

Revelation 17: Dating the Book of Revelation by the Proper and True Identities of "The Abyss," "The Beast Who is About to Arise out of the Abyss," and "The Destruction of the Whore"

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I. INTRODUCTION

Thousands, perhaps even millions, of Bible students have read and pondered over the ominous words "THE BOTTOMLESS PIT" in the several passages in which it occurs in the Authorized Version or King James translation of Revelation. Several modern translations of Revelation translate the Greek word "abussos" as abyss. What is this **BOTTOMLESS PIT** (abyss or abussos in Greek.)? Where is it located? Does it have another, possibly more common, name? If so, what is that name?

Throughout the history of Christianity it has ostensibly been assumed that this "abussos" is hell; the abode of Satan, the demons, and unrepentant sinners. Every commentator to which I have referred has either directly identified this "abussos" of Revelation as hell or something associated with it. Their understanding of these chapters is controlled by their perception of this "abussos."

If it could be established that John's use of "abussos" in Revelation had a much more practical and realistic meaning to his first century audience, it would be demonstrated that these translators and subsequent readers have seriously erred in this matter.

The purpose of this paper is to correctly identify the actual meaning behind John's use of "abussos" and thus to demonstrate that the true meaning behind this word does in fact control the proper understanding of these chapters and other portions of the Revelation. We will also demonstrate that the establishment of the proper identity of this "abussos" along with the proper identity of the "beast that is about to come out of this abyss" (Rev. 17:8 & 11) and the whorish "Mystery Babylon the Great" (Rev.17:5) provides the reader with precise information for dating the time of the writing of the Revelation. "Neither can be understood apart from the other."

II. ARGUMENT

In New Testament times the apostle Paul and others often spoke and wrote of judgment that was **about to come** upon the first century people:

God...**now** commands all men every where to repent: Because **he has appointed a day**, in which he **is about to judge** the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he has ordained (Jesus Christ); *whereof* he has given assurance unto all *men*, in that he has raised him from the dead. (Acts 17:30-31, emphasis and comment added)

Many partial preterists and all futurists insist that this judgment did not take place in the first century. If it did not, Paul was radically confused, not inspired.

And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and **judgment about to come**, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. (Acts 24:24-25)

Why did Felix “tremble”? Certainly not because of righteousness or temperance, but because he clearly understood with Paul that the judgment of Yahweh was **about to come in his life time in that generation!**

Paul told Timothy essentially the same thing:

I charge *thee* therefore before God, and **the Lord Jesus Christ**, who **is about to** judge the living and the dead **at his appearing and his kingdom;** (2 Timothy 4:1)

The above passages and many similar passages in the New Testament make it very clear that the judgment of the “wrath of” Jesus Christ was **about to descend** on the people of the first century. This judgment (among other things) was to bring about the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem (Matt. 24:2 et al.) Thus we ask ourselves the question – how was this judgment to occur? Who or what was going to carry out this judgment and destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem? For our answers we now turn to the Revelation:

The beast that you saw was, and is not; and **is about to** ascend out of the abyss (bottomless pit), **and go unto destruction:** and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. (Revelation 17:8)

The full context of this passage is one of the very best internal evidences for a late 60’s AD date for the writing of the Revelation! “It is vitally important to see **with the preterist** that the book (Revelation) must be interpreted in light of **the immediate historical crisis** in which the first-century church found itself.” (Emphasis added) In order to recognize this, of course, it is very important to understand what John is really writing about in this and related verses. We submit for the reader’s consideration that very, very few have ever understood this verse and its related context. We think that there is only one Biblical definition of this “**BOTTOMLESS PIT**”, and that the Bible itself must supply us with that definition and Yahweh’s Holy Spirit enables us to understand what the apostle John was writing about in Revelation 9, 11, 17 & 20.

When John wrote this passage, he declared that “the beast” was **about to come** up out of the abyss and go unto the destruction. Of special interest to us in this context is information about the abyss or “bottomless pit.” “Bottomless pit” is the rather loose King James Version (AV) translation of the Greek word:

abussos {ab'-us-sos} Strong's #12 from 1 (as a negative particle) and a variation of 1037; TDNT - 1:9,2;

AV - bottomless pit (5)

- deep (2)

- bottomless (2) [9]

1) the abyss, bottomless pit

2) bottomless, unfathomed: boundless, enormous

3) The rabbinic (Hebrew to Greek) translation of the Hebrew

word *t@howm* (teh-home') in the Septuagint.

If it may be judged by the literature and many personal conversations with other Christians, it is obvious that many if not most Christians are very uncertain about the identity of the bottomless pit or abyss although most ostensibly think it has something to do with their concept of “hell”. Many commentators have stated similar positions. “The abyss...is the realm of demons over which Satan rules...” “In Revelation...it (the abyss) is the place inhabited by spirits.” “The word (abyss) evidently denotes the deepest depths of hell.” While this seems to be the assumption of most modern Christians, **we think that this is an unwarranted assumption.**

In reference to Revelation 17:8 one commentator wrote, “**Whatever is meant by the bottomless pit,** the text does say that the beast will go to perdition or destruction.” (Emphasis added) This commentator readily admits that he does not know what the “bottomless pit” is, and he obviously assumes (as do most Christians) that John’s statement means the beast will go to his own personal destruction, as he stated, “Even unbelievers will be astonished at **the fall of the beast...**” (Emphasis added)

We can find nothing in the text of Revelation 17:8 about the fall or the destruction of this beast. John wrote:

The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is **about to ascend out of** the abyss, and go unto destruction, and those who dwell on the land (of the abyss) will marvel, whose names are not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not and yet is.

This verse states that the beast is **about to ascend out of the abyss** and those who live on the land will marvel when they see the beast that was, and is not and yet is. The text is clear the people will marvel when they see the beast! Nothing is said about the destruction of the beast. However, the text does say that “he will go unto destruction.” While it seems that very few have done so, the obvious question that all Bible students should ask themselves here is **the destruction of whom/what?** It seems that the modern Christian community assumes, without due consideration, that the text is about the destruction of the beast. Mounce wrote, “The beast (of Rev.17:8 & 11-12) is an eighth king. His ten horns represent ten other kings who join with the beast in waging war against the Lamb and are defeated.” We do not think that this is the case. Mounce very clearly demonstrates the absurdity of his own interpretation as in the very next sentence he writes, “The beast and the ten kings turn their hatred on the prostitute and bring her to a gory death.” His position, as presented in the two sentences quoted above, is totally incongruous; the beast and his ten kings completely defeated would not be able to destroy the whore. As this verse alone is not clear on this matter, we need to carefully examine the full context of this verse to find the correct answer.

In verse one of this seventeenth chapter, John is told that he is to be shown the “**judgment of the whore.**” Old and New Testaments speak in unison and conclusively that the “whore” is Jerusalem – the capital city of the southern kingdom of Judah. Thus the full context of this passage is “**the destruction of Jerusalem.**” It is obvious that Bowman (and many others) would agree with this conclusion because he stated repeatedly in his book “that God had targeted Jerusalem for divine judgment.” He even goes so far as to state that “the Roman Empire...was soon to attack and conquer the Jewish nation.” He also stated “that the beast is the Roman Empire at the time of the reign of Nero.” Therefore, we conclude that the “destruction” of verse 8 is **the destruction of the whore, not the destruction of the beast** as Bowman and nearly everyone else has mistakenly assumed! There is much more evidence for this in the remaining context of chapter 17.

According to verse 3, John is taken (in the spirit) into the wilderness and shown a vision of the whore and the beast upon which she was riding. Here the whore is identified as “drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.” This description can identify none other than the apostate Judaism in Jerusalem.

In addition to the “whore” John is shown a great “scarlet colored beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.” As Bowman has stated, and as all Bible students “in the know” agree this beast generically is the Roman Empire. Verse 10 tells John’s first century audience that there are “eight specific kings” of this Empire of which they should be cognizant. We could not help but notice that although Bowman correctly identified the first seven kings, he made no mention of the eighth king. We could not help but wonder why?

According to verse 11, the “beast” that John described in verse 8 is to be that “eighth” King (Caesar) of the Roman Empire.

As has been noted above, in verse 8 John describes the beast (eighth king of Roman Empire) as “the beast *that... was*, and *is not*, and *is about to come up out of the abyss...*” What is this riddle that John puts forth? Very few modern Bible students have understood this riddle, however Bowman got quite close when he stated, “‘the beast that was’ as the past Roman persecution, the beast that ‘is not’ as a pause in the Roman persecution, and the beast that ‘yet is’ as a renewal of Roman persecution.” He erred because he forgot that the context of this statement is the destruction of the whore, *not the Roman persecution of the Christians*. The reason that most modern Bible students do not understand this riddle is because they fail to put it in the proper context. Remember the context of this whole passage is the “*judgment of the whore*” – *thus the destruction of Jerusalem!* John’s riddle thus means that this man who “*is about to come up...*” and become the eighth king of the Roman Empire “*was*” (previous to his coming up and becoming king) involved in the judgment-destruction of the whore-Jerusalem, but at the time in which John was writing the Revelation he “*is not*” yet the Caesar or king of the Roman Empire, but he “*is about to come up*” into his kingship and in that capacity he will return to the work of the judgment – “*destruction*” of Jerusalem.

Where is this man who is going to be the eighth king of the Roman Empire? John informs us that he “*is about to go up out of the abyss.*” **By this we now that he is presently in the abyss.** What and where is **this abyss?**

As noted above, traditional Christian “*wisdom?*” has associated the abyss with their concept of hell. Thus it is generally taught that this beast is some strange (Devil possessed?) creature that comes from hell or as Bowman states this abyss “has been interpreted as ‘the invisible demonic habitat’ and ‘the domain of heathenism.’”

We don’t think that John’s abyss has anything to do with hell, and we think we have clear and strong biblical evidence for our thoughts! **First**, in context all the kings (Caesars) of the Rome Empire were flesh and blood human men, thus this eighth king must also have been a flesh and blood human being. If hell is what the Christian church has taught that it is, *no man ever did or ever will come out of hell to rule the Roman Empire!* Thus if this eighth king did not come up out of hell, where was he and from whence did he come? In other words – what and where is John’s **abyss?**

Remember the context here is “*the judgment of the whore!*” Verses 16-17 inform us that the whore was hated, made desolate and naked, her flesh eaten and she was burned with fire. In other words she was “*judged and destroyed!*” This whore was located in the land of Judaea, thus the judgment of the whore would take place in Judaea.

A Hebrew prophet, psalmist informs us:

The transgression of the wicked [Jew] says...*that there is* no fear of God before his eyes. For he flatters himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful. The words of his mouth *are* iniquity and deceit: he hath left off to be wise, *and* to do good. He devises mischief...**O Yahweh...thy judgments** [upon these iniquities] **are an abyss**: (Psalms 36:1-6, in part, emphasis and comment added)

The Hebrew word which is translated abyss in the reference above (great deep in KJV) is:

t@howm {teh-home'} or t@hom {teh-home'} Strong's 8415 (usually feminine) from 1949; TWOT - 2495a; n f/m It is defined as:

1) deep, depths, deep places, **abyss**, the deep, sea

1a) deep (of subterranean waters)

1b) deep, sea, abysses (of sea)

1c) primeval ocean, deep

1d) deep, depth (of river)

2) When the rabbis translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek (the Septuagint) they translated the Hebrew word t@howm (teh-home) into the Greek word abussos.

In Revelation 17, Yahweh/Yahshua God is showing the judgment-destruction which He is about to bring down upon the whore (Jerusalem/apostate Judaism). It is established above that the whore is Jerusalem in Judaea. Thus putting the information from the Hebrew psalmist-prophet with the information from the Hebrew apostle-prophet **we can now see** that John's "**abyss**" *is the first century place of Yahweh's judgment for sin which is Jerusalem in Judaea! Thus the land of Judaea of the first century Jews is John's abyss!* This is the place where Yahweh's judgment was to take place, and as a matter of historical fact, did take place in 70 AD.

Bowman got very close to this truth when he stated, "the land of Judaea had become a target area for the just and holy judgment of God," "God had singled out Judaea for divine judgment," (Page 46) "...so the mighty angels in this passage really means the Roman soldiers that Christ used as his **messengers of justice** (emphasis added) to punish the Jewish persecutors. The words, 'flaming fire' means the 'flaming fire of war' which Christ used to destroy the harlot city of Jerusalem and its temple," and "the bottomless pit is **symbolic of divine punishment.**" Unfortunately he did not find the connection to certain Old Testament passages such as Psalm 36:6, Jonah 2:5, Habakkuk 3-10, Ezekiel 26, and did not follow it all the way to its proper biblical conclusion.

Now we must ask – **was there a man in the land of Judaea** (the abyss) who was involved in the judgment-destruction of Judaea, but at the time John wrote Revelation he was not the King of the Roman Empire, and who soon left Judaea to become a Roman Emperor and who as the king of the Roman Empire ordered the judgment-destruction of Judaea? **There certainly was and his name was Vespasian, the Roman General who had been sent to Judaea by Nero to take over the Roman army which was already in that land, and to prosecute the judgment-destruction war against the Jews in that land.**

There is a very interesting comment in Josephus about a “sacred oracle” that ostensibly applies to this Revelation passage. Josephus states:

But now, what did most elevate them in undertaking this war was an ambiguous oracle (Rev.17:10-11) that was also found in their sacred writings, how, “about that time, **one from their own country** (this shows that the Jews understood John’s bottomless pit to be “their own land”) should become governor (Caesar) of the habitable earth (Roman Empire).” The (apostate) Jews took this prediction to belong to themselves in particular; and many wise men were thereby deceived in their determination. Now this oracle certainly denoted **the government of Vespasian, who was appointed emperor in Judea.** (Emphasis and comments added)

According to Josephus, The Roman army wanted Vespasian to become emperor because of his age, excellent character, experience and military record. They also considered Vespasian and his son Titus as the "dynamic duo" that would be able to salvage the Roman Empire with Vespasian as king and his son Titus leading the army. When Vespasian went to Rome to officially begin his reign, Titus returned to Judaea to continue the prosecution of the war against the Jews and was "sent (by Vespasian) to destroy Jerusalem" which he eventually did. In his writings, Josephus often refers to Titus as "Caesar" even while Vespasian was the ruling monarch.

According to the historical accounts, especially Josephus, Vespasian became the general of Nero’s army in Judaea and proceeded to prosecute the war against the Jews (“**was**”), however, while doing that Vespasian and the army heard about the death of Nero. At that time Vespasian placed the war in abeyance pending the placement of the new king. During this time of inaction in Judaea and chaos in the Empire Vespasian “**is not**” yet king; however, the Roman soldiers began to persuade Vespasian to become the new Caesar. After considerable hesitation Vespasian finally succumbed to the urging of the troops and with the approval of Alexander of Egypt, he agreed to permit them to anoint him the eighth Caesar of Rome (“**about to come up out of the abyss**”). Vespasian then proceeded to Rome, dispatching Vitellius’ army on the way, and became the eighth king which John described in Revelation 17.

In the clear light of this information let us now take another look at verse 8 and its pertinent context and true meaning as shown below:

The beast (eighth king of the Roman Empire) that you saw was (involved in the war against the Jews), and is not (currently prosecuting the war); and **is about to come up out** (ascend) out of the abyss (Judaea), and lead [the kingdom] unto [the] destruction [of Jerusalem-Judaea (Jews)]: and they that dwell on the land (the apostate Jews) shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, **when they behold the beast** (the eighth Roman Caesar) that was (involved in the war), and is not (currently prosecuting that war), and yet is (in the land). **And here is the mind which hath wisdom.** The seven heads are seven mountains (the reign of the seven kings), on which the woman (Jerusalem) sits. And there are seven kings: five (Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, & Claudius) are fallen, and one is (Nero), *and* the other (Galba) is not yet come; and when he (Galba) comes, he must continue a short space (seven months). And the beast (Caesar-king) that was (in the abyss prosecuting the war against the Jews), and is not (yet the king), even he is the eighth (Roman Caesar-king), and is of the seven (as the chief General of the Empire under Nero), and leads unto (presides over) the destruction (of Jerusalem). (Revelation 17:8-11)

The “ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet” of verse 12 receive their kingdom when Vespasian becomes Caesar, and being of “one mind...(they) give their power and strength unto the

beast” (Vespasian, v.13). Verse 14 explains that these ten kings shall make war **with** (Greek: “meta,” this does not mean *against* as erroneously given in many “modern” translations) the Lamb.

If this passage means that the “ten kings” *fight against the Lamb and the Lamb “overcomes them”* as many modern translations render this passage, then it is totally out of context as clearly demonstrated above. Remember the context is “**the judgment of the whore” and her destruction as given in verses 16-17, it is not about the destruction of the Roman Empire or any of its kings.**

The first portion of verse 14 is clear, the beast and the ten kings make war **with the Lamb**, not *against* him. In other words the beast and the ten kings unite, and are brought under the power of the Lamb to do his will to make war against the whore. This is verified in verses 16-17:

And the ten horns which you saw upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For **God** (the Lamb) **hath put in their hearts to fulfill his will**, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. (Revelation 17:16-17, emphasis and comment added)

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul urges the Roman Christians to not attempt to “avenge” themselves against their persecutors (primarily the Jews) but rather to allow the wrath (judgment) of God to do its work (Romans 12:19ff). Then Paul continues:

...the [Roman] powers that be (the beast and the ten kings) are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resists the power resists the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves judgment (Gk. “krima” cf. Rev. 17:1). For rulers are...a terror to...the evil...if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he bears not the sword in vain: for **he is the minister of God, a avenger to execute wrath upon him** (persecutors) **that doeth evil**. (Romans 13:2-4, emphasis and comment added)

In Revelation 17: 14 and in greatly expanded form in 19:11-21 John describes the Lamb coming forth as a conquering king:

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness **he doth judge and make war**. His eyes *were* as a flame of fire, and on his head *were* many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he *was* clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies *which were* in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on *his* vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all *men, both* free and bond, both small and great. And **I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war with** (Not against as in AV. Gk. meta, cf. Rev. 17:14) **him that sat on the horse, and with** (Not against as in AV. Gk. meta, cf. Rev. 17:14) **his army**. (Revelation 19:11-19, emphasis and comment added)

The above is John’s description of the climax of the destruction of Jerusalem as a result of the Lamb’s judgment. The great armies of the beast (Vespasian and the ten kings) in submission to do the will of the Lamb bring destruction to the whore. However, at this point John makes an interesting adjustment in his language. In verse 20 John describes the whore using the words by which he had described her in the 13th chapter of Revelation:

And I beheld *another beast coming up out of the land*; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spoke as a dragon. And he exercised all the power of the **first beast** (Roman Empire, the generic form of the beast) before him, and caused the land and them which dwell therein to **worship the first beast**, whose deadly wound (Empire chaos at the death of Nero) was healed (by the reign of Vespasian). And he doeth great wonders, so that he makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, And deceived them that dwell on the earth by *the means of* those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the [first] beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the [first] beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. And he had power to give life unto the image of the [first] beast, that the image of the [first] beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the [first] beast should be killed. And he caused all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the [first] beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the [first] beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number *is* Six hundred threescore *and* six. (Revelation 13:11-18, emphasis and comments added)

Thus John describes the fate of the second beast of Revelation 13:11-18 at “the hands” of the armies of the beast (Vespasian) and the ten kings. Thus “the powers that be” have borne the sword, become the avenger, and delivered the wrath of God upon Jerusalem and the apostate first century Jews:

And the [second] beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the [first] beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both [the second beast & the false prophet] were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone [Jerusalem in the process of destruction]. And the remnant [of apostate Jews] were slain with the sword (the Roman army) of him that sat upon the horse, which *sword* [of prophecy fulfilled] proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their (the war dead) flesh. (Revelation 19:11-21, comments added)

Thus just as John and Paul had declared, in 70 AD the armies of the beast and the ten kings delivered the “wrath of God” by sacking and burning Jerusalem (Apostate Judaism, the second beast of Rev.13:11-18) to carry out the will of the Lamb.

Much very useful information about the angel (messenger) and the key of the abyss, etc. can be gleaned from Revelation chapter nine, and much more is brought forth in chapter twenty, however, due to space limitations that must be examined in another paper.

III. Summary

In 1985 Becker wrote that “Many attempts have been made to fit these words... ‘there are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come...’ into the pattern of Roman history, but all such attempts end in failure.” This may or may not have been a true statement in 1985. However, this writer acknowledges that he has never found any previous attempt which properly placed these words into the context of Roman history prior to his own recognition of the information presented in this paper.

In this paper we have demonstrated that the abyss of Revelation, properly identified, is the land of Judaea not some imaginative abode of Satan and his demons as is generally erroneously assumed. The recognition of this fact of biblical history then enables us to properly identify the beast that is about to ascend out of the abyss, become Caesar of the Roman Empire and reign through the destruction of Mystery Babylon the Great – the city of apostate Judaism - Jerusalem, the whorish widow of Yahweh. This personage specifically identified as “the beast” in Revelation 17:8, as “an eighth king in

Revelation 17:11-12, and as the beast that makes war to destroy the whore for the Lamb in Revelation 17:12-17 is Vespasian whose son Titus is the General of the Roman army that finished the destruction of the city and the temple in 70 AD.

We have also demonstrated that the proper identification of “the beast,” “the abyss,” and the “Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the land” fits perfectly with the sequence of history pertaining to the war of the Jews with the Roman army and thus provides nearly irrefutable evidence for a late 60’s AD date for the writing of the Revelation. Thus whether Becker’s 1985 statement was true then or not, it certainly is no longer true in 2003.

That TRUTH may prevail!

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