

Part II, Chapter I: Introduction, concerning the time when the Apocalypse was written

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PART II.

OBSERVATIONS

UPON THE
APOCALYPSE

OF
St. JOHN.

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CHAP. I.

Introduction, concerning the time when the Apocalypse was written.

IRENÆUS introduced an opinion that the *Apocalypse* was written in the time of *Domitian*; but then he also postponed the writing of some others of the sacred books, and was to place the *Apocalypse* after them: he might perhaps have heard from his master *Polycarp* that he had received this book from *John* about the time of *Domitian*'s death; or indeed *John* <236> might himself at that time have made a new publication of it, from whence *Irenæus* might imagine it was then but newly written. *Eusebius* in his *Chronicle* and *Ecclesiastical History* follows *Irenæus*; but afterwards ^[1] in his *Evangelical Demonstrations*, he conjoins the banishment of *John* into *Patmos*, with the deaths of *Peter* and *Paul*: and so do ^[2] *Tertullian* and *Pseudo-Prochorus*, as well as the first author, whoever he was, of that very antient fable, that *John* was put by *Nero* into a vessel of hot oil, and coming out unhurt, was banished by him into *Patmos*. Tho this story be no more than a fiction, yet was it founded on a tradition of the first Churches, that *John* was banished into *Patmos* in the days of *Nero*. *Epiphanius* represents the *Gospel of John* as written in the time of *Domitian*, and the *Apocalypse* even before that of *Nero*. ^[3] *Arethas* in the beginning of his *Commentary* quotes the opinion of *Irenæus* from *Eusebius*, but follows it not: for he afterwards affirms the *Apocalypse* was written before the destruction of *Jerusalem*, and that former commentators had expounded the sixth seal of that destruction.

With the opinion of the first Commentators agrees the tradition of the Churches of Syria, preserved to this day in the title of the Syriac Version of the *Apocalypse*, which title is this: <237> *The Revelation which was made to John the Evangelist by God in the Island Patmos, into which he was banished by Nero the Cæsar*. The same is confirmed by a story told by ^[4] Eusebius out of Clemens Alexandrinus, and other antient authors, concerning a youth, whom *John* some time after his return from *Patmos* committed to the care of the Bishop of a certain city. The Bishop educated, instructed, and at length baptized him; but then remitting of his care, the young man thereupon got into ill company, and began by degrees first to revel and grow vitious, then to abuse and spoil those he met in the night; and at last grew so desperate, that his companions turning a band of high-way men, made him their Captain: and, saith ^[5] Chrysostom, he continued their Captain a long time. At length *John* returning to that city, and hearing what was done, rode to the thief; and, when he out of reverence to his old master fled, *John* rode after him, recalled him, and restored him to the Church. This is a story of many years, and requires that *John* should have returned from *Patmos* rather at the death of *Nero* than at that of *Domitian*; because between the death of *Domitian* and that of *John* there were but two years and an half; and *John* in his old age was ^[6] so infirm as to be carried to Church, dying above 90 years <238> old, and therefore could not be then suppos'd able to ride after the thief.

This opinion is further supported by the allusions in the *Apocalypse* to the Temple and Altar, and holy City, as then standing; and to the *Gentiles*, who were soon after to tread under foot the holy City and outward Court. 'Tis confirmed also by the style of the *Apocalypse* itself, which is fuller of *Hebraisms* than his Gospel. For thence it may be gathered, that it was written when *John* was newly come out of *Judea*, where he had been used to the Syriac tongue; and that he did not write his Gospel, till by long converse with the Asiatick Greeks he had left off most of the *Hebraisms*. It is confirmed also by the many false *Apocalypses*, as those of *Peter*, *Paul*, *Thomas*, *Stephen*, *Elias* and *Cerinthus*, written in imitation of the true one. For as the many false Gospels, false Acts, and false Epistles were occasioned by true ones; and the writing many false *Apocalypses*, and ascribing them to Apostles and Prophets, argues that there was a true Apostolic one in great request with the first *Christians*: so this true one may well be suppos'd to have been written early, that there may be room in the Apostolic age for the writing of so many false ones afterwards, and fathering them upon *Peter*, *Paul*, *Thomas* and others, who were dead before *John*. Caius, <239> who was contemporary with *Tertullian*, ^[7] tells us that *Cerinthus* wrote his Revelations as a great Apostle, and pretended the visions were shewn him by Angels, asserting a *millennium* of carnal pleasures at *Jerusalem* after the resurrection; so that his *Apocalypse* was plainly written in imitation of *John*'s: and yet he lived so early, that ^[8] he resisted the Apostles at *Jerusalem* in or before the first year of *Claudius*, that is, 26 years before the death of *Nero*, and ^[9] died before *John*.

These reasons may suffice for determining the time; and yet there is one more, which to considering men may seem a good reason, to others not. I'll propound it, and leave it to every man's judgment. The *Apocalypse* seems to be alluded to in the Epistles of *Peter* and that to the *Hebrews* and therefore to have been written before them. Such allusions in the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, I take to be the discourses concerning the High-Priest in the heavenly Tabernacle, who is both Priest and King, as was *Melchisedec*; and those concerning the word of God, with the sharp two-edged sword, the σαββατισμὸς, or *millennial rest*, the earth whose end is to be burned, suppose by the lake of fire, the judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries, the heavenly City which hath foundations whose builder and maker is <240> God, the cloud of witnesses, mount Sion, heavenly Jerusalem, general assembly, spirits of just men made perfect, viz. by the resurrection, and the shaking of heaven and earth, and removing them, that the new heaven, new earth and new kingdom which cannot be shaken, may remain. In the first of *Peter* occur these: ^[10] The Revelation of Jesus Christ, twice or thrice repeated; ^[11] the blood of Christ as of a Lamb foreordained before the foundation of the world; ^[12] the spiritual building in heaven, 1 Pet. ii. 5. an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us, who are kept unto the salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time, 1 Pet. i. 4, 5. ^[13] the royal Priesthood, ^[14] the holy Priesthood, ^[15] the judgment beginning at the house of God, and ^[16] the Church at Babylon. These are indeed obscurer allusions; but the second Epistle, from the 19th verse of the first Chapter to the end, seems to be a continued Commentary upon the *Apocalypse*. There, in writing to the Churches in Asia, to whom *John* was commanded to send this Prophecy, he tells them, they have a more sure word of Prophecy, to be heeded by them, as a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in their hearts, that is, until they begin to understand it: for no Prophecy, saith he, of the scripture is of any pri <241> vate interpretation; the Prophecy came not in old

time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. Daniel ^[17] himself professes that he understood not his own *Prophecies*; and therefore the Churches were not to expect the interpretation from their Prophet *John*, but to study the *Prophecies* themselves. This is the substance of what *Peter* says in the first chapter; and then in the second he proceeds to describe, out of this *sure word of Prophecy*, how there should arise in the Church *false Prophets*, or *false teachers*, expressed collectively in the *Apocalypse* by the name of the false Prophet; who should *bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them*, which is the character of *Antichrist*: *And many, saith he, shall follow their lusts* ^[18]; they that dwell on the earth ^[19] shall be deceived by the false Prophet, and be made drunk with the wine of the Whore's fornication, *by reason of whom the way of truth shall be blasphemed*; for ^[20] the Beast is full of blasphemy: *and thro' covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandize of you*; for these are the Merchants of the Earth, who trade with the great Whore, and their merchandize ^[21] is all things of price, with the bodies and souls of men: *whose judgment — lingreth not, and their damnation* ^[22] *slumbreth not*, but shall surely <242> come upon them at the last day suddenly, as the flood upon *the old world*, and fire and brimstone upon *Sodom and Gomorrha*, when the just shall be delivered ^[23] like *Lot*; for *the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished*, in the lake of fire; *but chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness*, ^[24] being made drunk with the wine of the Whore's fornication; who *despise dominion, and are not afraid to blaspheme glories*; for the beast opened his mouth against God ^[25] to blaspheme his name and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. *These, as natural brute beasts*, the ten-horned beast and two-horned beast, or false Prophet, *made to be taken and destroyed*, in the lake of fire, *blaspheme the things they understand not*: — they count it pleasure to riot in the day-time — sporting themselves with their own deceivings, while they feast ^[26] with you, *having eyes full of an* ^[27] *Adulteress*: for the kingdoms of the beast live deliciously with the great Whore, and the nations are made drunk with the wine of her fornication. *They are gone astray, following the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness*, the false Prophet ^[28] who taught *Balak* to cast a stumbling-block before the children of *Israel*. *These are*, not <243> fountains of living water, but *wells without water*; not such clouds of Saints as the two witnesses ascend in, but *clouds that are carried with a tempest*, &c. Thus does the author of this Epistle spend all the second Chapter in describing the qualities of the *Apocalyptic* Beasts and false Prophet: and then in the third he goes on to describe their destruction more fully, and the future kingdom. He saith, that because the coming of *Christ* should be long deferred, they should scoff, saying, *where is the promise of his coming?* Then he describes the sudden coming of the day of the Lord upon them, *as a thief in the night*, which is the *Apocalyptic* phrase; and the *millennium*, or *thousand years*, which *are with God but as a day*; the *passing away of the old heavens and earth*, by a conflagration in the lake of fire, and our *looking for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness*.

Seeing therefore *Peter* and *John* were Apostles of the circumcision, it seems to me that they staid with their Churches in *Judea* and *Syria* till the *Romans* made war upon their nation, that is, till the twelfth year of *Nero*; that they then followed the main body of their flying Churches into *Asia*, and that *Peter* went thence by *Corinth* to *Rome*; that the *Roman* Empire looked upon those Churches as enemies, because <244> *Jews* by birth; and therefore to prevent insurrections, secured their leaders, and banished *John* into *Patmos*. It seems also probable to me that the *Apocalypse* was there composed, and that soon after the Epistle to the *Hebrews* and those of *Peter* were written to these Churches, with reference to this Prophecy as what they were particularly concerned in. For it appears by these Epistles, that they were written in times of general affliction and tribulation under the heathens, and by consequence when the Empire made war upon the *Jews*; for till then the heathens were at peace with the *Christian Jews*, as well as with the rest. The Epistle to the *Hebrews*, since it mentions *Timothy* as related to those *Hebrews*, must be written to them after their flight into *Asia*, where *Timothy* was Bishop; and by consequence after the war began, the *Hebrews* in *Judea* being strangers to *Timothy*. *Peter* seems also to call *Rome* *Babylon*, as well with respect to the war made upon *Judea*, and the approaching captivity, like that under old *Babylon*, as with respect to that name in the *Apocalypse*: and in writing to the strangers scattered thro'out Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, *Asia* and *Bithynia*, he seems to intimate that they were the strangers newly scattered by the *Roman* wars; for those were the only strangers there belonging to his care.

This account of things agrees best with history when duly rectified. For [29] *Justin* and [30] *Irenæus* say, that *Simon Magus* came to *Rome* in the reign of *Claudius*, and exercised juggling tricks there. *Pseudo-Clemens* adds, that he endeavoured there to fly, but broke his neck thro' the prayers of *Peter*. Whence [31] *Eusebius*, or rather his interpolator *Jerom*, has recorded, that *Peter* came to *Rome* in the second year of *Claudius*: but [32] *Cyril Bishop of Jerusalem*, *Philastrius*, *Sulpitius*, *Prosper*, *Maximus Taurinensis*, and *Hegesippus junior*, place this victory of *Peter* in the time of *Nero*. Indeed the antienter tradition was, that *Peter* came to *Rome* in the days of this Emperor, as may be seen in [33] *Lactantius*. *Chrysostom* [34] tells us, that the Apostles continued long in *Judea*, and that then being driven out by the *Jews* they went to the *Gentiles*. This dispersion was in the first year of the *Jewish* war, when the *Jews*, as *Josephus* tells us, began to be tumultuous and violent in all places. For all agree that the Apostles were dispersed into several regions at once; and *Origen* has set down the time, [35] telling us that in the beginning of the *Judaic* war, the Apostles and disciples of our Lord were scattered into all nations; *Thomas* into *Parthia*, *Andrew* into *Scythia*, *John* into *Asia*, and *Peter* first into *Asia*, where he preacht to the dispersion, and <246> thence into *Italy*. [36] *Dionysius Corinthius* saith, that *Peter* went from *Asia* by *Corinth* to *Rome*, and all antiquity agrees that *Peter* and *Paul* were martyred there in the end of *Nero's* reign. *Mark* went with *Timothy* to *Rome*, 2 *Tim.* iv. 11. *Colos.* iv. 10. *Sylvanus* was *Paul's* assistant; and by the companions of *Peter*, mentioned in his first Epistle, we may know that he wrote from *Rome*; and the Antients generally agree, that in this Epistle he understood *Rome* by *Babylon*. His second Epistle was writ to the same dispersed strangers with the first, 2 *Pet.* iii. 1. and therein he saith, that *Paul* had writ of the same things to them, and also in his other Epistles, ver. 15, 16. Now as there is no Epistle of *Paul* to these strangers besides that to the *Hebrews*, so in this Epistle, chap. x. 11, 12. we find at large all those things which *Peter* had been speaking of, and here refers to; particularly the *passing away of the old heavens and earth*, and *establishing an inheritance immoveable*, with an exhortation to grace, because *God*, to the wicked, is a *consuming fire*, Heb. xii. 25, 26, 28, 29.

Having determined the time of writing the *Apocalypse*, I need not say much about the truth of it, since it was in such request with the first ages, that many endeavoured to imitate it, by feigning *Apocalypses* under the Apostles names; <247> and the Apostles themselves, as I have just now shewed, studied it, and used its phrases; by which means the style of the Epistle to the *Hebrews* became more mystical than that of *Paul's* other Epistles, and the style of *John's* Gospel more figurative and majestic than that of the other Gospels. I do not apprehend that *Christ* was called the word of *God* in any book of the New Testament written before the *Apocalypse*; and therefore am of opinion, the language was taken from this Prophecy, as were also many other phrases in this Gospel, such as those of *Christ's* being *the light which enlightens the world*, *the lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world*, *the bridegroom*, *he that testifieth*, *he that came down from heaven*, *the Son of God*, &c. *Justin Martyr*, who within thirty years after *John's* death became a *Christian*, writes expresly that *a certain man among the Christians whose name was John, one of the twelve Apostles of Christ, in the Revelation which was shewed him, prophesied that those who believed in Christ should live a thousand years at Jerusalem*. And a few lines before he saith: *But I, and as many as are Christians, in all things right in their opinions, believe both that there shall be a resurrection of the flesh, and a thousand years life at Jerusalem built, adorned and enlarged*. Which is as much as to <248> say, that all true *Christians* in that early age received this Prophecy: for in all ages, as many as believed the thousand years, received the *Apocalypse* as the foundation of their opinion: and I do not know one instance to the contrary. *Papias* Bishop of *Hierapolis*, a man of the Apostolic age, and one of *John's* own disciples, did not only teach the doctrine of the thousand years, but also [37] asserted the *Apocalypse* as written by divine inspiration. *Melito*, who flourished next after *Justin*, [38] wrote a commentary upon this Prophecy; and he, being Bishop of *Sardis* one of the seven Churches, could neither be ignorant of their tradition about it, nor impose upon them. *Irenæus*, who was contemporary with *Melito*, wrote much upon it, and said, that *the number 666 was in all the antient and approved copies; and that he had it also confirmed to him by those who had seen John face to face*, meaning no doubt his master *Polycarp* for one. At the same time [39] *Theophilus* Bishop of *Antioch* asserted it, and so did *Tertullian*, *Clemens Alexandrinus*, and *Origen* soon after; and their contemporary *Hippolytus* the Martyr, Metropolitan of the *Arabians*, [40] wrote a commentary upon it. All these were antient men, flourishing within a hundred and twenty years after *John's* death, and of greatest note in the Churches of those times. Soon after did *Victor* <249> *rinus Pictaviensis* write another commentary upon it; and he lived in the time of *Dioclesian*. This may surely suffice to shew how the *Apocalypse* was received and studied in the first ages: and I do not indeed find any other book of the New Testament so strongly attested, or commented upon so early as this. The Prophecy said: *Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this*

Prophecy, and keep the things which are written therein. This animated the first *Christians* to study it so much, till the difficulty made them remit, and comment more upon the other books of the New Testament. This was the state of the *Apocalypse*, till the thousand years being misunderstood, brought a prejudice against it: and *Dionysius of Alexandria*, noting how it abounded with barbarisms, that is with *Hebraisms*, promoted that prejudice so far, as to cause many *Greeks* in the fourth century to doubt of the book. But whilst the *Latins*, and a great part of the *Greeks*, always retained the *Apocalypse*, and the rest doubted only out of prejudice, it makes nothing against its authority.

This Prophecy is called *the Revelation*, with respect to *the scripture of truth*, which *Daniel*^[41] was commanded to *shut up and seal, till the time of the end*. *Daniel* sealed it *until the time of the end*; and until that time comes, <250> the Lamb is opening the seals: and afterwards the two Witnesses prophesy out of it a long time in sack-cloth, before they ascend up to heaven in a cloud. All which is as much as to say, that these Prophecies of *Daniel* and *John* should not be understood till the time of the end: but then some should prophesy out of them in an afflicted and mournful state for a long time, and that but darkly, so as to convert but few. But in the very end, the Prophecy should be so far interpreted as to convince many. *Then*, saith *Daniel*, *many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be encreased*. For the Gospel must be preached in all nations before the great tribulation, and end of the world. The palm-bearing multitude, which come out of this great tribulation, cannot be innumerable out of all nations, unless they be made so by the preaching of the Gospel before it comes. There must be a stone cut out of a mountain without hands, before it can fall upon the toes of the Image, and become a great mountain and fill the earth. An Angel must fly thro' the midst of heaven with the everlasting Gospel to preach to all nations, before *Babylon* falls, and the Son of man reaps his harvest. The two Prophets must ascend up to heaven in a cloud, before the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of *Christ*. 'Tis therefore a part of this Prophecy, that it should <251> not be understood before the last age of the world; and therefore it makes for the credit of the Prophecy, that it is not yet understood. But if the last age, the age of opening these things, be now approaching, as by the great successes of late Interpreters it seems to be, we have more encouragement than ever to look into these things. If the general preaching of the Gospel be approaching, it is to us and our posterity that those words mainly belong: ^[42]*In the time of the end the wise shall understand, but none of the wicked shall understand.* ^[43]*Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this Prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein.*

The folly of Interpreters has been, to foretel times and things by this Prophecy, as if God designed to make them Prophets. By this rashness they have not only exposed themselves, but brought the Prophecy also into contempt. The design of God was much otherwise. He gave this and the Prophecies of the Old Testament, not to gratify men's curiosities by enabling them to foreknow things, but that after they were fulfilled they might be interpreted by the event, and his own Providence, not the Interpreters, be then manifested thereby to the world. For the event of things predicted many ages before, will then be a convincing argument that the world <252> is governed by providence. For as the few and obscure Prophecies concerning *Christ's* first coming were for setting up the *Christian* religion, which all nations have since corrupted; so the many and clear Prophecies concerning the things to be done at *Christ's* second coming, are not only for predicting but also for effecting a recovery and re-establishment of the long-lost truth, and setting up a kingdom wherein dwells righteousness. The event will prove the *Apocalypse*; and this Prophecy, thus proved and understood, will open the old Prophets, and all together will make known the true religion, and establish it. For he that will understand the old Prophets, must begin with this; but the time is not yet come for understanding them perfectly, because the main revolution predicted in them is not yet come to pass. *In the days of the voice of the seventh Angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God shall be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the Prophets: and then the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ, and he shall reign for ever*, Apoc. x. 7. xi. 15. There is already so much of the Prophecy fulfilled, that as many as will take pains in this study, may see sufficient instances of God's providence: but then the signal revolutions predicted by all the holy Prophets, will at once <253> both turn mens eyes upon considering the predictions, and plainly interpret them. Till then we must content ourselves with interpreting what hath been already fulfilled.

Amongst the Interpreters of the last age there is scarce one of note who hath not made some discovery worth knowing; and thence I seem to gather that God is about opening these mysteries. The success of others put me upon considering it; and if I have done any thing which may be useful to following writers, I have my design.

- [1] Dem. Evang. l. 3.
- [2] Vid. *Pamelium* in notis ad *Tertull.* de Præscriptionibus, n. 215 & *Hieron* l. 1. contra *Jovinianum*, c. 14. Edit. *Erasmi*.
- [3] Areth. c. 18, 19.
- [4] Hist. Eccl. l. 3. c. 23.
- [5] Chrysost. ad Theodorum lapsum.
- [6] Hieron. in Epist. ad Gal. l. 3. c. 6.
- [7] Apud Euseb. Eccl. Hist. l. 3. c. 28. Edit. *Valesii*.
- [8] Epiphan. Hæres. 28.
- [9] Hieron. adv. Lucif.
- [10] 1 Pet. i. 7, 13. iv. 13. & v. 1.
- [11] Apoc. xiii. 8.
- [12] Apoc. xxi.
- [13] Apoc. i. 6. & v. 10.
- [14] Apoc. xx. 6.
- [15] Apoc. xx. 4, 12.
- [16] Apoc. xvii.
- [17] Dan. viii. 15, 16, 27. & xii. 8, 9.
- [18] ὁσελγειας, in many of the best MSS.
- [19] Apoc. xiii. 7, 12.
- [20] Apoc. xiii. 1, 5, 6.
- [21] Apoc. xviii. 12, 13.
- [22] Apoc. xix. 20.
- [23] Apoc. xxi. 3, 4.
- [24] Apoc. ix. 21. and xvii. 2.
- [25] Apoc. xiii. 6.
- [26] Apoc. xviii. 3, 7, 9.
- [27] μοιχαλίδος.

[28] Apoc. ii. 14.

[29] Apol. ad Antonin. Pium.

[30] Hæres. l. 1. c. 20. Vide etiam Tertullianum, Apol. c. 13.

[31] Euseb. Chron.

[32] Cyril Catech. 6. Philastr. de hæres. cap. 30. Sulp. Hist. l. 2. Prosper de promiss. dimid. temp. cap. 13. Maximus serm. 5. in Natal. Apost. Hegesip. l. 2. c. 2.

[33] Lactant de mortib. Persec. c. 2.

[34] Hom. 70. in Matt. c. 22.

[35] Apud Euseb. Eccl. Hist. l. 2. c. 25.

[36] Euseb. Hist. l. 2. c. 25.

[37] Arethas in Proæm. comment. in Apoc.

[38] Euseb. Hist. l. 4. cap. 26. Hieron.

[39] Euseb. Hist. l. 4. c. 24.

[40] Hieron.

[41] Dan. x. 21. xii. 4, 9.

[42] Dan. xii. 4, 10.

[43] Apoc. i. 3.
