

## **NERO ANTICHRIST: Patristic Evidence of the Use of Nero's Name in Calculating the Number of the Beast (Rev 13:18)**

*Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast,  
for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.*

*Revelation 13:18*

### *THE NERO THEORY & THE PROBLEM OF PATRISTIC EVIDENCE*

In Revelation 13:18 John says that the number of the beast is that of a man. For almost two centuries a multitude of scholars have suggested that the “man” was the Roman emperor Nero. Although according to certain authors the Nero identification is “the most widely accepted” interpretation, one of its main problems is the lack of substantiation for it in patristic literature. This paper introduces a fifth-century chronicle from North African Christianity, entitled *Liber Genealogus* or *Book of Genealogy*, that has bearing on the question of whether or not early Christians used Nero's name in their calculations of the number of the beast. It will provide a translation of the relevant portion, contextualize and explain the passage, bring it into dialogue with a statement from Irenaeus, and discuss its implications for biblical studies.

Those who hold to the identification of Nero as the man of Rev 13:18 claim that

666 is the sum of the numerical value of the Hebrew letters *nrwn qsr*, transliterated *Neron Kaisar* in Greek. While the non-standard spellings, i.e. *nrwn* instead of *nrw* for Nero and *qsr* instead of *qysr* for Caesar, are somewhat problematic for the theory, the Talmud, Rabbinical writings, and the discovery of a scroll at Qumran all containing similar spellings of Nero's name are used as supporting evidence. A further argument in support of the interpretation is that the sum of a Latinized form of Nero's name in Hebrew, i.e. *nrw qsr*, equals 616. This, proponents say, accounts for the variants of Revelation 13:18 in several ancient versions of the biblical text which contain 616 in place of 666.

Several objections to the Nero designation have been raised. According to Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., the "strongest argument against it" is that the early church fathers seem to have been unaware of it. In fact, the identification of Nero's name with the number of the beast seems to have arisen in Christian history only recently in the 1830s. In my opinion this is a weighty argument; for, if the theory were correct and the early recipients of the Book of Revelation understood that the number of the beast was to be calculated from Nero's name, one would expect at least a trace of this interpretation to show up somewhere in patristic literature. But according to Gentry, who advances the Nero identification, "no early Church father suggests Nero's name as the proper designation of 666, even though various suggestions were given by such men as Irenaeus, Andreas of Caesarea, Victorinus, Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria, and others." So, as far as contemporary scholarship stands, no patristic texts, not even the twenty or so patristic commentaries on Revelation, extant in whole or in fragments, suggest the name of Nero for identifying the number of the beast. However, several paragraphs of the *Liber genealogus* give us cause for re-

examination of the alleged lack of evidence in the writings of the fathers.

### *LIBER GENEALOGUS ON THE EMPEROR NERO*

Overview of the Text. The *Liber genealogus* is a chronology written in Latin by an unknown North African Donatist Christian in the fifth century. The Donatists, named after their founding bishop Donatus of Casa Niger, were North African schismatics who separated from the larger Christian body after the Diocletian persecution over issues of ecclesiastical purity. This chronology was originally written between 405 and 427, but is preserved in four slightly different versions written in the years 427, 438, 455, and 463. It was edited by Theodore Mommsen in 1892 and reprinted in 1981.

In short entries the *Liber* lists persons and events in chronological order from Adam and Eve to the fifth century of the Christian era. In doing so, it makes extensive use of the genealogies in the Old Testament, in Matthew, and in Luke, lists of Persian kings, and lists of Roman kings, dictators, and emperors. Other identifiable sources include a Latin translation of the *Chronicle* of Hippolytus, a recension of Victorinus' *Commentary on Revelation*, and the *Chronology* of Julius Quintus Hilarianus.

Toward the end of the chronology, it speaks about the birth and death of Christ under the emperors Augustus and Tiberius respectively. It then briefly touches upon the persecutions of Christians under the emperors Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Decius, Valerian, and Diocletian, as well as the persecutors of the Donatists. It is in this section of the *Liber*, which deals with the persecuting emperors (pages 194-196 of Mommsen's edition), that the relevant statements are made about Nero.

Paragraphs on Nero. Citing a portion of Revelation 13:18, paragraphs 614-620 of the version that was written in 438 states that the letters of Nero's name are to be used in calculating the number of the beast. The Latin text is provided below followed by an English translation.

614. A passione autem domini usque ad passionem Petri et Pauli anni sunt XXXVIII: passi Nerone consule. persecutio haec prima fuit Neronis quae iterum futura est sub Enoch et Helia.

615. hic Nero ipse est, cuius nomen Iohannes in apocalpsin vocavit DCXVI. hic sapientia vertitur, ut computetur per eras nomen eius, qui dicitur, "antichristus sic"

A N T I C H R I S T V S  
I XIII XVIII VIII III VIII XVII VIII XVIII XVIII XX XVIII

fit numerus collectus asses CLIII: haec quater "ducta secundum litteras IIII nom(inis) Neronis" faciunt DCXVI, quod est nomen Antichristi.

616. Sed haec ad certum computationis numerum discrepare videtur, iuxta quod alii doctores de numero bestiae tractaverunt. sic enim ait sanctus Victorinus episcopus: numerus eius, ait spiritus sanctus, nomen hominis est et numerus nominis eius DCXVI, id est Antichristus. in mutatio enim nomine veniet et duo sibi nomina inponet Antemus Graece et Gensericus Gotice, scilicet ut multas gentes seducat. Antemus per s litteris scribitur secundum Graecos sermones in computu, ut venias ad numerum illum, id est DCLXVI, supra scriptum computari prudens: A unum est I—N quinquaginta sunt L—T trecenti sunt CCC—E quinque sunt V—M quadraginta sunt XL—O septuaginta sunt LXX

—C centum sunt C. quod est numerus sescens sexagies sexies secundum Graecos.

617. Item aliud nomen Grecum Teitan, quem gentiles Solem Phoebumque appellant: iuxta quod aliud orator ait: Teitan enim secundum Grecam litteram ad eandem ratione vel numerum pertinent: computatur sic: T tau CCC sunt—E eta V sunt—I iota X sunt—T tau CCC sunt—A alfa I est—N ne L sunt: quod est DCLXVI. quod nomen, id est Phoebum, si velis in Latinum convertere per as VI litteras invenies ita: D-I-C-L-V-X: D quipped figurat quingenti, I unum, C centum, L quinquaginta, V quinque, X decem, quid computati sunt DCLXVI.

618. Item aliud nomen Gotice quod dicebat Gensericus, ut gentiles seducat, computa per litteram prorudens et invenies in hoc numero, id est Graeco, DCLXVI: I gamma III sunt—E eta V sunt—N ne L sunt—C simma CC sunt—H eta VIII sunt—P ro C sunt—I iota X sunt—K cappa XX sunt—O u LXX sunt—C simma CC sunt. hic numerus per litteras supra scripta Gensericus eundem computum explicabit.

619. Nunc iam ad superiorem ordinem redeamus. nam ideo ista de egregii Victorini episcopi vel aliorum dicta subiunximus, quia supra scriptum computum collecta summa ex nomine Neronis ad numerum bestie non conveniebat.

620. ipse autem antichristus ut in secretis legitur, “de tribu Dan filii Iacob patriarche veniet in spiritu Neronis et Saar” dicitur civitas in occidente, ubi adhuc tenetur incl“usus, quamvis iam ubique habuit metores [sic], de quibus apostolus [Ioh. 1,2] dicit: quoniam” veniet Antichristus, ex nobis exierunt, sed non erant ex nobis, si enim ex nobis fuissent [sic], nobiscum utique permansissent.

614. Moreover, from the passion of the Lord to the passion of Peter and Paul are thirty eight years: They suffered when Nero was consul. This first persecution was of Nero, which is going to occur again under Enoch and Elijah.

615. This Nero is he whose name John called in the Apocalypse 616. *Here wisdom is* (Rev 13:18) used, that the name of him who is thus called ‘Antichrist’ may be calculated through letters.

|   |    |    |   |   |   |    |   |    |    |    |    |
|---|----|----|---|---|---|----|---|----|----|----|----|
| A | N  | T  | I | C | H | R  | I | S  | T  | V  | S  |
| 1 | 13 | 18 | 9 | 3 | 9 | 17 | 9 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 18 |

The collected number equals 154. This [multiplied by] four “strokes, according to the four letters of the name of Nero” makes 616, which is the name of Antichrist.

616. But this seems to differ with the established number of the computation according to what other teachers have written about the number of the beast. For, the holy bishop Victorinus says this: “*His number, the Holy Spirit says, is the number of a man*” and the number of his name is 616 (Rev 13:18), that is, Antichrist. For, he will come with a changed name; and he will ascribe two names to himself, ‘Antemus’ in Greek and ‘Gensericus’ in Gothic, because he deceives many nations. In the calculation, ‘Antemus’ is written in letters corresponding to the Greek language, so that you may come to that number, that is 666. Upon this word a wise person is able to calculate: “A=1, N=50, T=300, E=5, M=40, U=70, S=200. This is the number six hundred sixty six, according to the Greeks.”

617. “Again, another Greek name is ‘Teitan’ which the Gentiles call Sol and Phoebus,” according to what another orator says. For, ‘Teitan’ according to Greek letters

adds up to the same sum or number. “It is calculated in this manner: T=300, E=5, I=1, T=300, A=1, N=50, which is 666.” This name, that is Phoebus, “if you want to convert it into Latin,” you will find the six letters as these: “D-I-C-L-V-X. D surely represents 50, I=1, C=100, L=50, V=5, X=10, which calculated are 666.”

618. “Again, another name in Gothic” is that which he called “‘Gensericus,’ because he deceives the nations.” A wise person can calculate through letters, and you will find in this number, that is in Greek, 666. “G=3, E=5, N=50, S=200, E=8, R=100, I=10, C=20, U=70, S=200.” This number, [calculated] through the letters of the word ‘Gensericus’ will yield the same sum.

619. Now let us return to a superior way of thinking. For, we have added these things from the sayings of the excellent bishop Victorinus or others because the words calculated above do not match the number of the beast, the sum gathered from the name of Nero.

620. But Antichrist himself, as is read in the mysteries, “will come from the tribe of Dan, the son of the patriarch Jacob in the spirit of Nero and Saar.” There is said to be a city in the west where he is still held “secluded, although now he has satellites everywhere, about which the apostle says, *that’ Antichrist will come. They have gone out from us, but they were not of us. For, if they were of us, they surely would have remained with us.* (1 John 2:18-19).

Nero as the Antichrist. The writer of the 438 version of the *Liber genealogus* believed that the Antichrist would be Nero redivivus, a revived Nero. He indicated this in

paragraph 614 where he explained that just as Nero was the first great persecutor of the Christians, so also he would be their last. This will occur, he says, when the two witnesses of Revelation 11, identified by the author as Enoch and Elijah, will return to earth from paradise. According to patristic eschatology, this is going to take place in the very last times before the second coming of Christ from heaven.

The association by early Christians of Nero with an end-time persecutor, called both the beast and the Antichrist, is well documented. The *Sibylline Oracles* testify of the Nero-Antichrist belief, as do the church fathers Victorinus and Commodian. More contemporaneous with the *Liber genealogus* is the witness of the fifth-century historian, Suplicius Severus, who explained the historical and scriptural basis of the Nero redivivus myth in this manner:

Meanwhile Nero, already detestable even to himself on account of the consciousness of his wicked deeds, was removed from human affairs. But it was uncertain whether he had committed suicide. Surely his body was gone.

Accordingly it is believed that although he pierced himself through with a sword, he was healed of his mortal wound and was preserved, according to that which was written about him: *And his mortal wound was healed* (Rev 13:3), that he should return at the end of the world so that *the mystery of iniquity* be fulfilled (2 Thess 2:7).

Severus attributes the origin of the legend to uncertainties raised by the mysterious circumstances of Nero's death. Nero was gone, and it was rumored that he was dead. The ancient historian Suetonius informs us that public funeral rites had not been held, but only

about five people—his scribe, his mistress, a freedman named Icelus, and two old nurses—saw Nero’s dead body, burned it on a pyre, and entombed it on the Pincian Hill in Rome. Such lack of closure for the Roman people sent curious minds sailing with speculation that he was still alive. The belief that Nero was not dead, Severus tells us, was strengthened in the minds of early Christians by certain biblical passages, namely Revelation 13:3, and 2 Thessalonians 2:7. The Apocalypse commentary of Victorinus on Rev 13:3 confirms that some early Christians associated the healing of the mortal wound of the beast in that passage with Nero; and the exegesis of the eastern fathers John Chrysostom and Theodoret of Cyrus confirm that many interpreted the *mystery of iniquity* in 2 Thess 2:7 as Nero.

In fifth-century North Africa, where the *Liber genealogus* was written, both Augustine and Quodvultdeus inform us that the Nero Antichrist belief was alive and well there. Augustine wrote in his *City of God*:

Some think...that in saying, ‘For the mystery of iniquity doth already work,’ he alluded to Nero, whose deeds already seemed to be as the deeds of Antichrist. And hence some suppose that he shall rise again and be Antichrist. Others, again, suppose that he is not dead, but that he was concealed...and will live until he is revealed in his own time...”

Quodvultdeus, a bishop of Carthage writing in exile about 450, commented on Revelation 17:7-12: “Therefore, the eighth king, whom he [John] calls Antichrist, some want to understand as Nero, so that he is *the beast who was, and is not*, and will come again (Rev 17:8).”

The *Liber genealogus* explains that either Nero will return from his hiding as the

Antichrist, or a Jewish Antichrist will come in the spirit of Nero. This is confirmed for the author by the words of the apostle John: *you have heard that Antichrist is coming* (I John 2:18). But until such time as Nero returns for a second wave of persecution against the church, he has satellites, many little assistant antichrists working on his behalf. The author probably has in mind as satellites of Antichrist, the Vandal bishops. The Vandals, who overthrew the Roman cities of North Africa in the 430s, were Arian in their Christology and persecuted both Catholics and Donatists. The African bishop Quodvultdeus, who was forced into exile near Naples, called them “precursors of Antichrist;” and Victor of Vita, another African Catholic bishop who lived later in the fifth-century, associated the Arian baptismal certificates of the Vandals with the mark of the beast.

Nero and the Number of the Beast. While early Christians saw references to Nero in 2 Thess. 2:7, Rev. 13:3, and 17:8, the *Liber genealogus* illustrates that some African Christians also saw an allusion to him in Revelation 13:18, the passage about the number of the beast. Paragraph 615 shows that that verse of Scripture, in the author’s copy of the Apocalypse, read 616 rather than 666. The 616 variant, found in papyrus Ox. 4499, uncial manuscript C, cursives 5 and 11 (no longer extant), and *Codex Ephraemi rescriptus*, was known to early Christian writers of the second through eighth centuries including Irenaeus, Tyconius, Caesarius of Arles, and the unknown authors of *De monogramma* and the Irish Reference Bible.

According to the writer of the *Liber*, by using wisdom one can calculate the number of the beast by first adding the numerical values of the letters which make up the word

‘Antichristus,’ which is Latin for ‘Antichrist.’ Then by taking that sum, 154, and multiplying it by four, according to the four letters in the name Nero, one will arrive at 616, the number of the beast.

In paragraphs 616-618, the writer then reviews three other names of the beast that he gathered from a recension of Victorinus’ *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. They are: Antemus, Teitan, and Gensericus. Even though the author of the *Liber* respects Victorinus, calling him a “holy” and “excellent” bishop, he rejects all three of those names because in each case the numerical equivalents of the letters total 666, going beyond 616. In paragraph 619 and 620 the *Liber* then brings the reader back to what he says is a “superior” way of understanding the number of the beast, that is, to use the name of Nero.

The *Liber*’s Unknown Source. In paragraph 615, the author of the *Liber* was quoting from an ancient source that informed him of the correct way to calculate the number of the beast, i.e., to use the four “strokes, according to the four letters of the name of Nero.” In paragraph 620 the writer seems to return to that source to verify that his method of calculation is the best. He writes: “It is read in mysteries” that the Antichrist “will come from the tribe of Dan...in the spirit of Nero and Saar.” In the text edited by Mommsen in 1892, citations from older books are placed in quotation marks. Whether or not these citations were indicated as such in the manuscripts that Mommsen had before him, or they were the product of Mommsen’s research, is unknown. If the latter were the case, Mommsen may have known and had access to the ancient source that told Christians to use the strokes of the four letters of the name of Nero to calculate the number of the beast. Unfortunately, Mommsen did not disclose a title or author of that ancient source from

which the *Liber* cited. I have searched the known sources of the *Liber genealogus* mentioned earlier, apocryphal literature, patristic Apocalypse commentaries, and the search engine of the Chadwyck-Healey *Patrologia Latina* database, and still I have been unable to identify the source.

### *THE IRENAEUS CONNECTION*

The calculation of the number of the beast by early Christians using Nero's name, attested to in the *Liber genealogus*, sheds light on the question of whether or not Irenaeus, the earliest church father to write about the number of the beast, was aware of this practice. For at least forty years, scholarly opinion has overwhelmingly asserted that Irenaeus had no knowledge of any Christians in his day associating the number of the beast with Nero. For example, Gregory K. Beale writes:

...Irenaeus discusses various possible identifications for the number of the 'beast' (666). But he does not entertain the possibility that the beast is to be identified with Nero, and he even rejects the possibility that the beast is to be identified with any Roman emperor at all. Such lack of consideration is striking since Nero's infamous reputation as a persecuting tyrant would still have been well known.

Gentry expresses a similar opinion, writing, "Frequently, we hear that the earliest treatment of the cryptogram in Revelation 13:18 does not mention Nero as a likely candidate. The reference to which I refer is *Against Heresies* by Irenaeus." And in another place Gentry writes, "Irenaeus knew nothing of the Nero theory." Both Beale and Gentry

were dependent upon Leon Morris' 1969 commentary on the Book of Revelation. In it Morris wrote that Irenaeus did not "even include Nero in his list, let alone regard this as a likely conjecture." Barclay Newman in a 1963 article examining Irenaeus' views on the Apocalypse, claimed likewise: "Where Irenaeus makes reference to the speculation concerning the number 666... in no instance does he even reflect knowledge of the Nero-redivivus myth in the list of interpretations familiar to him."

Let us take a fresh look at Irenaeus' statements, written about the year 180. In Book 5, chapter 30, of *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus reviewed and evaluated three names that equaled the number of the beast, 666. These were 'Evanthas', 'Lateinos', and 'Teitan.' Irenaeus did not want to pronounce positively about any of these names, but thought that it would be better to simply wait for the fulfillment of the prophecy. Nevertheless, he depicted 'Teitan' as the name with the highest probability.

In the same chapter, Irenaeus also explained that there were some in his day who were using a corrupted reading of Revelation 13:18, which read 616 instead of 666. He then informs us that some "have ventured to seek out a name which should contain the erroneous and spurious number," and were affirming "that this name, hit upon by themselves, is that of him who is to come." From these statements, it seems very likely that Irenaeus knew exactly what that name was, but he never mentioned it. One reason for this may have been because he believed it was based upon a corrupt version of Scripture, and so did not want to give it the least bit of credence. Another reason may have been because it was the name of a Roman emperor, and Irenaeus was adverse to the idea that the number should be interpreted with respect to the Roman emperors. The point I would like to

emphasize is that Irenaeus does seem to have known the name that these Christians were using to arrive at 616.

What was that name? The *Liber genealogus* may provide a clue. It reveals that some African Christians, whose version of Revelation 13:18 read 616, were using the name ‘Antichristus Nero,’ and arriving at the number of the beast, 616. No other patristic writing of which I am aware provides a name for the beast whose sum totals 616.

Therefore, I think it is highly probable that the name that Irenaeus alluded to was Nero, and that he did in fact know of the Nero theory for the number of the beast, but rejected it for the reasons mentioned above. Although the evidence supporting this is contained in a chronology written some 250 years after Irenaeus, the ancient source that the chronology had drawn upon for that information may significantly narrow the temporal gap between the second century Irenaeus and the fifth-century *Liber*.

#### *IMPLICATIONS FOR BIBLICAL STUDIES*

Many modern scholars believe that the earliest Christians calculated the number of the beast in Revelation 13:18 by adding the sum of the Hebrew letters of the name “Neron Caesar.” The *Liber genealogus*, a fifth-century text, spoke of a procedure used by some Christians that adds the sum of the letters in the word “Antichristus” and multiplies it by four, the number of letters in Nero’s name. Although these two modes do not correspond exactly, scholars who are convinced of the Nero theory may view the practice mentioned in the *Liber* as a vestige of the original method. Thus, they may welcome the *Liber genealogus* as a text lending patristic support for their theory.

Present scholarship depicts the Nero theory of the number of the beast as having first arisen in Christian history among German scholars in the 1830s. The *Liber genealogus* attests that the name of Nero was being used by early Christians in their calculation of the number of the beast, 616 in their version of Revelation 13:18. This fifth-century African text, therefore, pushes back the date of the Nero identification some fourteen hundred years. Based on a statement in Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* about a "name... of him who is to come" that some Christians were using to arrive at the spurious number 616 instead of 666, it is very likely that Irenaeus in the second century knew of the Nero identification. This allusion in Irenaeus, along with the Nero theory contained in an unknown source from which the *Liber* quotes, may bring the date of this idea even closer to the time of the writing of the Book of Revelation. Therefore, against critics who regard the Nero identification as a novelty not to be found in the early church, the *Liber genealogus* shows that it did in fact exist in the earliest centuries of Christian history.

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Biblical studies on the passage include Michael Oberweis, "Die Bedeutung der neutestamentlichen 'Rätselzahlen' 666 (Apk 13.18) und 153 (Joh 21.11)," *ZNW* 77 (1986):226-41; Gregory K. Beale, "The Danielic Background for Revelation 13:18 and 17:9," *Tyndale Bulletin* 31 (1980):163-70. Adela Yarbro Collins (*The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*. Harvard Theological Dissertations in Religion 9 [Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1976], 174) writes: "First of all, the use of the word *psephizein* [*calculate*] is an indication that the number involves the process of gematria, i.e. adding the numerical value of the letters of a word. Secondly, the most natural way to understand *arithmos gar anthropou estin* [*for the number is that of a man*] (13:18) is that the number relates to the name of some human individual."

John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (1976, reprinted, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 235. Cf. John W. Marshall, "Parables of the War: Reading the Apocalypse within Judaism and during the Judean War," (Ph. D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1997), 255: "...the solution 'Nero' is well received by the majority of scholars..."; J. Christian Wilson, "The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation," *NTS* 39 (1993):587-605 esp. p. 598: "There is little disagreement among scholars today that this number is a gematria on the name NERON KAISAR."; Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary. New Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 799: "But the most popular proposal among scholars today is 'Nero Caesar.'"

"The numerical value of N=50; R=200; W=6; N=50; Q=100; S=60; and R=200, totals 666. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Perilous Times: A Study in Eschatological Evil* (Texarkana, Arkansas: Covenant Media Press, 1999), 128.

On the spelling of Nero's name in the Talmud and Rabbinical writings, Jay Adams, *The Time is at Hand: Prophecy and the Book of Revelation* (Woodruff, South Carolina: Timeless Texts, 2000, 1966), 73

n. 1; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 1998), 199, who cites Moses Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* (2 vols.; Andover: Allen, Morrill, and Wardwell, 1845), 2:457; Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 719. On the scroll at Qumran, D. R. Hillers, "Revelation 13:18 and a Scroll from Murabba'at," *BASOR* 170 (1963):65; Pierre Benoit, Jozef T. Milik, and Roland DeVaux, *Discoveries in the Judean Desert of Jordan II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 18, plate 29.

Advocating this view are Ralph E. Bass, *Back to the Future: A Study in the Book of Revelation* (Greenville, South Carolina: Living Hope Press, 2004), 318; Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2002), 37-50; Gary DeMar, *End Times Fiction: A Biblical Consideration of Left Behind Theology* (Nashville: Nelson, 2001), 148; Adams, *The Time is at Hand*, 73, no. 1; Gentry, *Perilous Times*, 127-8; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 193-219, which on page 200 lists 37 scholars who held or hold to this view; Gentry, "A Preterist View of Revelation," in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* (ed. C. Marvin Pate, Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., Sam Harnstra, and Robert L. Thomas: Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 37-92 esp. p. 68; L. J. Lietaert Peerbolte, *The Antecedents of Antichrist* (New York: Brill, 1996), 151; Robert C. Fuller, *Naming the Antichrist: The History of an American Obsession* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 29; Fausto Sbaiffoni, *Testi sull'Anticristo secoli I-II* (Firenze: Nardini Editore, 1992), 358; Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 53; Paul Trudinger, "The 'Nero Redivivus' Rumour and the Date of the Apocalypse of John," *St. Mark's Review* 131 (September 1987):43-4; David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, 1984), 350-1; Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 517 n. 87; Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Apocalypse* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1979), 97; Albert A. Bell, Jr., "The Date of

John's Apocalypse: The Evidence of Some Roman Historians Considered," *NTS* 25 (1978):93-102; John M. Lawrence, "Nero Redivivus," *Fides et Historia* 11 (1978):54-66; Collins, *Combat Myth*, 174-5.

Claims are made that the names of other first century emperors equal 616 or 666. "Gaius Caesar", which was Caligula's name, equals 616. See Mark Hitchcock, "The Stake in the Heart—The A.D. 95 Date of Revelation," in *The End Times Controversy* (ed. Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice: Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 2003), 123-50 esp. 446 n. 85. "Imp Caes Vesp Aug P M Cos IIII," the legend on a coin of the emperor Vespasian, equals 666. See William G. Baines, "The Number of the Beast in Revelation 13:18," *Heythrop Journal* 16 (1975):195-6. "Kaiser Domitianus," i.e. Caesar Domitian, equals 616. See *Beale, Book of Revelation*, 720. "Ulpios," the Emperor Trajan's surname, equals 666. See Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1970), 960 n. 1. Throughout church history, names innumerable that equal 666 have been put forward. See the tables in my *The Day and the Hour: Christianity's Perennial Fascination with Predicting the End of the World* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2000), 10, 89, 115, 185, 225, 231, 286, esp. "Table 18: Names Which Have Yielded the Number of the Beast," 307; and David Brady, *The Contributions of British Writers between 1560 and 1830 to the Interpretation of Revelation 13.16-18* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1983), who counted at least 147 different identifications. Walter K. Price (*The Coming Antichrist* [Chicago: Moody, 1974], 37) quoted a certain Professor Salmon as saying: "Any name, with sufficient ingenuity, can be made to yield the number 666. There are three rules by the help of which, I believe, an ingenious man could find the required sum in any given name. First, if the proper name by itself will not yield it; add a title; secondly, if the sum cannot be found in Greek, try Hebrew, or even Latin; thirdly, do not be too particular about the spelling. The use of a language different from that to which the name properly belongs allows a good deal of latitude in the transliteration."

Gentry, *Beast of Revelation*, 44. This objection is also discussed in Simon J. Kistemaker, "Hyper-Preterism and Revelation," in *When Shall These Things Be? A Reformed Response to Hyper-Preterism*

(ed. Keith A. Mathison: Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2004), 215-54 at 228; Kym Smith, *Redating the Revelation* (Blackwood, South Australia: Sherwood Publications, 2001), 49; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 20, 719-20; Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 203-212; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 959.

David Brady (*Contributions of British Writers*, 292) lists Fritzsche (*Annalen der gesammten theologischen Literatur und der christlichen Kirche überhaupt*, Jahrg. I, Bd. 3, Heft 1 [Coburg & Leipzig, 1831], 42-64), Ferdinandus Benary (*Zeitschrift für speculative Theologie*, Bd.1, Heft 2 [Berlin, 1836], 205), Ferdinand Hitzig (*Ostern und Pfingsten. Zur Zeitbestimmung im Alten und Neuen-Testament. Sendschreiben an Dr. L. Ideler* [Heidelberg, 1837], 3) and Eduard Reuss. Cf. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 35; Robert H. Charles, *Studies in the Apocalypse* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1913), 47.

Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 205.

For a list of twenty extant commentaries on the Book of Revelation from the third to eighth centuries see my paper "Ancient Commentaries on the Book of Revelation: A Bibliographical Guide," Southwest Regional Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, March 2003. Online: <http://www.tren.com>.

One indication of Donatist authorship is in section 546: "and there was war between them [Rehoboam and Jeroboam] all the days of their lives, just as there is now between true Christians and false Catholics."

Quoted in Maureen A. Tilley, "Sustaining Donatist Self-Identity: From the Church of the Martyrs to the *Collecta* of the Desert" *J ECS* 5:1 (1997):21-35 esp. 30 n. 42. On Donatism, see also Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa*. Translated Texts for Historians 24 (Liverpool, England: Liverpool University Press, 1996); William H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952, 1971).

Theodore Mommsen, ed., *Liber genealogus*. In *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi* [hereafter=MGH, AA] *Vol. 9: Chronica Minora Saec IV. V. VI. VII.* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892; Repr.,

Munich: Strauss and Cramer, 1981), 154-193. The version of 427 (*G*) is preserved in a tenth century manuscript, Sangallensis 133, p. 299-396. The version of 438 (*F*) is preserved in a tenth-century manuscript, Florentini 623, f. 122-125, and an eleventh century Laurentianus, plut. 20 no 54, f. 24-29. The version of 455 (*L*) is preserved in a manuscript dated 796, Lucensis, n. 490, where it is ascribed to Jerome. Mommsen mentions another seventh century manuscript, Taurinensis, which contains a version of the *Liber*, but I am unclear as to which recension it contains. A version of the *Liber* is also in PL 59: 523-546.

Brief descriptions are in G. Broszio, "Liber genealogus" in *Dictionary of Early Christian Literature*, (ed. Siegmar Döpp and Wilhelm Geerlings; trans. Matthew O'Connell: New York: Crossroad, 2000), 381; Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 139-140; Martine Dulaey, *Victorin de Poetovio premier exégète latin* (2 vols., Paris: Institut d' Études Augustiniennes, 1993), 1:346; Paula Fredriksen, "Apocalypse and Redemption in Early Christianity from John of Patmos to Augustine of Hippo," *VC* 45 (1991):151-83 esp. 182 n. 86; Antonio Isola, *I Christiani dell'Africa Vandolica nei Sermones del Tempo (429-534)* (Milan: Jaco, 1990), 33; Paul Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne*, Vol. 4: Le Donatisme (Paris, 1912; Repr. Brussels: Culture et Civilisation, 1963), 102; Frend, *Donatist Church*, 303.

In manuscript *F*, the first hand has XVIII (18 years), with a correction of XXXVIII (38 years).

Manuscripts *L* and *G* read XXVIII (28 years).

Mommsen's edition indicates that manuscript *F* reads "nominis" (of a name) but codex 54 correctly reads "hominis" (of a man).

Mommsen's edition indicates that it should read "ducenti sunt CC," (two hundred).

Mommsen's edition indicates that it should read "prudens" (wise person).

Mommsen's edition recognized that this is not the usual symbol for a gamma.

Mommsen's edition indicates that in manuscript *F* there is a correction of "sunt" (are) for "erant" (were).

Paragraphs 614-620 are in MGH, AA, 9:194-5.

The concept of Nero returning as Antichrist with a changed name is in Victorinus, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. On Rev 13:3. CSEL 49:120-121. ANF 7:358. Tilley (*Bible in Christian North Africa*, 153) suggested that ‘Antemus’ may have been a Romanized form of ‘Anthemios,’ the praetorian prefect who persecuted John Chrysostom. ‘Gensericus’ is a variant spelling of the fifth century Vandal king, Gaiseric. He ruled in North Africa from 429-477, and established a monarchy there that lasted about a century, until 533. On Vandal rule there, Herwig Wolfram, *The Roman Empire and Its Germanic Peoples* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); and Frank M. Glover, ed., *The Late Roman West and the Vandals* (Brookfield, Vermont: Variorum, 1993). The description of Gensericus, “ut multas gentes seducat” (so that he may deceive many nations), seems to derive from the description of the dragon in Revelation 20:3 which is bound in the abyss “ut non seducat amplius gentes” (so that he may no longer deceive the nations). In the context of the *Liber* “ut” is probably used in an explanatory sense rather than to express purpose or result. Hence, I have translated it “because.” On the patristic identification of the Antichrist with the devil himself, William C. Weinrich, “Antichrist in the Early Church,” *CTQ* 49 (1985): 134-47 esp. 146.

Besides Victorinus among the fathers of the second and third centuries, Irenaeus (*Haer.* 5.30, 3; ANF 1:559) thought “Teitan” was the most probable explanation, and Hippolytus (*Antichr.* 50; ANF 5:215) mentioned it as a possibility.

In paragraphs 616-618, the *Liber* is quoting from and paraphrasing a recension of Victorinus of Pettua, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. On Rev 13:18. CSEL 49:124-127. ANF 7:356. Victorinus wrote his commentary about the year 260. Jerome’s recension dates to about 398. The recension that the author of the *Liber genealogus* used, which mentions the Vandal king Gaeseric, is later than Jerome’s.

Having Nero in seclusion in the West is unique, for all of the ancient literature of which I am aware related to the Nero redivivus legend has him in hiding in the East. It could be that this was part of the evolution

of the Antichrist figure into an anti-Messiah, the direct antithesis of Jesus. Since many early Christians believed, based on Matt 24:27, that Christ would return from the East, perhaps in antithesis they portrayed the Antichrist as returning from the West. For the concept of Christ returning from the East, the Syriac *Teaching of the Apostles* 1 (ANF 8:668) indicates: “The apostles therefore appointed: Pray ye towards the east: because ‘as the lightning which lighteneth from the east and is seen even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of man be:’ that by this we might know and understand that He will appear from the east suddenly.” Or, it could be that the writer of the 438 version of the *Liber* thought that the Vandal king Gaiseric was the Antichrist who had come “in the spirit of Nero,” and then fashioned his Antichristology accordingly. For, during the time of his edition of the *Liber*, Gaiseric had come across North Africa from the West, systematically taking Roman cities along the African coast. He overthrew Carthage in 439. Against this idea is the editor’s seeming rejection of the Gensericus (a Latin spelling of Gaiseric) identification in paragraph 618, since the letters of his name added up to 666 and not 616. Or, the mention of Nero Antichrist hiding in the West may simply be indicative of variety within patristic Antichristology. For, Lactantius (*Inst.* 7.17. ANF 7:214) has Antichrist coming from Syria, and eastern apocalyptic literature (*Syriac Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, Andreas Salos Apocalypse, Arabic Apocalypse of Peter, Apocalypse of Samuel, 14<sup>th</sup> Vision of Daniel*) contain narratives about end-time kings coming from various directions. The basis for some of these seem to be Daniel 11.

Many of the church fathers believed that since Enoch and Elijah were translated bodily into paradise without having experienced physical death, they would return at the end of the world in order to “pay the debt” of death. Cf. *History of Joseph the Carpenter* 31, ANF 8:394; Jerome, *Ep.* 59.3, CSEL 54:543. On the future roles of Enoch and Elijah, as believed by early Christians, Thomas W. Mackay, “Early Christian Millenarianist Interpretation of the Two Witnesses in John’s Apocalypse 11:3-13” in *By Study and Also By Faith*. (2 vols.; ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks: Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1990) 1:222-331.

J. Nelson Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 161-4; Martin Bodinger, "Le mythe de Néron de l'Apocalypse de Saint Jean au Talmud de Babylone," *RHR* 206 (1989):21-40; Larry Kreitzer, "Hadrian and the Nero *Redivivus* Myth," *ZNW* 79 (1988):92-115.

John J. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," *OTP* 1: 317-472 esp. 395-8, 419, 421, 447. Cf. Peerbolte, *Antecedents of Antichrist*, 146, 331-5; C. Marvin Pate and Calvin B. Haines Jr., *Doomsday Delusions: What's Wrong with Predictions About the End of the World* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 40-3; Gregory C. Jenks, *The Origins and Early Development of the Antichrist Myth* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), 259-67; Collins, *The Sibylline Oracles of Egyptian Judaism* (Missoula: University of Montana, 1972; Macon, Georgia: Society of Biblical Literature and Scholars' Press, 1974), 80-6; Saul J. Bastomsky, "The Emperor Nero in Talmudic Legend," *JQR* 59 (1968-1969):321-5. Victorinus (*Commentary on the Apocalypse*. CSEL 49:118-20; ANF 7:358) says that John in Rev 13:3 was speaking of Nero in his description of the beast having the mortal wound that was cured. Cf. Dulaey, *Victorin de Poetovio premier exégète latin*, 1:200-02. Commodianus, *Instructions*, 41. ANF 4:211. Cf. McGinn, *Antichrist*, 65; Jenks, *Origins and Early Development of the Antichrist Myth*, 34, 77, 103-6; Curt Daniel, "The Concept of Antichrist in Pre-Gregorian Literature," (Springfield, Illinois: Reformed Bible Church, 1975), 24-5.

Suplicius Severus, *Historia Sacra*, 2.29. PL 20:146 .

Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, 224-5.

On 2 Thess 2:7, Chrysostom (*Hom 2 Thess*, 4; NPNF 13:389) wrote: "For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work. He speaks here of Nero, as if he were the type of Antichrist." Theodoret on the same passage wrote: "Some commentators claimed that to Nero is given the name *mystery of iniquity*, and that he became a worker of godlessness." Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentary on the Letters of St. Paul* (2 vols.; Translated by Robert Charles Hill: Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001), 2:129.

Augustine, *Civ.* 20.19. (Translated by Marcus Dods: New York: Random House, 1950), 739.

Quodvultdeus, *On the Promises and Predictions of God*, Dimidium Temporis, 8. CCSL 60:201. On Quodvultdeus' eschatology, Daniel Van Slyke, *Quodvultdeus of Carthage. The Apocalyptic Theology of a Roman African in Exile*. Early Christian Studies 5. (Strathfield, Australia: St Pauls [sic] Publications, 2003).

Quodvultdeus, *On the Promises and Predictions of God*, Dimidium Temporis, 10. CCSL 60:203. PL 51:845. Victor of Vita, *History of the Vandal Persecution*, 3.47. In *Victor of Vita: History of the Vandal Persecution*. Translated Texts for Historians 10 (Translated by John Moorhead: Liverpool, England: Liverpool University Press, 1992), 83, 93. The Vandals were "homoean" Arians, probably converted by Arian missionaries when the tribe lived in Eastern Europe before invading North Africa via Spain. They rejected the doctrine of "homoousia", that the Son is the same substance as the Father, set forth at the Council of Nicea in 325. They held to the Councils of Rimini and Seleucia (359). Unlike the semi-Arian "homoiousians" who said that the Son was *similar* in substance with the Father, "homoeans" discarded the term "ousia" (substance) altogether.

Roger Gryson, ed., *Commentaria minora in Apocalypsin Johannis*. CCSL 107:143-4, 149, 151, 276; Peerbolte, *Antecedents of Antichrist*, 151; Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testament Graece et Latine* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), 659 in apparatus on Rev 13:18; Kenneth B. Steinhauser, *The Apocalypse Commentary of Tyconius: A History of Its Reception and Influence* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 300; Lawrence, "Nero Redivivus," 55; Germain Morin, ed., *Sancti Caesarii Arelatensis opera varia* (2 vols.; Maretioli [Bruges, Belgium]: Desclée, 1942), 2:247; Charles, *Studies in the Apocalypse*, 47-8.

'Dixlvx' was a Latin form of 'Teitan.'

In the earliest centuries of Christianity two potentially conflicting theories of the origin of Antichrist arose, one that he would be Nero redivivus, the other that he would be a Jew from the tribe of Dan.

Drawing from both traditions, Commodian (*Instructions*, 1.41; ANF 4:211) fashioned a double Antichrist, a Neronian persecutor and a Jewish end-time tyrant, perhaps with scriptural support from the two beasts mentioned in Rev 13. Others, however, such as Victorinus and Cyril of Jerusalem, combined the two traditions into one person. The unknown source used by the writer of the *Liber* seems to also have done this, portraying Antichrist as one person from the tribe of Dan but coming “in the spirit” of Nero, similar to John the Baptist coming “in the spirit” of Elijah (Lk 1:17), Antichrist coming from the tribe of Dan is an opinion based upon Genesis 49:17, Jeremiah 8:16, and the absence of the tribe of Dan from Revelation 7. Cf. Wilhelm Bousset, *The Antichrist Legend. A Chapter in Christian and Jewish Folklore* (1896; reprinted Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999); Charles E. Hill, “Antichrist from the Tribe of Dan,” *JTS* 46 (1995):99-117; McGinn, *Antichrist*, 59, 296, no. 12; Weinrich, “Antichrist in the Early Church”; Vincent P. Miceli, *The Antichrist* (West Hanover, Mass.: Christopher Publishing House, 1981); P. Huchedé, *History of Antichrist* (New York, 1884; Repr. Rockford, Illinois: Tan, 1976). Concerning the identity or meaning of Saar, Jerome (*Questione Hebraicae*. PL 23:1381) wrote, “Saar is written about in [the book of] Kings, and is interpreted ‘singer;’” and Suetonius (*Lives of the Caesars*. Catharine Edwards, trans. [New York: Oxford University Press, 2000], 204-7) tells us that Nero was a singer. F. Tempestinus, *Glossarum Gothicae Linguae* (cited in PL 18:1431) indicates that the word “Saar” comes from the Gothic “Sair” meaning “dolor, afflictio” (sorrow, affliction) and lists as a reference the Greek word for “travail” in I Thessalonians 5:3. “Saarim” (1 Chr 4:31) was a city in which the descendants of Simeon lived. The identity of Saar still remains a mystery to me.

Among the known extra-biblical sources of the *Liber* are the Latin translation of Hippolytus’ *Chron.* (Rudolf Helm, ed., *Hippolytus Werke. Die Chronik* [Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1955]) and Julius Quintus Hilarianus’ *Chronology* (PL 13:1097-1106). The eighth-century Spanish monk, Beatus of Liebana, was familiar with the Latin title “Nero Antichristus.” See his *Commentary on the Apocalypse* on Rev 13:3. Eugenio Romero-Pose, ed., *Sancti Beati a Liebana commentaries in Apocalypsin* (2 vols.; Rome: Typis

Officinae Polygraphicae, 1985), Vol. Alterum:165: "...non habebit nomen Nero Antichristus sed aliud nomen afferturus est..." "He will not have the name 'Nero Antichrist' but will bear another name." Also in the Armenian language the word for Antichrist is "Neren." See the anonymous article "Apocryphal Apocalypses and the Apocalypse of John," *CQR* 89 (1897):151-62 esp. 160.

Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 20.

Gentry, *Beast of Revelation*, 44.

Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 203.

Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 38, 174. Cited in Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 203-4.

Barclay Newman, "The Fallacy of the Domitian Hypothesis," *NTS* 10 (1963):133-9 esp. 136.

Irenaeus, *Haer.*5.30, 1. ANF 1:558.

Jenks, *Origins and Early Development of the Antichrist Myth*, 89: "Irenaeus, however, considered this alternative reading [616] to be an error of too great a magnitude to be allowed to pass unrebuked, since it not only involved an alteration to the text of the Bible but would also mislead the faithful into seeking Antichrist under a name whose letters totaled 616 instead of 666."

Newman, "The Fallacy of the Domitian Hypothesis," 136-7: "Where Irenaeus makes reference to the speculation concerning the number 666, he does so to quell and to refute any mistaken notion that this number should be interpreted with regard to the Roman Emperors....Neither does Irenaeus afford any compassion for those who seek to uncover some contemporary-historical allusion in the reading 616 which occurs in some manuscripts in place of 666."

Another vestige of this may be in the seventh or eighth century *Commematorium de Apocalypsi Johannis Apostoli*. Commenting on Revelation 13:18, it says, "The number of his name is understood according to the Hebrew language." CCSL 107:221.

Caution should be exercised, however, if citing the *Liber genealogus* as an early example of preterist

eschatology. For, we know from other patristic writers that just because one sees a reference to Nero in Revelation 13, it does not follow that the writer held a preterist view of Revelation, with an early date of Revelation and belief that its prophecies were fulfilled in the Roman-Judean war. Victorinus (c. 260) and Suplicius Severus (c. 405) both saw a reference to Nero in Revelation 13:3, but both advocated a Domitianic date for Revelation. Cf. Victorinus, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, on Rev 17:10. CSEL 49:118; ANF 7:358; Suplicius Severus, *Sacred History*, 2.31 cited in Hitchcock, “The Stake in the Heart —The A.D. 95 Date of Revelation,” 135. Also, the fifth-century author of the *Liber genealogus* was expecting an end-time Antichrist, a tenet incongruous with some contemporary preterism.