

The great whore	The great city
18.3a For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her,	18.2 [The angel] called out with a mighty voice, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! It has become a dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit, a haunt of every foul bird, a haunt of every foul and hateful beast. 18.3b and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxury.'
18.4a Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, 'Come out of her, my people, so that you do not take part in her sins,	18.4b and so that you do not share in her plagues;
18.5 for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.	
18.6-7 Render to her as she herself has rendered, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed. As she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, so give her a like measure of torment and grief. Since in her heart she says, 'I rule as a queen; I am no widow, and I will never see grief,'	18.8 therefore her plagues will come in a single day – pestilence and mourning and famine – and she will be burned with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.'
18.9a And the kings of the earth, who committed fornication and lived in luxury with her,	18.9b-11 will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning; they will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say, 'Alas, alas, the great city, Babylon, the mighty city! For in one hour your judgement has come.' And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore,

18.15-16a The merchants ... who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud, 'Alas, alas, the great city.'	
18.16b clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls!	
18.17-18 For in one hour all this wealth has been laid waste! And all shipmasters and seafarers, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning, 'What city was like the great city?'	
18.21 Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, 'With such violence Babylon the great city will be thrown down, and will be found no more;	19.3 Once more they said, 'Hallelujah! The smoke goes up from her forever and ever.'
19.1-2 After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, 'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power to our God, for his judgements are true and just; he has judged the great whore who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants.'	

As is evident from the table above, John intertwines the imagery of the great whore and the great city to great dramatic effect as he describes the downfall of the satanic empire.⁵⁶ The call of the heavenly voice for the people of God to 'come out of her' (18.4) acquires a double meaning (or *double-entendre*); it is both a call for them to move their citizenship from the great city to the heavenly city, and also for them to cease and desist from participating in the seductive pleasures of the great whore. John's use of language here is vivid and compelling, designed to shock his audience into a realization of the nature of the symbolic world they inhabit, and to elicit an appropriate response in terms of their living-out of their membership of the army of the Lamb.

One specific image that John employs for the great whore deserves additional comment. Through Chapter 18, John uses the image of fire to

describe the burning of the great city, evoking the picture of a city being put to the torch (18.8, 9, 18). However, he also describes the 'burning' of the great whore in the following terms: 'And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the whore; they will make her desolate and naked; they will devour her flesh and burn her up with fire' (17.16). This description of the stripping, rape, cannibalistic consumption and burning of the body of the great whore is as deeply shocking to modern readers as it would have been to John's first audience. It is worth noting that John is consciously employing such powerful imagery to deconstruct the worldview of those living in the seven churches of Asia Minor under the Roman Empire. He is not seeking to describe an actual physical and sexual assault; rather he is using the language of such a violation as an image to describe the downfall of the idolatrous satanic empire.⁵⁷ It is to this end that the heavenly multitude praise God for the justice of his judgement of the great whore, and for avenging on her the blood of his servants. They rejoice at her burning (19.2-3), because the evil empire finally receives judgement for all the wrong done against the people of God.

There is a very real question here as to the effect such imagery has on modern readers, and also of the effect that it has had down through the centuries since it was first written. John's association of the alluring female form, laid vulnerable and violated, with God's fitting judgement on evil in the world, has doubtless played its part in promoting a negative and exploitative view of women. Artistic representations of this scene have fed the male desire to see women dominated and abused, even lending divine authorization to such imagery.⁵⁸ While this may not have been John's original intent in constructing this image, nonetheless it must be recognized that this is part of the effect that it has had and continues to have. Although Tina Pippin's comments may be seen as a little naïve in their imposition of modern genre categories onto an ancient text, they nonetheless provide a useful introduction to the way in which this imagery may be interpreted by some:

The Apocalypse is less like the shower scene in *Psycho* than the all-out killing in the *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, but there are elements of both these forms of subtle and big-screen gross-out horrors in the text ... [A]t the murder scene of the great whore in 17:16 is grotesque horror ... The Apocalypse has similarities to the genre of horror literature in the splattering of blood and gore on the reader and in the intensity in which it draws the reader to gaze on the ripped flesh ... The Whore of Babylon is a siren calling to men ... Is the Apocalypse pornographic? Are apocalypses the pornography of the end time? Pornography, like horror and utopian literature, goes beyond societal boundaries. Like horror, pornography is iterative; the act of violence repeats itself in

our re-readings, in the violence done on the psyche of the victim. Does the Apocalypse do psychological damage? The wrathful, judging God is alongside the joy (*jouissance*) of the believer. The deadly desire of godly utopia targets the unbeliever – and wayward women.⁵⁹

The beast from the bottomless pit

The first occurrence of *τὸ θηρίον* ('the beast') in Revelation is found in 11.7, where 'the beast' ascends from the bottomless pit to make war on and kill the two witnesses.⁶⁰ It is not specified whether this is the beast from the sea (cf. 13.1), or the beast from the earth (cf. 13.11), and it is probably best to identify it as neither. Rather, the beast from the bottomless pit serves to demonstrate that the forces behind the satanic empire, which oppose and persecute the Church, find their origin in the pits of hell itself. In John's descriptions of the various beasts, he draws on Daniel's vision of four beasts that come from the sea (Dan. 7.1-8). The closest parallel within this Old Testament passage to the beast from the bottomless pit of Revelation 11 is found in the 'little horn' of Daniel's fourth beast, which makes war on the 'holy ones', and is seen 'prevailing over them' (Dan. 7.21).

The scarlet beast from the sea

A further image that John utilizes for Babylon is that of the scarlet beast which arises from the sea (13.1) after the dragon has taken its stand on the seashore (12.8). Having failed to overcome the woman, the dragon sets about making war on the woman's other children (12.17), and calls forth the beast from the depths with this intent. It is therefore clear from its first appearance that the scarlet beast exists at the bidding of the dragon, with the goal of doing the dragon's will in terms of opposing those who hold the testimony of Jesus. This association between the dragon and the beast is reinforced by the physical similarity between them: like the dragon, the beast also has seven heads and ten horns. The background to this image lies in the Leviathan of Jewish mythology, who ascends from the chaos of the deep seas to wreak havoc on the land.⁶¹ However, John is also drawing on the four beasts that ascend from the sea in Daniel's vision (Dan. 7.2-7). The beasts that Daniel sees are described as a winged lion, a three-tusked bear, a winged four-headed leopard, and a strong beast with ten horns. John amalgamates these images to make his beast with seven heads, ten horns, a leopard's body, a bear's feet, and a lion's mouth (13.2). Whereas Daniel's four beasts represented four kingdoms (Dan. 7.17, 23),⁶² John's scarlet beast represents just one: Rome.

The seven heads with the blasphemous names (13.1; cf. 17.9) symbolize the idolatrous claims made by the city on the seven hills, as it positions itself as an alternative to the one on the throne in heaven.

The beast is then duly invested with the power of the dragon (13.2), and sets about deceiving the earth into following it (13.3). Crucial to its success in gaining the support and allegiance of the nations is a specific characteristic exhibited by one of the seven heads of the beast: this head looks as if it has been slaughtered (*ἐσφαγμένον*) but has been miraculously healed. At one level this image functions as a satanic imitation of the Lamb who was slaughtered (*ἐσφαγμένον*) but is still alive (5.6), drawing the nations to worship the beast instead of the Lamb. However, there is a specific contextual background to John's imagery here. The Emperor Nero, the archetypal dictator and persecutor of Christians, had reportedly committed suicide with a sword in AD 68, some years before the most likely date for the writing of the book of Revelation.⁶³ In that intervening period, a myth had emerged that Nero would either come back to life, or John, it seems, knows of this myth, and finds the imagery of Nero's rebirth too compelling to ignore. While returning to Nero more fully in his image of the beast from the earth, he utilizes this *Nero Redivivus* myth in his picture of the scarlet beast. From John's perspective, although Nero may be dead and gone, his mythology is alive and well, providing powerful propaganda for the Roman Empire. The great persecutor may have gone, but his spirit is still active in the satanic empire, leading the nations of the world in idolatrous opposition to the Lamb.

So successful is the beast in attracting the allegiance of the inhabitants of the earth, that John sees the whole earth worshipping not just the beast of Rome, but also the underlying force of evil that sustains it. There is an expression of hopelessness in the cry uttered by the nations when they say: 'Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?' (13.4) They are both seduced by the might of the beast, and also discouraged from thoughts of resistance by their sense of futility in the face of such overwhelming power. This cry would surely have been echoed by those in the seven churches, as they pondered their own insignificance and powerlessness in the face of the might of the imperial machine. This sense of frustration becomes more palpable as the beast acquires the ability to speak blasphemous words (13.5). However, a note of hope is then sounded, as a time-limit of 42 months is placed on the beast's authority.⁶⁵ During this period of persecution, the beast utters blasphemies both against God himself and against those who dwell in heaven (13.5), and makes war on the saints and conquers them, taking authority over the nations of the earth (13.7). The result is that all the nations of the earth worship the beast, excepting only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life (13.8). The picture here is of the beast's

total domination of the earth. The Church is a beleaguered minority, but nonetheless only the faithful can see the satanic empire for what it is because only they recognize the idolatrous and blasphemous nature of the claims made by the beast.

However, in all of this, John's language is *passive*: he says that the beast *was given* a mouth to utter blasphemies and that it *was allowed* to exercise authority (13.5); it *was allowed* to make war on the saints and it *was given* authority over the nations (13.7). In this way, the idolatrous claims of the beast are relativized, because its power is seen as existing only by divine permission, and even then only for a little while. Once again, John is addressing the question of the extent to which God is in control even during times of judgement and suffering on the earth. Once again his answer is that, however much it might appear that the beast is in control, true authority resides solely with the one on the throne in heaven, and that therefore any blasphemous pretension to that authority, however convincing it may appear to be, is ultimately doomed to failure.

The beast from the sea is next seen following the pouring out of the sixth bowl-plague onto the waters of the river Euphrates, which causes them to dry up in preparation for the invasion of the kings from the east (16.12). At this point, John sees three foul spirits like frogs emerging from the mouths of the dragon, the scarlet beast, and the false prophet. These foul spirits mobilize the armies of the world for battle against the army of the Lamb, something that is depicted as having a threefold satanic origin.

The scarlet beast reappears in the narrative in Chapter 17, where the great whore is seen riding the beast full of blasphemous names with seven heads and ten horns (17.3). This close association between the great whore and the beast indicates that they are to be understood as two different presentations of the same underlying signifier. Both, in their own way, function as images for Rome as an expression of Babylon, and Bauckham suggests that the beast is a representation of the military and political might of the satanic empire, while the great whore represents the economic corruption that supports and bankrolls the beast.⁶⁶

The *Nero Redivivus* myth explored above also lies behind the next appearance of the scarlet beast, where it is described as that which 'was and is not and is to come' (17.8; cf. 17.11). Once again, John presents the myth of Nero's return from the grave as a satanic and idolatrous parody of the one in heaven 'who was and is and is to come' (4.8; cf. 1.4, 8). So successful is this alternative claim on the worship and allegiance of the people of the earth, that the inhabitants of the earth whose names are not written in the book of life are 'amazed'.

The scarlet beast from the sea makes its final appearance at the great battle of Harmagedon, when it joins its army with that of the kings of the earth to make war against the rider on the white horse and his army (19.19). This final conflict between the nations of the world and the

people of God ends with the scarlet beast being captured and thrown into the lake of fire (19.20). There is no place for Babylon in any guise within the new Jerusalem, and so the powerful and mighty satanic empire is cast into the flames for destruction.

There are two beasts in Revelation that have seven heads and ten horns: the dragon (12.3) and the scarlet beast from the sea (13.1; 17.3; 17.9-12). The presence of these heads and horns on the scarlet beast is clearly indicative of its familial relationship to the dragon, the underlying source of evil that calls the beast to life and gives it its power. However, they also pose something of an interpretative puzzle that will now be briefly explored.

The seven heads of the scarlet beast

The number seven is the Jewish number of perfection, and at one level the presence of seven heads on the beast is indicative of Babylon's idolatrous claim to perfection. However, John provides two further levels of interpretation: 'This calls for a mind that has wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; also, they are seven kings, of whom five have fallen, one is living, and the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain only a little while. As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction' (17.9-11). The seven mountains almost certainly represent the fabled seven hills of Rome, indicating once again the link between the scarlet beast and the seat of the Empire.⁶⁷

The seven kings, however, are harder to identify. It is most likely that the seven kings are intended to signify Roman emperors, given their identification with the seven hills of Rome; but the difficulty lies in deciding which are the specific emperors that John has in mind. John states that five have already passed, one is current, and one is yet to come, with the beast making an eighth that belongs to the seven (17.11). A historical-correlation approach has significant implications for the dating of the work, and the picture is further complicated by the fact that John may be setting a fictional date for his text earlier than the time of his actual writing. The following table illustrates three of the major suggestions for tying together John's list and the date of composition.⁶⁸

		mid-60s	early 70s	early 90s
Julius Caesar	d. 44 BC	1		
Augustus	d. AD 14	2	1	
Tiberius	14-37	3	2	
Caligula	37-41	4	3	1

		mid-60s	early 70s	early 90s
Claudius	41-54	5	4	2
Nero	54-68	6	5	3
Galba	68-9		Ignore	Ignore
Otho	69			
Vitellius	69			
Vespasian	69-79		6	4
Titus	79-81			5
Domitian	81-96			6
'the other'	Rev. 17.10	7	7	7
'an eighth'	Rev. 17.11	8	8	8

It will be seen that two of these suggestions ignore the three short-lived emperors of Galba, Otho and Vitellius. This is not as arbitrary as it may appear, as these three were never universally recognized across the Empire even during their own brief reigns.

Rather than adopting a strictly historical approach, an alternative way of understanding John's imagery here is to treat his list as figurative. According to this understanding, while John may or may not have specific emperors in mind, his overall intent in employing these images is to convey that wherever and whenever human power seeks to usurp God's kingly rule, it is to be understood as a manifestation of the beast.⁶⁹

John's description of a seventh 'other' head which will 'remain only a little while' (17.10), followed by an eighth head described as 'the beast that was and is not' (17.11; cf. 17.8), is often understood as a further reference to the *Nero Redivivus* myth in which the next emperor (whoever it may be) will shortly give way to a resurrected Nero returning from the grave to resume his reign of terror over the Empire. The significance of this for John's audience was that they were living in a time when the beast seemed all-powerful, to the extent that it even posed a challenge to the lordship of the resurrected Christ among the congregations of the faithful, in its seemingly all-encompassing claim on the hearts and minds of the nations of the earth. It is therefore to those seeking to resist the idolatrous assertions of the beast that John affirms the ultimate destruction of the beast (17.11).

The ten horns of the scarlet beast

The interpreting angel, who has explained the mystery of the seven heads, then continues to tell John that the ten horns of the beast symbolize ten

kings who have not yet received a kingdom (17.12; cf. Dan. 7.7-8, 20, 24). Rather than emperors, the ten horns symbolize Roman client kings,⁷⁰ possibly the same kings of the earth who commit fornication with the whore.⁷¹ The ten kings receive power to rule the earth in league with the beast, but this reign is short-lived (17.12) as they cede their authority and power to the beast (17.13). Within John's scheme, those human rulers who give their allegiance to the beast in exchange for earthly power will find that their reward is merely temporary. Those who join with the beast in making war against the Lamb will ultimately be unsuccessful, as John assures his audience once again that the Lamb will be victorious against all the forces of evil (17.14).⁷²

The ten horns/kings have one final role to play in the drama of the judgement of Babylon. John says that they, together with the beast, will turn on the great whore and destroy her (17.16). John returns here to his theme of evil bringing upon itself its own self-destructive judgement.⁷³ The final annihilation of the great whore, who has so successfully seduced the kings and nations of the world, is ironically seen to be completed by the hands of those who have previously been her lovers (cf. 17.2). Utilizing imagery from the Old Testament, John paints a shocking picture of the demise of the great whore, as the ten horns and the beast turn on her and desolate her,⁷⁴ devouring her flesh,⁷⁵ and burning her with fire.⁷⁶

The ten horns attack the great whore in conjunction with a beast (17.16), which may be a further reference to the *Nero Redivivus* myth. If the beast working in league with the ten kings here is the eighth head, 'the beast that was and is not' (17.11; cf. 17.8), then this may be an allusion to the myth of a returning Nero in league with the kings of the east (cf. 16.12), coming to destroy and burn his former capital city. John's clear message for his audience here is that the actions of the ten kings and the beast in destroying the great whore form part of God's overall purpose for the final destruction of evil and the fulfilment of his words of judgement (17.17).

The beast from the earth

It has already been seen how the spectre of Nero looms large over John's portrayal of Babylon, particularly as he utilizes the *Nero Redivivus* myth in his descriptions of the scarlet beast from the sea.⁷⁷ However, if Nero is implicit as an aspect of the beast from the earth, he is explicitly personified as the beast from the earth. Whereas the beast from the sea symbolizes the ancient enemy of God's people, Babylon currently incarnated in the Empire of Rome, the beast from the earth depicts Nero as the blasphemous mythology of Rome personified. The Old Testament background

for these two beasts, one from the sea and one from the earth, is found in the Leviathan and the Behemoth. The Leviathan is the mythical evil serpent from the deep,⁷⁸ while the Behemoth is the unconquerable land-dwelling monster.⁷⁹

The image being presented here for John's audience is of Rome as the latest and greatest manifestation of the long-running satanic project to draw humans away from the worship of God, while opposing and destroying all those who might attempt to resist this idolatrous call. Rome, symbolized by the beast from the sea, therefore draws its might and power from none other than Satan himself, symbolized by the great dragon. However, Rome does not function alone; and this is the role of Nero. During his lifetime he was not only the despotic head of the Roman Empire, and the object of the worship and adoration of all those who looked to Rome, but also a persecutor of Christians. However, since his suicide, a mythology had developed about him which made him in some senses more powerful in death than he had been in life, at least as far as John's understanding of him as a symbolic personification of the scarlet beast's idolatrous impersonation of God. The idea that Nero might come back from the grave, in a blasphemous parallel to the resurrection and parousia of Jesus, gave him an apparent power over death that rivalled that of the Lamb who had been slaughtered and yet who lived. So John presents Nero as the beast from the earth, exercising the authority of the scarlet beast from the sea, and causing the inhabitants of the earth to worship the scarlet beast (13.12). The parallel between the beast from the earth and the Lamb that was slaughtered is apparent in the fact that he has two horns like the Lamb, while his satanic allegiance is evident from the fact that he speaks like the dragon (13.11).

Just as the beast from the sea has multiple layers of interpretation, being simultaneously Rome, Babylon, or indeed any satanically inspired attempt to draw worship away from God on the throne in heaven, so also the beast from the earth has multiple layers of meaning. While Nero is clearly foremost in John's mind, the beast from the earth nonetheless represents all those individuals or powers which operate in a 'Neronic' manner, calling the nations of the world to engage in blasphemous worship of the beast. This would include, for example, the priests of the Roman imperial cult, as they exercised social control on the populace by calling worshippers in every city of the Empire to give allegiance and devotion to the one on the throne in Rome.⁸⁰ The beast from the earth in effect functions as the propaganda machine of the satanic empire.⁸¹ To this end, it performs great signs on behalf of the first beast (13.13),⁸² deceiving the inhabitants of the earth into making an idolatrous statue of the scarlet beast from the sea (13.14), a reference to the many statues of the Emperor which would have formed the main focus of the worship offered in the temples of the imperial cult. Just as Nero put to death

those who refused to engage in emperor-worship, so the beast from the earth kills those who refuse to engage in idolatrous worship (13.15).

One of John's categories for the inhabitants of the earth is those who are marked with the mark of the beast from the earth.⁸³ In its quest to secure the idolatrous allegiance of all peoples, the beast causes them to be marked either on the right hand or on the forehead (13.16). This is a symbol of ownership, and it serves to demarcate those who belong to the beast from those marked with the seal of God.⁸⁴ The mystery of the meaning of the mark of the beast is one of the interpretative riddles of Revelation that has occupied more than its fair share of commentators' time.⁸⁵ John simply says that the mark is the name of the beast, or the number of its name (13.17). He then issues a challenge to his audience: 'This calls for wisdom: let anyone with understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a person. Its number is six hundred sixty-six' (13.18). The practice of translating the letters of a name to their numerical equivalents and then adding those numbers together was not uncommon in first century Judaism, and was known as *gematria*.⁸⁶ The most compelling explanation of John's riddle is that it represents the Greek equivalent of 666. This interpretation is further strengthened by the fact that if the Latin *Nero* rather than the Greek *Népw* is used, the numerical equivalent becomes 616, which is reflected in a variant reading of this passage. The following table summarizes this suggestion.⁸⁷

Latin	N	e	r	o		C	a	e	s	a	r
Greek	N	ν	ρ	ω		Κ	α	ε	σ	α	ρ
Hebrew	נ		ר	ו		כ		ה	ש	א	ר
Number	50		200	6	50		100		60		200

Bauchham also notes that if the same gematria is performed on the Greek for 'beast', the number 666 also results, demonstrating that the *number* of the beast is indeed the *name* of Nero.⁸⁸

Greek	θ	ε	ρ	ι	ο	ν
Hebrew	ת		ר		ו	נ
Number	400		200	10	6	50

It is also possible that in addition to the gematria-based identification of Nero with the beast from the earth, John is also here seeking to make a theological point. The number 7 represented totality, or perfection, within Jewish understanding. The fact that the number of the name of the beast is three consecutive instances of the number 6 serves to demon-

strate that the beast is satanically short of perfection. Picture John here as a first-century equivalent to the modern fan of the cryptic crossword, delighting in this complex and meticulous process through which he can reinforce his thesis that Nero is a manifestation of the satanic beast.

The false prophet

After setting the riddle of the number of the beast (13.18), John then changes his language, and henceforth refers to the beast from the earth as 'the false prophet'. The first use of this designation occurs following the pouring out of the sixth bowl, when John witnesses three foul spirits like frogs emerging from the mouths of the dragon, the beast from the sea, and the false prophet (16.13). The role that the three foul spirits adopt is to mobilize the kings of the earth for the final great battle against the people of God, and John is here ascribing the origin of this to Satan (the dragon), aided by Rome (the beast from the sea) and Nero (the beast from the earth, now described as the false prophet). The image of a reborn Nero riding at the head of a Parthian army is once again in the background to John's image here.⁸⁹

The description of Nero as a 'prophet' is telling: the role of prophets was to ensure that their god was worshipped appropriately. In this way, the prophets of the imperial cult ensured that the emperor was ascribed due worship across the Empire. To depict Nero as the false prophet of the Empire is to confirm once again that the worship he elicits for the beast from the sea is blasphemous and idolatrous (13.14). It is therefore fitting that the false prophet, together with the beast from the sea, is thrown into the lake of fire (19.20; cf. 20.10).

This chapter has provided an overview of John's characterization of the forces of evil. The overriding theme that emerges is that within John's scheme, all those forces that oppose the lordship of the one on the heavenly throne are ultimately destined for destruction. The satanic empire, symbolized by Babylon, is presented as an idolatrous alternative to the kingdom of God, drawing the nations of the earth away from their true eternal home. To this end, the burning of Babylon represents the release of the nations from the tyranny of imperial slavery, freeing them to begin the journey towards the new Jerusalem.

Draw your own conclusions

- In your experience, how is 'Satan' typically understood within contemporary culture?
- How would you summarize John's understanding of 'evil'?

- What are the implications of regarding *deception* as Satan's greatest power?
- How do you react to John's characterization of empire as a satanic puppet?
- Do you agree that evil is a 'self-destructive' entity? Why?
- What view of God and the Church emerges from John's imagery of violent judgement on Babylon delivered in response to the prayers of the saints?

Notes

- 1 See the discussion of Satan in the Old Testament on p. 202.
- 2 Some have suggested that they are the local Jewish synagogue, flexing their civic muscle to instigate persecution of the Christians. Others suggest that they are a Jewish-Christian group who, in John's eyes, have compromised with the satanic kingdom. See Ian Boxall, 2003, *Revelation: An Introduction to the Apocalypse*, London: SPCK, pp. 53–5.
- 3 There is considerable discussion as to which aspect of the city of Pergamum should be identified as 'Satan's throne'. Suggestions include: the temple to Zeus; the temple to Augustus; the shrine of Asclepius; and the Roman acropolis. See Boxall, *Revelation*, p. 58.
- 4 The 'deep things of Satan' can be contrasted with 'the deep things of God' (Job 11.7; cf. Dan. 2.22; 1 Cor. 2.10), probably indicating an over-attendance to the acquisition of hidden teachings at the expense of the gospel of Christ.
- 5 For a more detailed discussion of this image see pp. 150–1.
- 6 J. Webb Mealy comments: 'Equipped with the context supplied by the previous visions of Satan's expulsion from heaven, the indication that he had but a "little time", and the apparent identification of that time with the career of the beast, the reader would know enough to expect to encounter some kind of definite judgement and defeat of Satan at the end of the beast's career.' J. Webb Mealy, 1992, *After the Thousand Years*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, Sheffield: JSOT Press, p. 118.
- 7 Cf. Job 3.8; 7.12; 41.1; Ps. 74.14; 104.26; Isa. 27.1; 51.9; 4 Esdras 6.49–52.
- 8 In Jewish understanding the number seven denoted perfection. John subverts this in his image of the dragon and the beast which it spawns, by linking the seven heads of the beast from the sea (13.1) with the seven hills of Rome (17.9), indicating that however perfect the dragon may appear, it is actually a personification of evil. Compare the seven diadems of the dragon with the 'many diadems' worn by the rider on the white horse (19.12; cf. 13.1).
- 9 Cf. Dan. 7.7, 24; Rev. 5.6.
- 10 Cf. Dan. 8.10; Rev. 6.13.
- 11 This story of the casting down of Satan and his angels has its origins in the Old Testament story of the Nephilim (Gen. 6.4), which is expanded in the story of the fall of the angels in 1 Enoch 6–11, 'In those days, when the children of man had multiplied, it happened that there were born unto them

- handsome and beautiful daughters. And the angels, the children of heaven, saw them and desired them; and they said to one another, "Come, let us choose wives for ourselves from among the daughters of man and beget us children." ... And they were altogether two hundred; and they descended into 'Ardos, which is the summit of Hermon' (1 Enoch 6.1–2, 6). Translated by E. Isaac in James H. Charlesworth (ed.), 1983, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* Vol. 1, New York: Doubleday, p. 15. On stars representing angelic beings, see Isa. 24.2–23. Cf. Edward Adams, 2007, *The Stars Will Fall from Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and its World*, London: T&T Clark, pp. 242–3.
- 12 Elizabeth Achtemeier, 1986, *Nabum-Malachi*, Interpretation, Atlanta: John Knox Press, p. 113.
 - 13 See pp. 76–7 for a discussion on whether this rider should be identified as an image for Christ or as a satanic parody of Christ.
 - 14 Smalley disagrees, and suggests that the word 'another' here is, 'merely a synonym for "second"'. Stephen S. Smalley, 2005, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*, London: SPCK, p. 151.
 - 15 Cf. Lev. 26.26; 2 Kings 7.1; Ezek. 4.10, 16. Smalley, *Revelation*, p. 153.
 - 16 Aune comments that the prices given here are 'about eight times the normal price for wheat and five-and-one-third times the normal price for barley'. David E. Aune, 1998a, *Revelation 6–16*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, p. 397. Cf. also Smalley, *Revelation*, p. 153.
 - 17 Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther, 2001, *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now*, New York: Orbis Books, p. 98.
 - 18 Cf. Deut. 7.13; 2 Kings 18.32; Jer. 31.12; Hos. 2.8; Joel 2.19. See Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, p. 142.
 - 19 Cf. 1 Cor. 15.26.
 - 20 Greek mythology features Thanatos, a personification of death, while the Jewish scriptures speak of death in personified terms (Job 18.23; 28.22; Ps. 49.14; Isa. 25.8; Jer. 9.21; Hos. 13.14; Hab. 2.5). Hades is the Greek term for both the underworld and the god of the dead, and has similarities with the Jewish underworld of Sheol, with the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint (LXX), substituting Hades for Sheol. Sheol is sometimes personified in the Old Testament (Prov. 30.15–20; Isa. 5.14). Cf. Boxall, *Revelation*, pp. 111–12.
 - 21 Note the increasing severity of the judgements on the earth: one quarter (6.8); one third (8.7–12; 9.15, 18); every living thing (16.3). These are indicative of the growing cycle of judgement and destruction that human allegiance to the beast attracts.
 - 22 Cf. Ezek. 5.16–17.
 - 23 Cf. Jer. 49.36; Dan. 7.2; 11.4.
 - 24 See the discussion of the first trumpet judgement on p. 124.
 - 25 For example 1 Enoch 66.1–2, 'After this he showed me the angels of punishment who are prepared to come and release all the powers of the waters which are underground to become judgement and destruction unto all who live and dwell upon the earth. But the Lord of the Spirits gave an order to the angels who were on duty that they should not.' Translated by E. Isaac in Charlesworth (ed.), *Pseudepigrapha* Vol. 1, pp. 45–6. See also Ezekiel 9.1–11 for a further

image of a destructive angel. Some have suggested that these four angels are synonymous with the four riders of 6.1-8; see G. K. Beale, 1999, *The Book of Revelation*, Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, pp. 407-8. However it is more likely that John has a different group of angelic beings in mind here, as argued in Smalley, *Revelation*, pp. 179-80.

26 1 Enoch 86.1-3, 'as I looked, behold, a star fell down from heaven ... and I saw many stars descending and casting themselves down from the sky upon that first star.' Translated by E. Isaac in Charlesworth (ed.), *Pseudepigrapha* Vol. 1, p. 63.

27 Cf. Prov. 5.4; Lam. 3.15; Amos 5.7.

28 Although wormwood itself is not a poisonous plant, there is a tradition within the Old Testament of associating it with poisonous water (Jer. 9.15; 23.15; cf. Amos 6.12).

29 See the discussion of Wormwood above for the Jewish background to fallen angels. Smalley notes that: 'It was an accepted element of Judaic cosmology that stars were living beings, who possessed a conscious personal nature.' Smalley, *Revelation*, p. 225.

30 Abaddon derives his name from the Hebrew word for *destruction*, which is fitting for his role in Revelation as the leader of the destructive army of the locusts. Although Prov. 30.27 says that 'the locusts have no king', within John's scheme the locusts are led by Abaddon, who points the way to the underworld (cf. Job 28.22; 31.12; Ps. 88.11; Prov. 15.11; 27.20). Apollyon, the Greek version of the name, would have evoked in John's readers a connection with the Hellenistic god Apollo, with whom Nero sought to identify. Cf. Boxall, *Revelation*, p. 145.

31 See the discussion in Beale, *Revelation*, p. 492, who argues in favour of such an identification. Smalley, on the other hand, argues that the fallen star is an agent of God sent to earth to unlock the bottomless pit. See Smalley, *Revelation*, p. 226.

32 The key is back in the possession of Jesus following the final judgement, as an angel comes from heaven with the key to seal Satan in the pit for a thousand years (20.1-2).

33 Cf. 2 Chr. 7.13; Joel 1.4-7; Amos 4.9.

34 Boxall, *Revelation*, p. 145. An alternative interpretation of John's description of the locusts is provided by Hal Lindsey, who suggests that John is actually seeking to describe a vision of advanced attack helicopters, with the crowns of gold representing the helmets of the pilots, and the sound of their wings the noise of the engines. See Hal Lindsey, 1997, *Apocalypse Code*, California: West Front, p. 42. In making this identification, Lindsey is taking an approach to Revelation whereby John's imagery represents a time-slip vision of the end of the world. By this reading, John's imagery is accessible only to those who have sufficient knowledge of, for example, attack helicopters to decode the visions. See pp. 24-5.

35 For example, the Battle of Carthage (53 BC) was one of the worst defeats ever sustained by the imperial army. Threat of renewed hostilities between Parthia and Rome had heightened in the AD 60s, to the extent that some believed Nero had fled to Parthia with the intention of returning to Rome with an invasion force. Cf. Boxall, *Revelation*, p. 145.

36 See the discussion of the voice from the horns of the altar on p. 129.

37 It is also worth noting that both the Assyrian and Babylonian invaders of Israel came from beyond the Euphrates. See Boxall, *Revelation*, p. 147.

38 The Parthian cavalry would bind the tails of their horses, giving them a snake-like appearance. Cf. Smalley, *Revelation*, p. 241.

39 Although the majority of modern commentators are agreed that John primarily has Rome in view when constructing the imagery of Babylon, Barker makes a forceful argument on the basis of the Old Testament language of Zion as an unfaithful woman (cf. Lam. 2.1; Ezek. 23.30) that actually John's image of the 'harlot city' was originally intended as a critique of Jerusalem, the city rebuilt with Babylonian money after the end of the Jewish exile (Isa. 1.21). She suggests that it was only in later interpretation of the Apocalypse that Babylon came to symbolize Rome for its readers. See Margaret Barker, 2000, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, pp. 279-85.

40 This is demonstrated by the early second century AD Jewish apocalypse 2 Baruch, which uses Babylon as an image for Rome. The following passage refers to the sacking of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70, and compares the Roman Empire to the Babylonians: 'Now this I, Baruch, say to you, O Babylon: If you had lived in happiness and Zion in its glory, it would have been a great sorrow to us that you had been equal to Zion. But now, behold, the grief is infinite and the lamentation is unmeasurable, because, behold, you are happy and Zion has been destroyed' (2 Baruch 11.1-2). Translated by A. F. J. Klijin in Charlesworth (ed.), *Pseudepigrapha* Vol. 1, p. 625. It is also significant that when the author of the book of Daniel, writing in c.165 BC, wanted to construct a narrative which would express his theological resistance to the Seleucid ruler, Antiochus IV (175-163 BC), he turned to stories of the Babylonian exile from the sixth century BC. Cf. D. S. Russell, 1989, *Daniel: An Active Volcano*, Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, pp. 11-12.

41 Smalley, *Revelation*, p. 364.

42 Cf. Smalley, *Revelation*, p. 362.

43 Boxall, *Revelation*, pp. 165-6.

44 Cf. Isa. 21.9; Rev. 18.2.

45 Pratt observes that the concept of Rome as the *Urbs aeterna* (the 'eternal city') dates from the fourth century BC. See Kenneth J. Pratt, 1965, 'Rome as Eternal', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 26, no. 1 (Jan-Mar): 25-44, pp. 25-8.

46 Cf. Isa. 13.20-2; Rev. 14.8.

47 Cf. Jer. 51.45.

48 For a more detailed exploration of the similarities and differences between Babylon and the new Jerusalem see pp. 111-13.

49 The Old Testament background for John's use of this image is found in Isa. 23.15-18, where the city of Tyre is condemned through comparison with a prostitute.

50 Cf. Richard Bauckham, 1993, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 17-18.

51 Cf. Pratt, 'Rome as Eternal', pp. 27-8.

52 Cf. Bauckham, *Theology*, pp. 17-18.

53 For further analysis of the beast, see pp. 163-6.

54 Cf. Jer. 51:7.

55 The debates over the identification of these kings are extensive, and contribute to the discussions around the dating of the book of Revelation. For more on the seven kings, see pp. 166–7.

56 For an exploration of the Old Testament background to Chapter 18, see Iain Provan, 1996, 'Foul Spirits, Fornication and Finance: Revelation 18 from an Old Testament Perspective', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, vol. 64: 81–100.

57 See the discussion of the ten horns of the scarlet beast on pp. 167–8.

58 In a fascinating article, Rowland discusses various portrayals of the Apocalypse in art down the centuries. His article contains a number of images which are unavailable elsewhere. However, many of the images he discusses are freely available via online image-search at <http://images.google.com/>. See Christopher Rowland, 2005, 'Imagining the Apocalypse', *New Testament Studies*, vol. 51: 303–27, pp. 307–8, 318, 323. Also Kovacs and Rowland, *Revelation*, pp. 177–89. The following website is a useful repository of images relating to the book of Revelation, and includes some interesting portrayals of the great whore which are illustrative of the points made above, including Albrecht Dürer's late fifteenth-century woodcut, and the illustration taken from Luther's 1522 New Testament: <http://www.payer.de/christentum/apokalypse.htm>.

59 Tina Pippin, 1999, *Apocalyptic Bodies: The Biblical End of the World in Text and Image*, London: Routledge, pp. 83, 92, 93–4. Cf. also Jean K. Kim, 1999, 'Uncovering Her Wickedness': An Inter(Con)Textual Reading of Revelation 17 from a Postcolonial Feminist Perspective', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, vol. 73: 61–81.

60 See the discussion of the two witnesses on pp. 102–4.

61 For references regarding the Leviathan, see pp. 150–1. Compare the Behemoth, on whom the beast from the earth is modelled, pp. 168–9.

62 Possibly the kingdoms of Babylonia, Media, Persia and Greece, with the 'little horn' of Dan. 7.8 representing Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 BC), the ruler of the Hellenistic Seleucid empire, who sacked Jerusalem and desecrated the temple, triggering the Maccabean uprising. See Boxall, *Revelation*, p. 187.

63 See the discussion on dating on pp. 15–16.

64 J. Nelson Kraybill, 1996, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, pp. 162–3. This myth may also lie behind the images of Parthian invasion found elsewhere in Revelation (cf. 9:7–9; 14:16; 16:12; 19:11). Cf. Richard Bauckham, 1993, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, pp. 407–31.

65 Cf. Rev. 11:2–3; 12:6, 14. For more on the period of 42 months experienced by the Church as a time of persecution, see p. 131.

66 Bauckham, *Theology*, pp. 35–6. This imagery is explored in more detail below, pp. 212–13.

67 Although, in defence of her thesis that Babylon is Jerusalem, Barker suggests that Jerusalem was also mythically understood to be a city of seven hills. See Margaret Barker, 2000, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, p. 285.

68 This table is a simplification of the many complex theories which have emerged to attempt to account for John's language here. For more detailed analyses of this problem, see David E. Aune, 1998b, *Revelation 17–22*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, pp. 946–7; Beale, *Revelation*, pp. 872–5.

69 This is the approach favoured by Smalley, who comments: 'Just as "Babylon" (17:1) represents the idolatrous forces of the state in any period of world history, so the satanic beast symbolizes any incarnation of the worldly misuse of power.' Smalley, *Revelation*, p. 437.

70 The 'client kings' of Rome were local rulers who chose to ally themselves with the Empire to avoid an otherwise inevitable invasion. They paid tribute to Rome in return for continuing to rule their own territories and having access to the imperial armies in defence against other tribes.

71 Cf. Rev. 17:2, 18. See also the discussion of the kings of the earth on pp. 139–40.

72 Cf. Rev. 16:14, 16; 19:17–21.

73 As Boxall comments: 'Evil and injustice bear within themselves the seeds of their own destruction, and ultimately the whole edifice will come tumbling down.' Boxall, *Revelation*, p. 249.

74 Cf. Ezek. 23:26–30.

75 Cf. 1 Kings 21:23–4; 2 Kings 9:10, 36–7.

76 Cf. Ezek. 23:25. For comment on the contemporary and historical impact of the description of the desolation of the whore see pp. 161–3. It is possible that John also has in mind here the burning of Rome at the hands of Nero.

77 Cf. Rev. 13:12, 14; 17:8, 11, 16.

78 See the discussion of the Leviathan on p. 150.

79 Cf. Job 40:15–24. 1 Enoch describes both the Behemoth and the Leviathan, portraying them as male and female respectively: 'On that day, two monsters will be parted – one monster, a female named Leviathan, in order to dwell in the abyss of the ocean over the fountains of water; and (the other), a male called Behemoth' (1 Enoch 60:7–8). Translated by E. Isaac in Charlesworth (ed.), *Pseudepigrapha Vol. 1*, p. 40.

80 Bauckham, *Theology*, p. 38.

81 Bauckham, *Theology*, p. 91.

82 Cf. 1 Kings 18:38.

83 See the discussion of 'those marked' on pp. 136–7.

84 See the discussion of the 144,000 on pp. 96–8.

85 The range of solutions which have been proposed to this puzzle is immense and occasionally bewildering, with the 'number of the beast' being used to identify the Pope, all Roman Catholics, those French kings named Louis, Hitler, the contemporary global political system, the period of Saracen rule (AD 635–1300), the year of the beginning of Muslim political expansionism (AD 666), the period between the execution of Charles I of England and the expected overthrow of Parliament, a tattoo on the forehead, and barcodes. Cf. Judith L. Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, *Revelation*, 2004, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 157–8; Hal Lindsey and C. C. Carlson, 1970, *The Late, Great Planet Earth*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, p. 101.

86 For example, Bauckham cites graffiti from Pompeii which reads, 'I love the girl whose number is 545'. Bauckham, *Climax*, p. 385.

⁸⁷ For a comprehensive and widely accepted defence of this interpretation see Bauckham, *Climax*, pp. 387f.

⁸⁸ Bauckham comments: 'Thus John is saying that the number of the *word* beast is also the number of a man. The gematria does not merely assert that Nero is the beast: it demonstrates that he is.' Bauckham, *Climax*, p. 389.

⁸⁹ See the discussion of the *Nero Redivivus* myth on pp. 164–5.

Part 3

Engaging the Imagery