well attested by the ancient writers (Franz 1999).

Suetonius (AD 75 – ca. 140), in his book

Lives of the Caesars, wrote, “With no less arrogance he began as follows in issuing a circular letter in the name of his procurators, ‘Our Master and our God bids that this be done.’” [“Dominus et deus noster hoc fieri iubet.”] (Domitian 13:2; LCL 2:367). He also delighted in the adulation of the people in the amphitheater when they shouted, “Good Fortune attends our Lord and Mistress” [Domino et dominae feliciter!”] (Domitian 13:1; LCL 2:367) a reference to himself and his wife.

Pliny the Younger (born AD 61 or 62 – died before 113), wrote in his *Panegyricus*, a tribute to Emperor Trajan, “He (Domitian) was a madman, blind to the true meaning of his position, who used the arena for collecting charges of high treason, who felt himself slighted and scorned if we failed to pay homage to his gladiators, taking any criticism of them to himself and seeing insults to his own godhead and divinity; who deemed himself the equal of the gods yet raised his gladiators to his equal” (33:4; LCL 2: 395).

Dio Cassius, in his

Roman History, wrote, “For he even insisted upon being regarded as a god [*theos*] and took vast pride in being called ‘master’ [*despotus*] and “god” [*theos*]. These titles were used not merely in speech but also in written documents” (Epitome of Book 67:5:7; LCL 8:329).

Elsewhere he wrote, “One Juventius Celsus, ... [conspired] ... against Domitian ... When he was on the point of being condemned, he begged that he might speak to the emperor in private, and thereupon did obeisance before him and after repeatedly calling him ‘master’ [*despoton*] and ‘god’ [*theon*] (terms that were already being applied to him by others)” (Epitome of Book 67:3:4; LCL 8:349). Later writers repeat the same claim and then go on to embellish it. However, Statius claims Domitian rejected these titles (*Silvae* 1:6:83-84; LCL 1: 69, 71).

There seems to be other contemporary evidence that backs up Domitian’s claim to deity. Unfortunately, no monumental inscriptions have been discovered with these titles on them. Dio Cassius again adds an important detail, when he wrote, “After Domitian, the

Romans appointed Nerva Cocceius emperor. Because of the hatred felt for Domitian, his images, many of which were of silver and many of gold, were melted down; and from this source large amounts of money were obtained. The arches, too, of which a very great number were being erected to this one man, were torn down" (Epitome of Book 68:1:1; LCL 8:361). Upon his death, the Roman Senate was, "... overjoyed ... [assailed] the dead emperor with the most insulting and stinging kind of outcries. ... Finally they passed a decree that his inscriptions should everywhere be erased, and all record of him obliterated" (Suetonius, Domitian 23:1; LCL 2:385). This decree, the *damnatio memoriae*, destroyed all the statues and epigraphical inscriptions of Domitian. Evidence of this can be seen in the arch at Hierapolis, built by Domitian, as well as the dedicatory inscriptions for the Temple of the Sabastoi in Ephesus (Friesen 1993:34).

The only evidence not destroyed was the set of coins minted by Domitian as it was impossible to recall all of them. Numismatics is able to provide some evidence of Domitian's boast of deity.

The Numismatic Evidence

Dr. Ernest Janzen, of the University of Toronto, in an article entitled, "The Jesus of the Apocalypse Wears the Emperor's Clothes" (1994, see also 1993) provides for two lines of evidence from numismatics for Domitian's claim to deity. The first are coins minted in AD 83 called the *DIVI CAESAR* ("divine Caesar") coins (Vagi 2:329, coins 1160, 1161, 1162). These coins, minted in gold and silver, had the bust of Domitia, the wife of Domitian, on the obverse with the inscription, "*DIVI CAESAR*

MATRI" and "DIVI CAESARIS MATER", the mother of the divine Caesar! (Vagi 2:327, coins 1149, 1150, 1151; RIC 2:179, coin 209A; 2:180, coin 213). On the reverse was their infant son who was born in the second consulship of Domitian in AD 73 and died in the second year after he became emperor in AD 82 (Suetonius, Domitian 3:1; LCL 2:345). He is depicted as naked and seated on a zoned globe with his arms stretched out surrounded by seven stars! (RIC 2:209; coins 440, 441) The inscription surrounding it said "DIVUS CAESAR IMP DOMITIANI F"; translated it means, "the divine Caesar, son of the emperor Domitian." The infant is depicted as baby Jupiter (Jupiter being the head of the Roman pantheon). "The globe represents world dominion and power, while stars typically bespoke the divine nature of those accompanied. ... the infant depicted on the globe was the son of (a) god and that the infant was conqueror of the world" (Janzen 1994:645-647). It goes without saying that if he is the son of a god, then his father, Domitian, must be god! I can not help but use my sanctified imagination and wonder if John did not have this coin in front of him when he penned, "and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to His feet ... He had in His right hand seven stars" (Rev. 1:13,16). He refers back to this vision in the letter to the church at Thyatira when the Lord Jesus identifies Himself as the "Son of God" (Rev. 2:18).

The second bit of numismatic evidence comes from the coins with the fulmen ("thunderbolt") on them. The fulmen is the divine attribute of Jupiter. Janzen says, "In 84 Domitian struck reverse type Jupiter holding thunderbolt and spear. The first issue of 85 continued

this type but the second issue witnessed the fulmen in Domitian's hand. He and Jupiter would 'share' the fulmen for the years 85-6 after which Jupiter remained as a regular type, only without fulmen. From 87-96 Domitian alone held the fulmen, persuasive evidence of a developing megalomania which place the fulmen in Domitian's hand and are clearly patterned after the Jupiter with fulmen type" (Janzen 1994:648, footnote 55; RIC 2:185, coins 247,248; 186, coin 253; 189, coin 279; 192, coin 300; 194, coins 313,314; 196, coin 334; 197, coin 342; 203, coin 288). One numismatic expert says that this type "clearly suggests a parallel between himself and 'Jupiter tonans' (the thunderer) or the father of the gods" (Mattingly, cited in Janzen 1994:648, footnote 55).

Martial, the first century satirist of Rome, confirms this idea in his writings. One of his epigrams, written in AD 94, describing the Gens Flavia says, "This piece of ground, that lies open and is being covered with marble and gold, knew our Lord (domini) in infancy. ... Here stood the venerable house that gave the world what Rhodes and pious Crete gave the starry sky [Helios, the sun god, was born on Rhodes according to some traditions, and Zeus, the chief god, was born on Crete-GF]. ... But you the Father of the High One did protect, and for you, Caesar, thunderbolt (fulmen) and aegis took the place of spear and buckler" (Epigrams 9:20; LCL 2: 249). Sometimes Martial even calls Domitian the "Thunderer" (7:99:1; LCL 2: 157), a title that usually belongs to Jupiter (Zeus) (Epigrams 9:91; LCL 2: 311)! Domitian is putting himself on the same level as Jupiter.

Elsewhere in Martial's writings he calls Domitian "lord" (Epigrams 7:2; 8:82; 9:20, 28, 66; LCL 2: 75, 231, 249, 257, 291) and "lord and god" (Epigrams 5:8; LCL 1: 361; 7:34; 8:2; LCL 2: 105, 161). Interestingly, after the death of Domitian, Martial repudiates these titles attributed to Domitian (Epigrams 10:72; LCL 2: 391). However, I think he was reflecting the sentiments of the day while Domitian was alive. Though he may not have believed it, that is what Domitian wanted, that is what he got.

Another interesting sidelight is that on some of Domitian's coins, the initials "PM" appears on the inscriptions. Some of the coins have Domitian praying or offering sacrifices (RIC 2:201, coins 377,378; 202, coins 381,383,385). These initials stand for "pontifex maximus," the high priest as head of the Roman religion. Biblically, this title belongs only to the Lord Jesus (Heb. 4:14). Yet in Revelation, the "things which you [John] have seen" (Rev. 1:19) is the vision of the glorified Son of Man who is also the High Priest (Thomas 1965: 241-247).

It appears that something triggered Domitian to openly claim deity in AD 85/86. The triggering event is not known, but the response in Asia Minor was a temple dedicated to the Sabastoi (emperors). This temple appears on several coins minted in Ephesus (Ramsay 1994: 168).

In the year AD 91/2 coins were minted in Alexandria, Egypt which had on the obverse a portrait of Domitian encircled by an inscription that identified Domitian as the "son of God" (RPC 2:323,328,333-337). One coin in particular had on its reverse, four pygmies surrounding

Hercules. In his left hand he is holding a fifth and in his right is his club. The inscription calls Domitian the “son of God” (Mowat 1901: 72-74; RPC 2:337, coin 2709).

Coins from the Seven Churches

Let us turn our attention to the Roman provincial coins of Asia Minor. The Book of Revelation was addressed to the churches at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamon, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (Rev. 1:11; 2-3). Each city minted coins during the reign of Emperor Domitian. The study of the local coins is important because of the light they shed on the city at the time. Colin Hemer points out, “Coinage is often in fact the most illustrating key to local religion and so to the formative ideas of the society” (2001:25). A British numismatic expert has observed, “The real value of the types of coins from the Greek East is the insights into the local city life which they reveal. Topography, architecture, literature and mythology, religious beliefs and practices, entertainments and celebrations were all considered suitable subjects for illustrations because the coinage provided citizens with a vehicle on which to express their civic pride” (I. Carradice, cited in Kreitzer 1996: 28).

Ephesus

The first letter from the Lord Jesus went to the church at Ephesus (Rev. 2:1-7). This city was famous because it housed one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the Temple of Artemis / Diana. In this open-air temple there was a garden with deer roaming in front of a sacred tree and the cult statue of Artemis. This garden

was called the “paradise of Artemis” (Hemer 2001:50-52).

Many coins from Ephesus have a bee on one side, symbolizing the priestesses that ministered in the temple as well as a palm tree and stag on the reverse (Rakicic 1994:6-12). The palm tree was a “sacred tree” and was considered the “tree of life” (Hemer 2001: 41-47).

John writes that the “overcomers” (those who have trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and are living a victorious Christian life) will “eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7).

What John is saying is this: the temple of Artemis is a false imitation of the real thing, i.e. the Biblical Tree of Life and the Paradise of God. Believers in the Lord Jesus have something infinitely superior than the Artemisian to look forward to. If they are faithful to the Lord, His Word, and to each other they will be “overcomers.” Those who overcome will receive the privilege of eating from the Tree of Life (Rev. 22:12-14) and abiding in the Paradise of God.

Smyrna

The second letter is addressed to the church of Smyrna (Rev. 2: 8-11). The city was established on Old Smyrna (Bayraki) and destroyed about 700 BC. It was reestablished as a polis in 290 BC. This is an example of a city that “died” but came “back to life.”

The story is told that Alexander the Great was hunting on Mt. Pagos when he fell asleep under a plane tree in front of the Temple of the two Nemeses. The two goddesses appeared to him in a dream and told him to

rebuild the city of Smyrna on Mt. Pagos. The Smyraeans sent envoys to the Temple of Apollo at Klaros to inquire if they should rebuild. The response from the priest was, “Thrice, yes, four times blest will those men be who shall dwell in Pagus beyond the sacred Meles” (Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 5:1-3; LCL 3:193).

A Roman coin minted during the reign of Philippus Arab (AD 244-249) depicts Alexander the Great sleeping under a plane tree with the two Nemeses on Mt. Pagos (Akurgal 1993: pl. 46a). The two Nemeses appear on one coin minted during the reign of Domitian (RPC 2:158, coin 1012).

Pergamum

The third letter is addressed to the believers living in Pergamum (Rev. 2:12-17). Twice in the letter Jesus acknowledges that Pergamum is where “Satan’s throne is” and where “Satan dwells” (Rev. 2:13). Commentators have had a field day trying to figure out these statements.

The numismatic evidence can support three of these ideas. The first is that Satan’s throne was located at Pergamun because there was a large temple to Asklepius, the god of healing. One of the characteristics of coins on Asklepius is that there is a snake coiled around a stick in his hands. Satan is called “that old serpent the Devil and Satan” (Rev. 12:9; RPC 2:144,145; coins 921,924).

The second possibility is the Temple of Zeus, the chief deity of the Greek pantheon that overlooked the lower city of Pergamun. This temple is now in the Berlin

Museum. There are a number of coins minted with the bust of Zeus on it.

The third possibility is the Temple of Augustus and the emperor worship associated with the place. One coin was minted during the reign of Domitian depicting a temple with four columns and a statue of Augustus (RPC 2:144, coin 918). This temple is also depicted in the reigns of Tiberius (RPC 1:403, coin 2369), Claudius (RPC 1:403, coin 2370) and Nero (RPC 1:403, coin 2372).

Thyatira

The fourth letter is addressed to the church meeting in the city of Thyatira (Rev. 2:18-29). Colin Hemer states: “The longest and most difficult of the seven letters is addressed to the least known, least important and least remarkable of the cities. The letter was not, I think, obscure to the church in Thyatira, the problem lies in our remoteness from the contemporary facts” (2001: 106).

Coins might help to shed some light on the letter. In this letter Jesus is described as “the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass” (Rev. 2:18). This is the only time in the Book of Revelation that Jesus is referred to as the “Son of God”. It is implied in Rev. 1:6; 2:27; 3:5, 21; 14:1.

The coins of Thyatira point to Apollo Tyrimnaeus as the patron deity of the city. Apollo was the “son of Zeus.” Jesus is described as having “eyes as flames of fire and feet of gleaming bronze.” The reader would immediately go back to the vision of the glorified Son of Man in Rev.

1:13-16. Colin Hemer points out that the fine bronze is “an alloy of copper with metallic zinc [that] was made in Thyatira, the zinc was obtained by distillation. This was a finer and purer brass than the rough and variable coinage-alloy” (2001:116). He goes on to suggest that there might have been a statue in town of the patron deity, Apollo Tyrimnaeus. Coins have been discovered of him grasping the hands of the Roman emperor (Ramsay 1994:235). While this coin is much later than the time of Domitian, there were coins with implements associated with Apollo (tripod, lyre) and his reign (RPC 2:147).

The phrase “son of God” would also call to mind the coins of Domitian’s deified infant son seated on the globe reaching for the seven stars.

Sardis

The fifth letter is addressed to the church meeting in the city of Sardis (Rev. 3:1-6). There seems to be no coins that illustrate the letter to the church at Sardis.

Philadelphia

The sixth letter was written to the church in Philadelphia (Rev. 3:7-13). This was a small church to which Jesus has nothing negative to say. In fact, He commends them for keeping His Word and not denying His Name in spite of the fact that they had little strength (3:8).

There have been very few excavations in Philadelphia. In the Manisa Museum in Turkey there are statues of various deities that have been discovered by the locals while putting in foundations for their houses or plowing fields. Some of the deities represented are Dionysis, the god of wine and merrymaking; Demeter, the goddess of

agriculture; Helios, the sun god. The coins add a few more deities. Philadelphia was a city that had a pluralistic society, but also had an exclusive element in the population that thought they had a corner on the market of truth, i.e. the synagogue. Yet the believers in the Lord Jesus were faithful to Him in spite of the societal pressures.

The promise to the overcomers was that he would be made a “pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on Him my new name” (3:12).

After the devastating earthquake of AD 17, the Roman government financially assisted the cities of Asia Minor that were affected by this quake. The city showed its gratitude to the emperor by changing the name of the city to “Neocaesarea”, the New Caesarea! There were coins minted in Philadelphia with this name on them (RPC 1:492,493, coin 3017; 494, coins 3032-3040).

Laodicia

The final letter was written to the church in Laodicea, located in the Lycos Valley (Rev. 3:14-22). In this letter, Jesus had nothing good to say about this church. In fact, He describes their arrogance by saying, “You say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” (3:17).

The church was imitating the society around it. It was a very affluent society and quite self-sufficient. After the earthquake of A.D. 17, the Roman imperial government

provided aid to the cities of Asia Minor, including Laodicia. Yet when Laodicia was hit with another earthquake in A.D. 60 (or 64) they declined the offer of imperial aid. Tacitus said, "Laodicea, one of the famous Asiatic cities, was laid in ruins by an earthquake, but recovered by its own resources, without assistance from ourselves" (Annals 14:27; LCL 5: 151).

In A.D. 22-23, Emperor Tiberius (A.D. 14-37) issued a coin commemorating his generosity to the cities of Asia Minor. On the reverse was Tiberius seated on a throne with his feet resting on a footstool. The inscription surrounding him states that he personally financed the restoration of the cities (Vagi 2:243, coin 442).

Word pictures from Revelation

Altars and Thunderbolt

In the first two years of his reign, Domitian minted coins with thunderbolts on a throne (RIC 2:154, coin 1; 155, coins 13, 16; 156, coin 24). These two objects are associated together in the Throne Room of Heaven recorded in Revelation 4. The description given is that the Lord Jesus is sitting on the throne with the 24 elders surrounding Him. John writes, "And from the throne preceded lightnings, thunders and voices" (4:5).

Statue of Domitian Riding a Horse

Emperor Domitian erected a large bronze statue of himself riding a horse in the Forum of Rome in A.D. 91, the famous Equus Maximus Domitiani (Platner 1929: 201-202). This statue commemorated his campaigns against the Germans and his attempt to bring peace to the Roman Empire. Statius, one of the Roman poets,

describes this statue in detail in the first poem in his book, *Silvae* (LCL 1: 7-15). Domitian minted a coin with a detailed representation of this statue on it (Carradice 1982: 376,377; 1993: Plate 30:36).

In contrast, the

Book of Revelation, chapter 19, records the return of the Lord Jesus to earth on a white horse with His saints following Him. Domitian took the title “Lord and God”. When the Lord Jesus returns, He will have on His robe and thighs a name written, “KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (19:16). Domitian thought he could bring peace to the Roman Empire, but only the Lord Jesus, the Prince of Peace (Isa, 9:6, 7) will bring world peace when He rules and reigns from Jerusalem.

Apollo and Ravens Predicting Prophecy

Emperor Domitian, the self-proclaimed “Lord and God” and ruthless dictator, reigned from AD 81 to 96. During the last few years of his life, Domitian became very superstitious. In fact, on the day before he was murdered, he consulted an astrologer (Domitian 14:3; LCL 2:373). Domitian himself proclaimed his own death based on an astrological reading by declaring, “that on the following day the moon would be stained with blood in Aquarius” (Domitian 16:1; LCL 2:375). It has been demonstrated that this was based on Domitian’s astrological readings (Molnar 1995:6-12).

During this time Domitian also consulted Apollo, the god of music and poetry, and who was also the god of light, truth and prophecy! To commemorate his superstition, the emperor minted coins depicting Apollo on one side and a raven, a bird associated with prophecy, on the

reverse side (Jones 1990:266; RIC 2:188, coin 275; 204, coins 398, 399; 205, coin 410; 206, coin 414; 207, coin 424B). It was believed one could tell the future by watching this bird's flight (Kanitz 1973-74:47), so Domitian looked to it to foretell his immediate future. Ironically, Suetonius, a Roman historian and senator, records, "A few months before he [Domitian] was killed, a raven perched on the Capitalium and cried, 'All will be well,' an omen which some interpreted as follows: '... a raven ... could not say, "It is well," only declared "It will be well."'" (Domitian 23:2; LCL 2:385). Emperor Domitian died soon after and all was well! J The Apostle John, exiled on the island of Patmos about AD 95, received a more sure word of prophecy. Not from a raven, nor Apollo, but from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The Book of Revelation begins, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants - things which must shortly take place" (Rev. 1:1). He goes on to say, "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near" (Rev. 1:3). Might we read the book, be blessed and also be encouraged.

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