

ARISE & BUILD

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THE BOOK OF REVELATION AND ITS CHALLENGES

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In the last issue of *Arise and Build*, we considered Dr. Rushdoony's approach to Revelation, which is markedly different from what many postmillennialists today hold. Although he was respectful to partial preterist approaches to Revelation (and subsidized research in this area because he believed no stone should be unturned when it comes to determining the meaning of Scripture), he himself adopted an idealist approach to Revelation. We laid out some basic parameters of the idealist view for our readership to consider. The reactions to the article have been interesting in their own right.

Most readers appreciated learning about a school of thought concerning Revelation that they'd never considered before, usually because they've never heard of idealism. These were Christians who were willing to step outside of the usual echo chambers and set aside confirmation bias in favor of letting the Word speak without the constraint of preexisting theories they've imbibed. It takes a measure of humility to reconsider our approach to a major book of Scripture, to take a Berean route to testing an idea that is new to us (but not new in the history of Biblical interpretation). Even those who weren't ultimately convinced were serious about weighing the evidence, and that is always to be commended over against a closed mind.

Some readers, however, merely reiterated their existing position, extolling its presumed benefits. It wasn't even obvious that some critics had read a single word in the article (claiming that idealism promoted application but lacked interpretation—a rather stunning charge in light of the actual contents of the last *Arise and Build*). Some felt that Rushdoony's approach simply omitted the legal aspects of Revelation (whereas his approach was saturated with the legal aspect). Such comments come much closer to the fallacy of “cavalier dismissal” that D. A. Carson identified in his book, *Exegetical Fallacies*, where an opposing viewpoint is supposedly handled but in actual fact has merely been written off. “You're wrong because I'm right” is not a sound apologetic approach. You need what Dr. Greg Bahnsen called “hand-to-hand exegetical combat” instead of declaring a premature victory, or worse, being unable to even see alternatives due to tunnel vision.

That said, *every* approach to the book of Revelation has strengths and weaknesses. An honest expositor will acknowledge this in humility, as Dr. Rushdoony did yet again shortly before his passing. Being dismissive about problems means an unwillingness to grapple with the implications and consequences of one's preferred view. If you filter out contrary evidence, your confidence is built on a manipulated data set. Stay on that kind of path long enough and every viewpoint other than one's own will soon be declared to be Russian

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disinformation.

To that end, we will consider some issues that arise out of the partial preterist view of Revelation, and then move on to aspects of Revelation 20 that are not only seldom discussed, but usually actively suppressed. We pray that the ensuing discussion will prove edifying to our readership.

IS NERO THE BEAST OF REVELATION?

Dr. Rushdoony was willing to be convinced that identifying Nero with St. John's Beast was justified. He wanted someone to provide solid evidence to seal the deal, but in his lifetime he found nothing that met the burden of proof.

Of course, this identification is heavily promoted today, to the point that dissent from this view is sometimes treated as some kind of anti-postmil heresy (even if the dissenter is an otherwise serious postmil scholar). Partial preterists see a still-standing temple in Rev. 11, a line of Roman emperors, and critical "time texts" in Revelation that point in their direction. In that light, they calculate the number of the beast using Hebrew letters to arrive at *Neron Kesar* to yield an enumeration of 666. This identification is promoted as a slam dunk.

But it is not without serious problems.

The older theologians long ago recognized the games being played to identify the Beast of Revelation. Three tactics are usually employed: if you can't get the desired sum in one language, try another. If you still don't reach 666, add a title. And if you still haven't achieved 666, don't be too picky about the spelling.

In the case of Nero, all three of these tactics are deployed: neither Greek nor Latin are used, but Hebrew is. Even though John speaks of "the number of his name," we actually compute "the number of his title plus his name" and not his name. But most telling, we are not spelling *Caesar* properly in Hebrew, as the title has a *yod* in it that would cause the sum to be 676, and not 666.

The spelling of QSR (Caesar) with the *yod* is well attested, so partial preterists have been hunting for instances where

the *yod* is omitted. Of four instances that have recently been put forward, only one is unequivocally earlier in time than the presumed *early date* of Revelation's composition (which itself is still in dispute). That spelling of QSR without the *yod* appears in a title deed for sale of land, although nowadays we're only shown a posterized (black-and-white) version of it which hides the condition of the scroll and the damage to it right where the *yod* would have appeared. It is not as unequivocal a witness as one would hope, so this archaeological scrap is forced to bear considerable weight to support the theory being built upon the spelling it supposedly upholds.

Dr. Ken Gentry, a justifiably respected partial preterist scholar, argues that spellings were not as settled back then as they are today, and that we should consider QSR with and without the *yod* as being legitimate variants. This argument sidesteps the charge of *misspelling* QSR by putting forward *a* spelling of it, since it isn't right to speak of *the* spelling of QSR. (However, few dispute that the Jews fully intended to standardize the spelling of QSR with the quiescent *yod*, which by default made that spelling about as "official" as could be had in a culture known for its literacy. By that standard, spellings without the *yod* were, in contrast, regarded as deprecated and non-standard.)

What is the significance of this spelling arguably appearing on a title deed for land sale? Partial preterists point to Rev. 13 which says that no one could either buy or sell without the number of the Beast's name (Rev. 13:17). So these title deeds, which document the sale of property, have Nero's name *and imperial title* on them, usually spelled to total 676 but we have one exception yielding 666 prior to 70 AD. The fact that this appears in a land sale transaction is regarded as fulfilling Rev. 13:17's rule.

BUYING OR SELLING IN THE EMPIRE

The question then becomes: does the (possibly lone appearance) of a 666 spelling in Hebrew on a land deed establish the principle of Rev. 13:17—and *how well* does it establish the rule against buying

and selling compared to other interpretations of 666?

Rev. 13:17 doesn't, on the face of it, restrict the rule against buying or selling to land purchases only. This is an arbitrary restriction, to say the least. The condition, as stated in the text of Scripture, is that you could not buy or sell without the presence of the number of the beast's name. And for this, we have no evidence beyond that of a land deed when it comes to Nero.

In comparison, consider an alternative view put forward by Ethelbert Stauffer¹ that provides numismatic evidence that in the reign of Domitian, the number 666 appeared on the coinage throughout the Roman Empire. The abbreviation of Autokrator Kaisar Dometianos Sebastos Germanikos (A KAI DOMET SEB GE), which appeared on the widely-circulated coins commemorating Domitian, totaled 666.

What advantage does the Domitian theory have over the Nero theory (as the archaeological data now stands)? The theory has four apparent advantages: it puts the solution to the 666 cipher into the pockets and purses of everyone in the empire, it more completely fulfills the predicates of Rev. 13:17 about buying or selling since it isn't restricted to land deeds but to *all* economic transactions, there is no dispute between a dominant and minority spelling to cloud the interpretation, and it appears in a language that everyone using the coins understands.

While the Domitian theory avoids some of the issues with the Nero theory, the two approaches share a common impediment: they both require use of titles. In fact, the Domitian theory uses four titles, with Domitian's name sandwiched in the middle, and all five words are abbreviated so that 666 appears on the coins. The Nero theory involves only a single title, Caesar.

But strictly speaking, there should be no title or titles involved here, there should be no confusion about spellings, and the meaning of 666 should be independent of the choice of language. Moreover, you *could* convert your Roman coins to something less problematic (as witness the

moneychangers before the destruction of the temple, who had a thriving, if pernicious, business in the temple courts that triggered Christ's anger against them).

What if there were an interpretation of 666 that was valid in all languages, involved only a name of a man (and no title), appeared in a location that agreed with a structural parallel inside Revelation, and was just as serious about buying and selling as Stauffer's discussion of Roman coinage was? And what if that interpretation sought the answer to identifying the Beast from inside Scripture, and didn't appeal to extra-scriptural considerations? Wouldn't that theory be worth at least considering, in terms of its relative strengths and weaknesses?

We believe it *is* worthwhile to examine it briefly, and to keep in mind Noah Webster's declaration that legal tender laws "are the devil in the flesh" because such laws force people to use currency that God's Word declares to be an abomination that shouldn't even be on your person. (Note in this connection the significance of the title of one of Dr. Rushdoony's main books on economics, *Larceny in the Heart: The Economics of Satan and the Inflationary State*. The book's subtitle points to the satanic nature of fiat currency and the moral impact it has on those who mindlessly use it in violation of Scripture. The implosion of a culture as a result of God's judgment for this is described in Micah 6:8-16; see my discussion in *Faith for All of Life*² for additional detail.)

WHERE DOES 666 APPEAR IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?

It is odd that those who scan the Scriptures for 666 tend to focus on the 666 talents of gold that Solomon received annually (1 Kings 10:14, 2 Chron. 9:13). We then get discussions about the decline of Solomon's kingdom that begin with the receipt of this weight of gold. The number 666 appears in only two other places in the Bible: Rev. 13:18 and the often-overlooked Ezra 2:13.

There is nothing in Rev. 13:18 (that speaks of a number associated with a name) that would give us any basis for

looking at the 666 talents of gold and tying the Beast to this event in Solomon's time. In my view, this is simply grasping at straws. And over-looking Ezra 2:13, or discounting that text, is so common that scholars are averse to reconsidering their often-premature rejection of it.³

The odd thing about Ezra 2:13 is that it appears in the middle of a census, where the name of Adonikam is associated with 666. As the NIV puts it, "of Adonikam, 666." Why would we look to the Old Testament to resolve the meaning of the 666 cipher? Perhaps the opening clause of Rev. 13:18 sheds some light here, for we are told "Here is wisdom: let him that hath understanding reckon the number of the beast..." On the face of it, this appears to be an invitation to *consult the Scriptures* on the principle that "I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation" (Ps. 119:99) and because "The entrance of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple." (Ps. 119:130). Why we invariably seek light from *outside Scripture* to understand Revelation and repose authority in extrascriptural connections over and above *internal evidence within Scripture* is hard to account for. While I respect those partial preterists who seek the explanation from extrascriptural sources, I am not convinced that this is required: in my view, the Scripture itself is sufficient to explain the meaning of 666. A humble approach, Berean-style, is called for here.

Let us examine a proposed parallel between the seventh and thirteenth chapters of Revelation to see why an appeal to a census is not some outrageous sleight-of-hand to promote an idealist approach to Revelation. Note the proposed correlations below:

7:1 Angel ascends	13:1 Beast rises
7:3 Saints' seal	13:16 Beast's mark
7:4 Israeli census	13:18 Israeli census
7:5 144,000 Jews	14:1 144,000 Jews
7:17 Lamb leads	14:4 Follow Lamb

The parallels immediately before and after the appearance of census data (actual in Rev. 7, proposed in Rev. 13) fall within a very tight scope, which is strong circum-

stantial evidence that we are on the right track in considering the census of Ezra 2 as possibly having something to say about what is going on in Revelation. This is especially true considering how many Hebraisms appear in John's prophecy (which, to be fair, is also a potential point in favor of the Nero theory that requires a particular Hebrew spelling to make its intended connection). Moreover, the syntactical structure of the census in Ezra aligns well with the structure of the census in Revelation—another possible correlation.

This is all well and good, but what does it mean about tying Ezra 2:13 to Revelation 13:18? This is where the details become important: details concerning the Beast's origin as articulated in Rev. 13:1, and details about the name Adonikam that appears alongside the number 666 in the census reported by Ezra.

Revelation 13:1 reports that the beast *rises up* out of the sea, and the blasphemies on its head indicate that it claims to be *the Lord* (which is the nature of the blasphemy at hand). Something claims to be the Lord and is said to rise up, in this case, out of the sea.

And this is where the name Adonikam becomes significant, for the name Adonikam means *The Lord Who Rises Up*. What we have here is a perfect agreement in the predicates: the one place in the Old Testament where 666 is associated with a man's name yields a name that matches the claims and origin of the beast out of the sea in Rev. 13:1.

Now, this identification does not lend itself to any form of sensationalism. From one point of view, it is introducing no new information whatsoever (i.e., it is what is called a tautology). The beast is simply the (false) Lord who rises up out of the sea (of peoples), who claims to be at the apex of authority with no higher court of appeal. At this point, virtually all human governments qualify, and they further qualify by acting as the Beast in their economic policies by compelling the use of abominations circulating as money in their respective realms.

This position regarding 666 is not a new one. This identification of the Beast

with the name Adonikam goes back at least as far as Vitranga, and Hengstenberg endorsed it in his Revelation commentary as well. But this approach has been dismissed, as you can't sell any overpriced prophecy books without something sensational to offer. This approach to Revelation is a sober one, one involving no future predictions nor requiring any scouring of archaeological finds in Palestine.

Because this solution entails examination of Scripture alone, without appeal to the outside world, it has been unable to gain any traction in an era of itching ears. It is our contention that, if this approach is the correct one, it will outlive the models that are currently at war against each other (Nero versus some alleged future Antichrist). While I am a sympathetic critic of partial preterism, I'm also of the view that it needs to be moved from the pedestal of certainty to the more modest dais of plausibility. Archeology continues to be a foundation of shifting sand, while there is a more sure foundation when arguments are raised on the basis of Scripture alone.

Whether the view of 666 outlined here is ultimately proven to be right or wrong, one should note its advantages: it is correct in any language, is not dependent on a particular spelling or abbreviation, doesn't require adding a title to a name but only involves a name, and it is the only solution that actually matches the attributes of the Beast as given at the outset of Revelation 13. For these reasons alone, the model should be given a place at the table, rather than being shadow-banned, throttled, and deplatformed.

MILLENNIAL MONSTROSITIES

Unexpectedly, one of the more common questions received in the wake of the last *Arise and Build* article about Rushdoony's approach to Revelation was this: Why can't we treat the millennium the way we always have, without the wholesale rethinking of it that your approach entails? We put forward the view of Warfield (which was laid out earlier by Milligan and others) that the chronology of Revelation 20 has been misunderstood: the thousand years is actually simultaneous

with the little season (*mikron chronon*). As Warfield explained it, "before" and "after" are terms related to the time symbols being used, and do not apply to the actual things being symbolized.

The basic interpretational principle was to treat earlier instances of the "little season" appearing in Revelation as being parallels to the appearance of the same idea in Revelation 20. In other words, *the symbol is interpreted consistently* from one end of Revelation to another. In this way, the *details* in Revelation 20 are properly explained, starting with the fact that only disembodied souls can occupy the realm symbolized by the thousand years. It is, as Warfield indicated, a symbol for the intermediate state (of the soul after death). That means that we who are alive are in the little season of Rev. 20:7-9, and when we die in the Lord, we enter the thousand years where Satan is sealed away from heaven's inhabitants (as taught in Rev. 12:12 and Rev. 20). As Milligan pointed out about the little season of Rev. 20:7-9,

It is, in short, the time between the First and Second Coming of our Lord. *The period so often sought in the thousand years of verse 2, is really to be found in the "little season" of verse 3.*⁴

The first mention of the little season is in Rev. 6:11 when it is offered as part of an explanation to the souls under the altar why they would not be avenged yet: they needed to wait a *little season* during which their brethren would run their race.⁵ The little season runs its course on the earth, and it is the time during which Romans 1:18 is in continuous fulfillment until there is no need for God's wrath to be poured out upon earthly unrighteousness. Why? Because the long-term transformation of the world under the influence of the gospel and the pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh will have come to its glorious conclusion.

Yet there remain those who want to put the thousand years front and center as an earthly reality, not the domain of disembodied souls in heaven. It should be understood, then, precisely what the undesirable theological consequences of this approach actually are. It is our contention

that these discordant features of an earthly millennium *of any kind* that tries to treat the symbols of Revelation 20 in chronological sequence entail serious problems. We are not shy to call these problems *millennial monstrosities*: collisions with other Scriptures that are the cost of confusing the symbol for the thing symbolized.

We mentioned one of these issues in the previous edition of *Arise and Build*, namely, that the permanent cessation of war taught in Isa. 2:4, 9:7, Psalm 72:7, and elsewhere will be absolutely violated, and these prophecies made of none effect. We also provided a lengthy enumeration of Scriptures in the last edition that would all be made of none effect if history is to end with the greatest war of all time, with God's enemies as the sand of the sea in number, mustered by Satan, marching over the breadth of the earth (Rev. 20:7-9). One dispensationalist thought to evade this collision between Isaiah 2:4 ("no more war evermore") and Revelation 20:8 (where Satan will "gather them together to war") by insisting that these "troops" are not trained in war, and have no weapons when they surround the camp of the saints, so that despite the size of this army bent on destroying Jesus, it's not a real war and doesn't violate the prophecy of "no more war evermore" or "peace increasing without end." This sleight of hand is unconvincing, especially since it violated this scholar's own rule of thumb that "details are important."

Is that the only problem with holding to an earthly millennium? No, there are others that are just as serious. For example, it is argued that Satan's binding allows the gospel to go forward without being impeded, but Satan's release puts the gospel back on hard times, with no traction, because he again deceives the nations. This approach tends to equate the binding of the strong man in the gospels with the sealing of Satan away from the saints who have died in the Lord, but this is only an apparent, not a real, parallel. And this is a good thing, because this argument spells the death of Calvinism.

How so? How is Calvinism implicated and indicted if we say the gospel goes

forth unimpeded due to Satan's being bound so he can no longer deceive the nations? The answer is simple. The key principle of Arminianism is that it puts the determining factor in the created realm, not in the Creator. And here the success of the gospel is based on the status of one creature: Satan. In short, under this model of the millennium, satanology determines soteriology (Satan determines salvation and its extent). The principle we should uphold is that pneumatology determines soteriology (the Spirit determines salvation and its extent: where He is poured out, His calling is irresistible and efficacious, and consistent with the decree of the Father's election and Son's justification of His people).

To ascribe the "success" of the gospel to Satan's being bound is a theological position that is unstable and dangerous, giving away far too many points to the creature and underplaying the total *direct* government of God.

This is why Warfield was the most postmillennial scholar of all: he taught that the entire world would become Christianized to the last man standing, even though Satan is completely unbound. Christ conquers the world in the teeth of Satan's vicious opposition. Today's postmils, influenced unwittingly by amillennial thinking, teach that Christ will not convert the whole world even though His enemy, Satan, is bound and gagged and essentially taken out of the way in regards to the gospel. Clearly, Warfield's faith in the gospel being "the power of God unto salvation" exceeds that of this generation's postmils.

Of course, we Christians are a stubborn bunch, and have ways to rationalize away the above objections: "We can ignore the wording of God's promises because He's given to hyperbole" and "What's wrong with Christ getting a little help by removing Satan for a while?" So we saved the worst millennial monstrosity for the last.

WHEN DOES CHRIST'S REIGN END?

The reign of Christ with His saints ends when the thousand years are finished. This is not a problem for the position

defended herein, where the intermed-iate state is described by the symbol of a thousand years and where the little season doesn't follow it chronologically but is simultaneous with the thousand years. The thousand years is a symbol of heaven between the advents, and the little season of the earth between the advents, and they both chronologically terminate at the same moment when death is destroyed and Christ turns over the now-united Kingdom to the Father.

But what about the prevailing models of the millennium, whether premillennial, amillennial, or conventional postmillennial? They teach that *the millennium ends and a little season follows*, a season sufficient for the world's largest army to be mobilized to attack the camp of the saints.

We tend to focus so much on this army, this alleged final apostasy which throws all the preceding gains away (a doctrine refuted in my 1998 article, "Reconstructing Postmillennialism")⁶, that we miss the single most important dislocation in this alleged sequence of prophetic events. We forget about what just happened to Christ's reign as King!

The problem is that Christ's reign is tied at the hip to the saints' reign in Revelation 20, and if the thousand years end, *Christ's reign ends with it*. He is no longer King. And now we enter the little season of Satan, where Christ has abdicated His throne because "the scripture cannot be broken." Rev. 3:21 makes clear that the martyred saints are granted to sit with Him in His throne, and this is an irrevocable promise reinforced further when Christ adds, "even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne." Christ affirms that His status on the Father's throne matches exactly the saints' status sharing Christ's throne, where they reign when they've overcome (having been faithful unto death). If the saints stop reigning when the thousand years are up, so does Christ—by scriptural necessity. Worse, Psalm 110 informs us that Christ is seated on God's right hand until all His enemies are made His footstool—but this promise too would be violated at the end of the millennium, during which Satan

allegedly musters a huge army to attempt to destroy the no-longer-reigning Christ.

We accept far too many ideas that, on closer examination, have serious debilitating effects that serve to dethrone Christ. If we on earth are living in the millennium as many allege and teach, it won't end well: an entire string of prophecies would be shattered to keep us in an earthly millennium, and to keep the little season as chronologically following it. These serious problems have been solved more than a century ago by diligent Christian scholars who focused on the question of eschatology, who took the internal parallels inside Revelation seriously. The time to recover that inexplicably lost ground is way overdue. May you be part of the recovery of a renewed, more solidly-grounded approach to the precious final book in the Biblical canon. 🙏

1. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), p. 179.
2. <https://chalconedon.edu/magazine/economics-justice-and-modern-preaching>
3. Uncharacteristically, Dr. Gentry challenged readers to look up Ezra 2:13 and to see how convincing it is. The problem here is that a theory must be considered in all its details and interconnections. The theory may still prove to be wrong, but until then it must be evaluated in as strong a light as possible, without being prematurely derailed. While I'm certain that Dr. Gentry isn't poisoning the well, and that he intends to promote strong, fair argumentation among all schools of thought, the fact remains that Ezra 2:13 only makes sense when one examines the sequence of events in Revelation, which would explain why a name appearing in a census would actually be expected in this particular location in the prophecy.
4. William Milligan, *The Revelation of St. John* (London: MacMillan, 1887), p. 214. Cf. pp. 193-233.
5. Misleading translations insist on talking about *number* when the word *number* (*arithmos*) doesn't appear in the verse at all. What is described is the completion of the lives of their brethren who had yet to fulfill their task on earth, and has nothing whatsoever to do with "completing the number" of any contingent of the elect. The faulty translations often rest on the incorrect textual variant, illustrating the importance of having the correct Greek text.
6. Martin Selbrede, "Reconstructing Postmillennialism," in Andrew Sandlin, ed., *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction* Winter 1998 "Symposium on Eschatology" (Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon Foundation).

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