

# Historical Situation of Revelation



**Comfort in Crisis**

**Vern Poythress, Westminster Seminary**

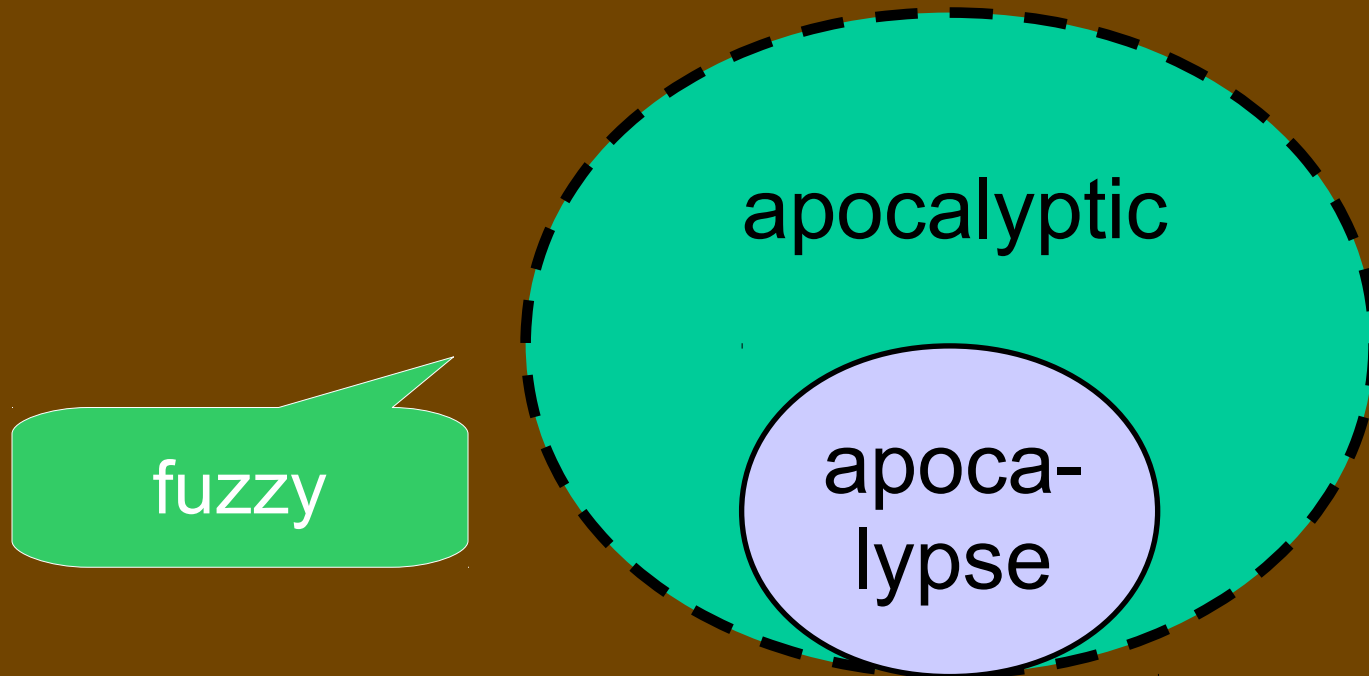
A. Genre:  
Apocalyptic Literature

# What Is Apocalyptic?

- ✓ • Revelation of God's secrets.
- Pseudonymy.
- History rewritten as prophecy.
- ✓ • Determinism in history, ending is cosmic cataclysm.
- ✓ • Dualism of good and evil.
- Pessimism about God's *saving* rule at present.
- ✓ • Bizarre and wild symbols denote historical events.

# Situating Apocalyptic

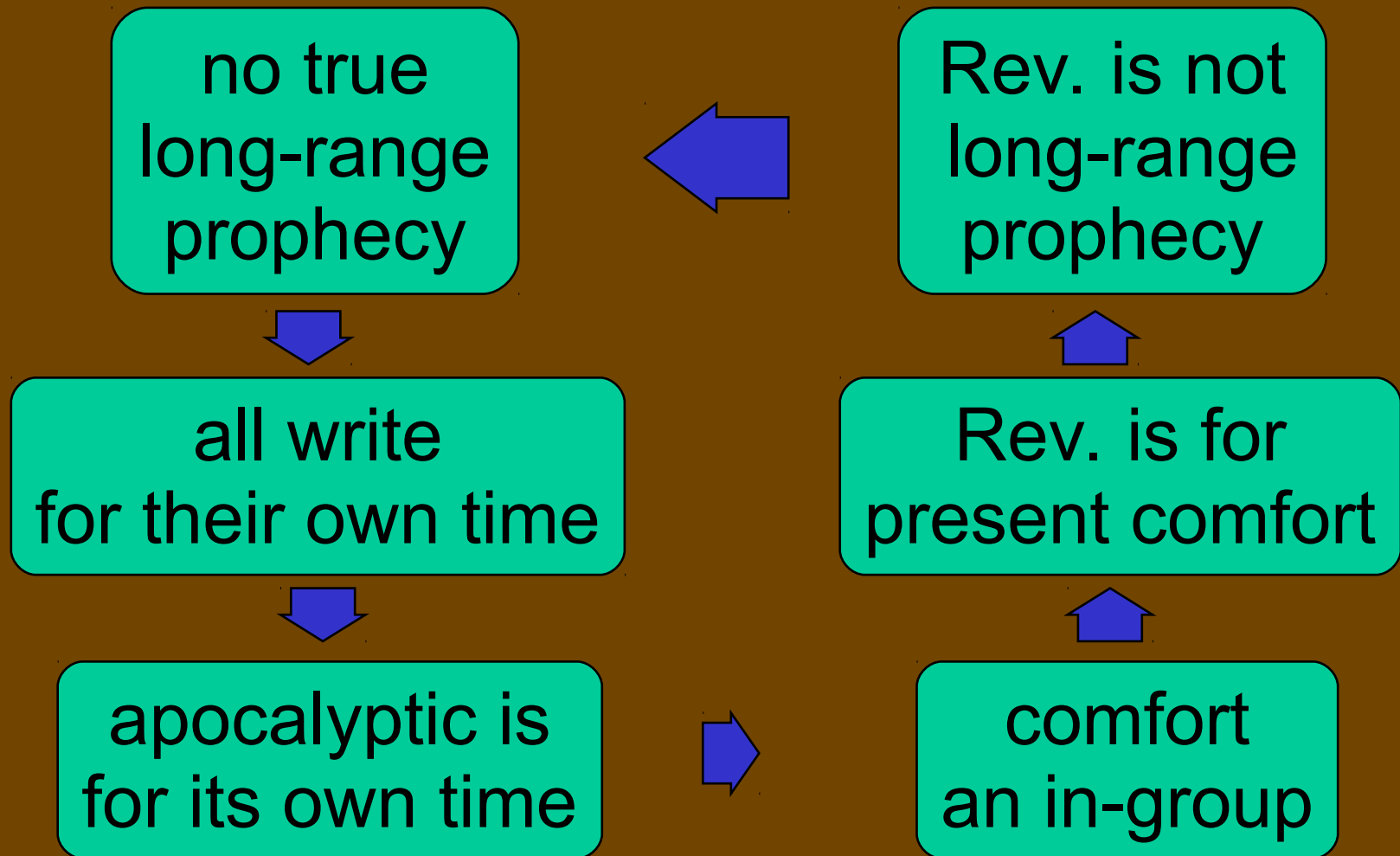
- See Morris, *Apocalyptic*.
- Morris, *Revelation 22-25*.
- Collins, “Apocalypse” 9.



# Examples of Apocalyptic

- **Numbers 23-24, Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah 24-27, 1 Thess 4-5, 2 Thess 1-2, the Olivet Discourse, Revelation.**
- **Extrabiblical: 1 QM, Assumption of Moses, 1-2-3 Enoch, 2-3 Baruch, 4 Ezra, Apocalypse of Peter, Apocalypse of Paul, Apocalypse of Thomas, Ascension of Isaiah.**

# Modernists' View of Apocalyptic



# Prediction in Apocalyptic

- Daniel 7; Zech. 6; 9.
- 1 Enoch; 4 Ezra.
- Comfort for the immediate audience can take place *through* long-range prediction.

# Lessons from Apocalyptic

- **Bizarre symbols are common.**
- **Prediction may be included.**
- **Present comfort may be one goal.**
- **Difficult to generalize about all apocalyptic.**



# Use Extracanonical Literature?

**No**

- Superficial, vague connections.
- Rev. is Christocentric.
- Much is explainable from canonical parallels.

**Yes**

- Symbols may come from general culture.
- Parallels may be polemical rather than merely approving paganism.

## B. The Seven Churches

1:11

# Asia Minor



# Importance of the 7 Churches

7 messages  
(2-3)



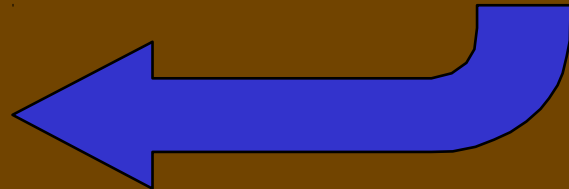
real  
church  
situations



application  
to Roman  
Empire

thematic  
connection

Rest of Rev.



# Structure of the 7 Messages

- “To the angel of the church in X write:”
- “The words of ...”
- “I know ...” (state of the church)
- Commendations and rebukes
- Promise
- “He who has an ear, let him hear ...”
- “To the one who conquers ...”

# Message to the Church in Ephesus

- **“To the angel of the church in X write:”**

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

- **“These are the words of ...”**

The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

- **“I know ...” (state of the church)**

I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.

# Message to Ephesus (cont.)

- **Commendations and rebukes**

I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.

But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. ... Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

- **Promise**

If not, I will come to you and remove your landstand from its place, unless you repent.

- **“He who has an ear, let him hear ...”**

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

- **“To the one who conquers ...”**

To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

# Research on Churches

- **William A. Ramsay, archeological research.**
- **Ramsay, *Letters of the Seven Churches* (1905).**
- **Colin J. Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches* (1986).**



## Connections in Smyrna (2:8-11)

- 2:8, “died” • Smyrna destroyed, 627 B.C.
- 2:10, “test” • Gladiatorial contests, 5 days.
- 2:10, “faithful” • Smyrna was known for fidelity to Rome.
- 2:10, “crown” • Like buildings of Mt. Paganos; Goddess Cybele with a crown-battlement; Smyrna as “crown of Ariadne” (Aristides).

# Multifaceted Allusions

## “died and came to life again” (2:8)

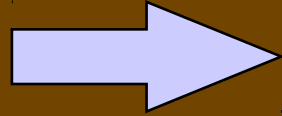
- City died.
- Church threatened with death.
- OT promise of life.
- Christ died and came to life.
- City
- Church
- OT
- Christ

← All-sufficiency of Christ →

## C. Troubles in Asia Minor

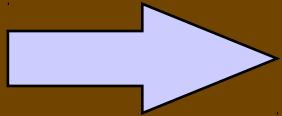
# Aspects of Opposition

- **Beast**



- **Persecuting power**

- **Prostitute**



- **Seductive luxury**

# First Century Idolatries

## Counterfeit

- **Dragon**
- **Beast**
- **False Prophet**

## Particular form

- **Various Satanic activities**
  - **Roman Emperor worship**
  - **Priests of Emperor worship**
- 
- **Prostitute**
  - **City-life enticements**

# Emperor Worship

- Emperors called themselves divine.
- People offered incense (an act of worship) to the “genius of the emperor” to show political loyalty.
- Those who refused were guilty of treason.



Uh oh!

# Roman Persecution

**Colin Hemer, *Letters 8*, shows situation:**

- Emperor worship proved political loyalty.
- Jews paid temple tax instead.
- After 70 A.D., the tax (2 drachmas) went to the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome.
- Domitian, in need of money, enforced taxes (Suetonius, *Domitian* 12.2).

# Domitian Persecution?

- Suetonius *Domitian* 12.2: “Besides other taxes, that on the Jews was levied with the utmost rigour, and those were prosecuted who without publicly acknowledging that faith yet lived as Jews, as well as those who concealed their origin and did not pay the tribute levied upon their people.”
- Jews might disown Christians and render them liable to the imperial cult.



# The Temple of Domitian in Ephesus



# Seduction of the Pagan City

## ① Sexual immorality

Pagans accept prostitution.



Gentile Christians feel the pull



Jezebel in 2:20 says it's OK.



## ② Idol food

business



guild



patron god



eating the god's food



# Temple of Artemis in Ephesus



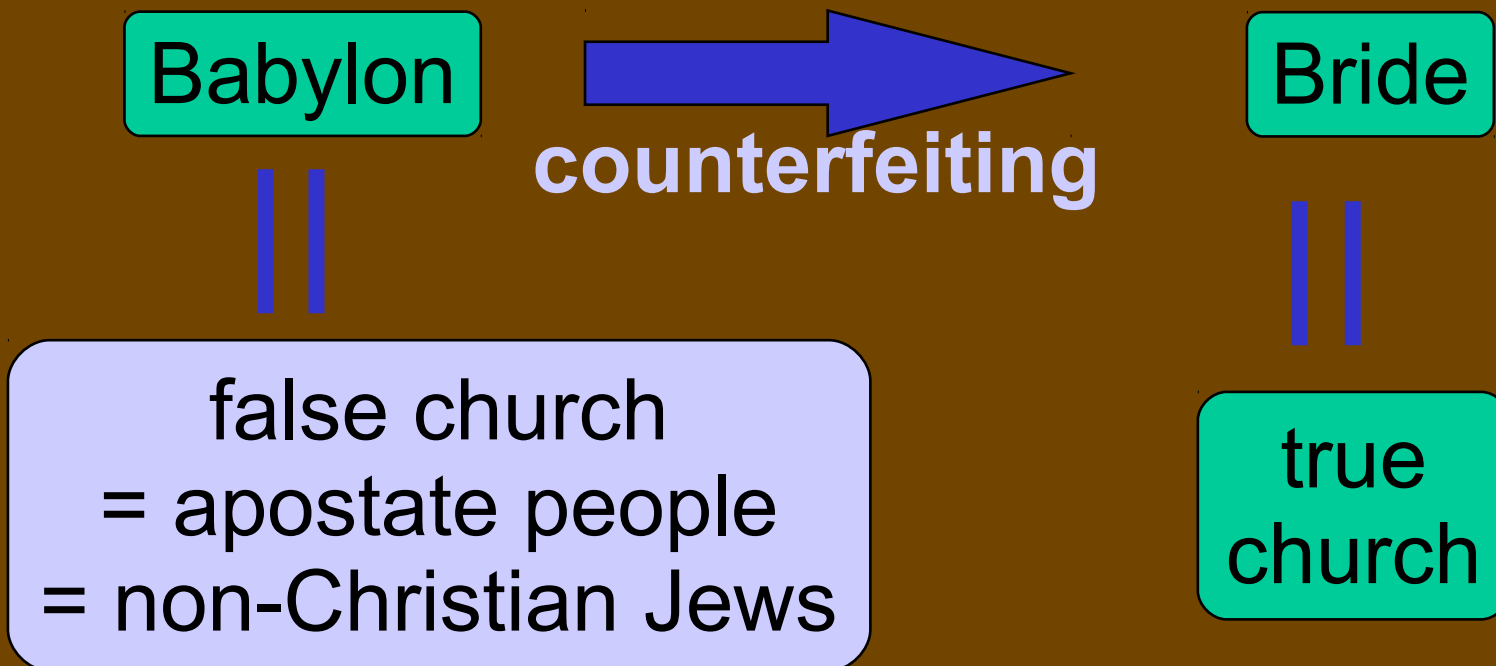
D. Does Babylon Stand for  
Jerusalem?

# Why Is It Important?

- **Advocates: Cornelius vander Waal and David Chilton.**
- **Postmil interest: the disasters depicted in Revelation can be put in the past.**
- **Where is the main danger threatening Christians? In the fall-of-Jerusalem view, the focus is on apostate church, not paganism.**

# Evidence for Jerusalem

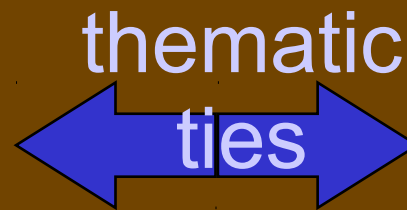
- Babylon as counterfeit



# Ties of the Olivet Discourse

Matt. 24;  
Mark 13;  
Luke 21

thematic  
ties



Rev. 6;  
rest of Rev.

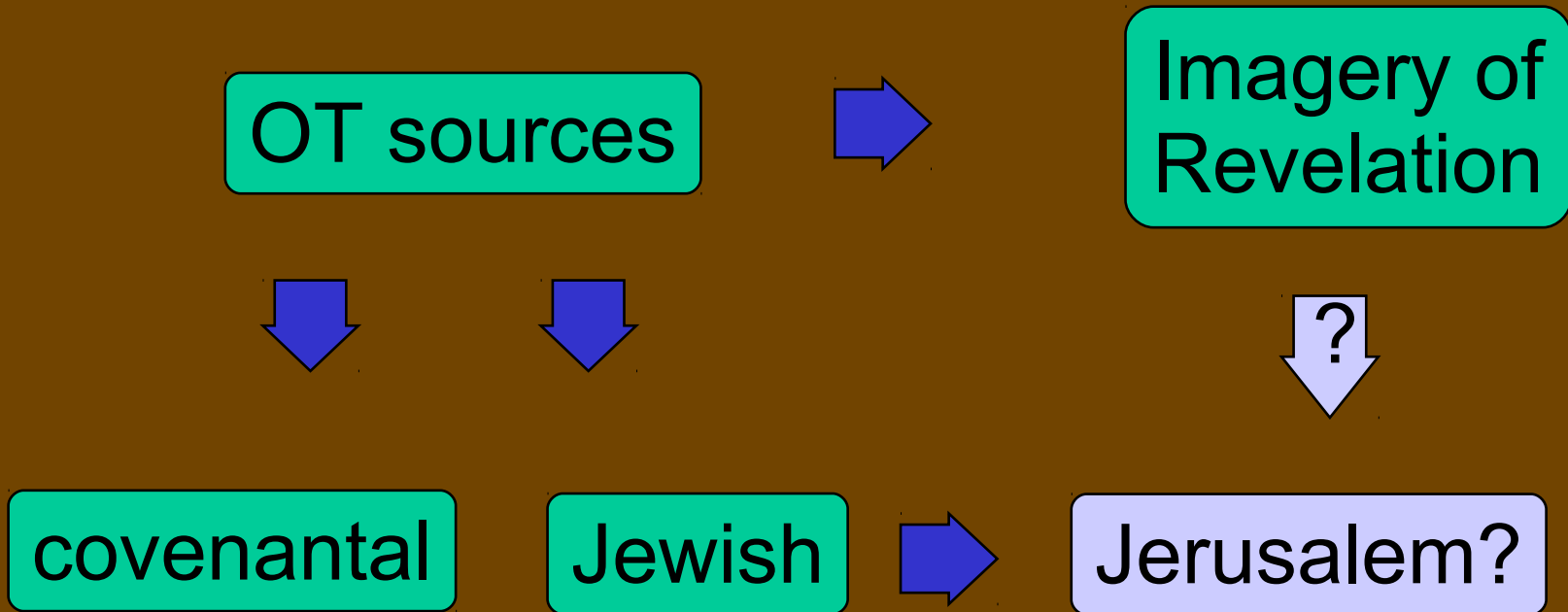
|| (at least  
partially)

fall of  
Jerusalem

||

Jerusalem?

# Covenant Imagery of Revelation



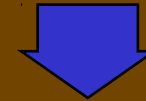


# NT Interest in Jews

NT  
interest  
in  
general

Jew-Gentile  
relations

unbelieving  
Jews

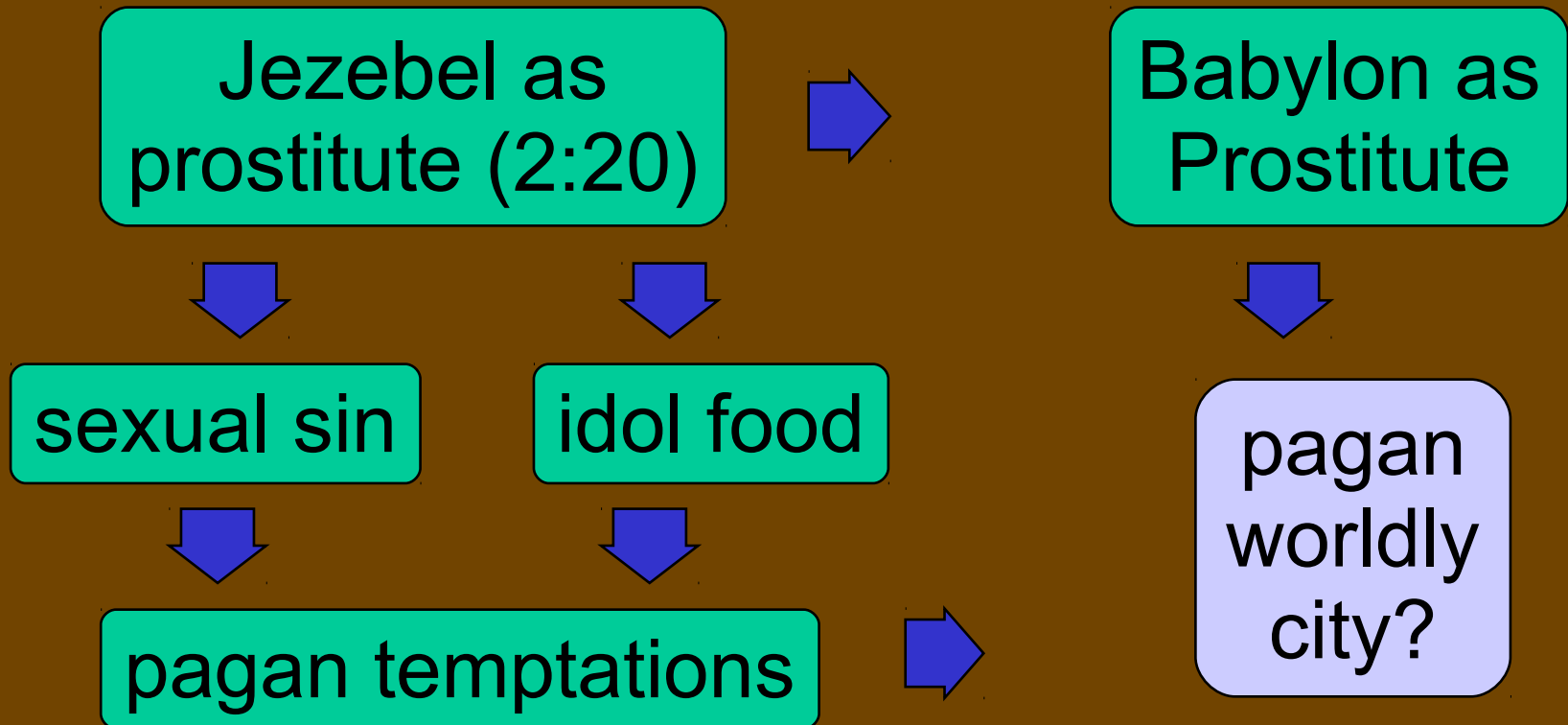


Rev.  
as part  
of NT

About  
unbelieving Jews?

# Evidence for Pagan World (Rome)

- Jezebel (2:20)



# 7 Cities are Pagan

7 cities are  
predominantly

**pagan**



city pressures

**pagan**



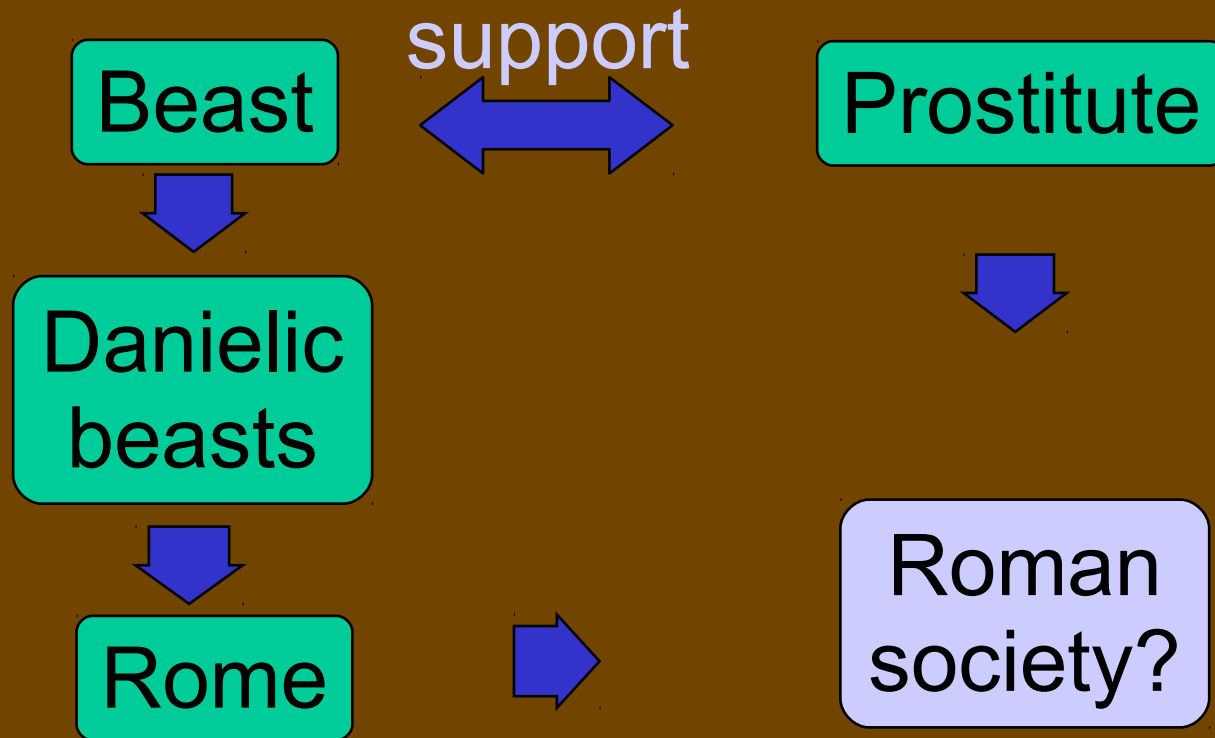
city symbol (Babylon)

**pagan**

## **“Has Dominion” in 17:18**

- **Babylon “has dominion over the kings of the earth.”**
- **“Kings”: not “princes of the land.”**
- **“has dominion”: not “would have ruled,” or “once ruled,” or “ruled in some invisible ‘covenantal’ sense.”**
- **Rome is the obvious referent. How would people in Asia Minor see otherwise?**

# Beast and Prostitute



# Covenantal Imagery as Universal

- All are in covenant through Adam.
- OT use towards Jews is but one possible use of a general pattern.
- Paganism too is counterfeit religion.
- Nineveh is prostitute, Nahum 3:4.
- Repeated pattern interpretation of Rev. accounts for the plausibility of Jerusalem *as one instance* of a counterfeit church.

# E. Author



# Who Is John?

## The Apostle ?

- Justin Martyr and Irenaeus say so.
- No other John is attested.
- Thematic connections with the Gospel of John.

## Someone else ?

- Style differs from the Gospel.



# The Bearing of Authorship

## The Apostle

- **Treat Rev. together with his other writings.**
- **But the different genre requires different treatment.**

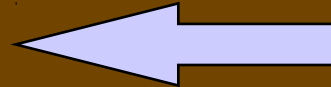
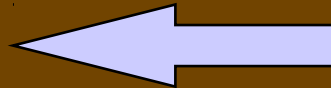
## Someone else

- **Treat Rev. separately from Gospel.**
- **But thematic connections invite joint treatment.**

F. Date

# The Roman Emperors

- **Augustus** 27 B.C. - 14 A.D.
- **Tiberius** 14-37 A.D.
- **Caligula** 37-41
- **Claudius** 41-54
- **Nero** 54-68
- Galba 68-69
- Otho 69
- Vitellius 69
- **Vespasian** 69-79
- **Titus** 79-81
- **Domitian** 81-96



most  
plausible

# Domitian



# Domitian Date (Irenaeus)

Irenaeus

says

Domitian's  
reign

from

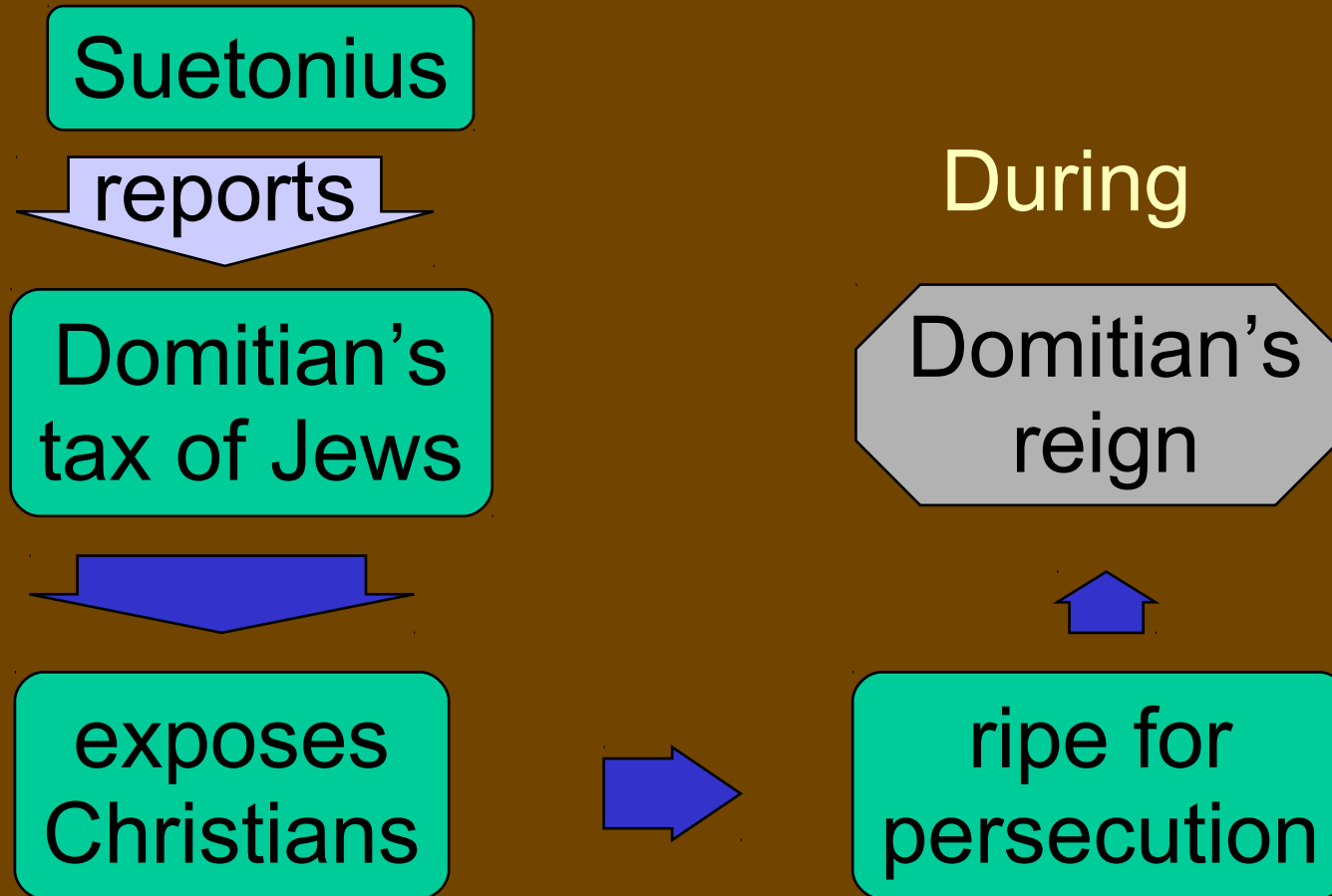
Polycarp

from

John

was the time  
when Revelation  
was written.

# Domitian Date (Suetonius)



# Nero



# Nero Date (17:10)

“5 fallen”  
Rev. 17:10



Nero is 6th, if  
Julius Caesar  
is 1st.

But:

- Augustus first?
- Galba and Otho don't work as 7th and 8th.
- Heads = empires?
- 6th is symbolic of next to last.



# Nero Date (11:1-2)

But:

temple in  
Jerusalem  
is standing  
(11:1-2)



before  
70 A.D.

- 11:1-3 implies preservation of inner room.
- Does not match the events of 70.
- Rev. 11 is symbolic of the church (11:4 and 1:20).
- City is figurative (11:8)