

# Dating Revelation

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## Resources

- [www.biblestudytools.com](http://www.biblestudytools.com) - Bible Commentaries / A Testimony of Jesus Christ / Introduction / 11.4.2. External Evidence for a Late Date / [11.4.2.1. Early Testimony](#)

As mentioned previously, a major early testimony to the late date of the book of Revelation is found in the statement by [Irenaeus](#) (ca. 130-200) to the effect that John's apocalyptic vision was seen *towards the end of Domitian's reign*:

"We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision. For that was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign." [Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, [Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. I](#) (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), s.v. "ECF 1.1.7.1.5.31."]

As we mentioned above, a straightforward reading of the statement of Irenaeus indicates that it was the *vision*, not *John*, that was seen during the reign of Domitian. [Eusebius](#) (b. ca. 260) certainly understood it in that light. "In the *Chronicle*, Eusebius lists these events in the fourteenth year of Domitian: 'Persecution of Christians and under him the apostle John is banished to Patmos and sees his Apocalypse, as Irenaeus mentions.'" | [Mark Hitchcock, "[The Stake in the Heart—The A.D. 95 Date of Revelation](#)," in Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice, eds., [The End Times Controversy](#) (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2003), 134.]

Eusebius also records that "ancient Christian tradition" held that John had been banished under Domitian:

"But after Domitian had reigned fifteen years and Nerva succeeded to the empire, the Roman Senate, according to the writers that record the history of those days, voted that Domitian's honors should be cancelled, and that those who had been unjustly banished should return to their homes and have their property restored to them. It was at this time that the apostle John returned from his banishment in the island and took up his abode in Ephesus, according to an ancient Christian tradition." | [Ibid]

It appears that Eusebius drew some of his material from Hegesippus:

Eusebius says, "After Domitian had reigned fifteen years, Nerva succeeded. The sentences of Domitian were annulled, and the Roman Senate decreed the return of those who had been unjustly banished and the restoration of their property. *Those who committed the story of those times to writing relate it.* At that time, too, the story of ancient Christians relates that the apostle John, after his banishment to the island, took up his abode at Ephesus." The key phrase here is, "Those who committed the story of those times to writing relate it." To whom is Eusebius referring? The context indicates he is referring to Hegesippus, whom he has just referred to twice as a source for his information. | [Ibid., 127]

Although there is no doubt that subsequent testimony within the early church was influenced by Irenaeus, nonetheless it will be seen that this view has strong support, which would seem unlikely if a *bona fide* alternate view of an early date also had currency in the early church.

[Tertullian](#) (ca. 160-220) and [Origen](#) (ca. 185-254) support the late date. [“Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen all support the late date, but . . . they don’t specifically say that John was banished by Domitian.”—Ibid., 138.] Although they do not specifically say that John was banished by Domitian, Jerome and Eusebius interpreted Tertullian as holding this view:

While Tertullian [c. A.D. 160-220] does not specifically say that John was banished to Patmos during the reign of Domitian, he is credited by Jerome with doing so. In addition, Eusebius quotes Tertullian’s *Apology 5*, which was written in A.D. 197, and then follows with his own statements that reveal he interpreted Tertullian as following the prevailing tradition of placing John’s exile under Domitian. | [Ibid., 123]

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215) in his *Quis Salvus Dives (Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?)* cites the story handed down of John being removed from Patmos to Ephesus upon the death of “the tyrant.” The “tyrant” is likely Domitian rather than [Nero](#) because Eusebius cites Clement with Irenaeus as a witness to the Domitian exile. [Ibid]

The late date is attested to by the mid-second century *Acts of John*, [“The apocryphal book *The Acts of John* clearly states that John wrote the book of Revelation on Patmos during Domitian’s reign.”—Gordon Franz, “[Was ‘Babylon’ Destroyed when Jerusalem Fell in A.D. 70?](#),” in Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice, eds., *The End Times Controversy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2003), 222.] and Victorinus (d. ca. 304) who wrote the first commentary on the book of Revelation:

Victorinus [d. c. A.D. 304], who wrote the first commentary on Revelation . . . at Revelation Rev. 10:11 notes: “He says this, because when John said these things he was in the island of Patmos, condemned to labor of the mines by Caesar Domitian. There, therefore, he saw the Apocalypse; and when grown old, he thought that he should at length receive his quittance by suffering, Domitian being killed, all his judgments were discharged. And John being dismissed from the mines, thus subsequently delivered the same Apocalypse which he had received from God.” Commenting further upon Revelation Rev. 17:10, Victorinus states, “The time must be understood in which the written Apocalypse was published, since then reigned Caesar Domitian.” [Hitchcock, “[The Stake in the Heart—The A.D. 95 Date of Revelation](#),” 133.]

Jerome, writing around 390, continues the witness of the late date:

In two places, Jerome stated clearly that John was banished under Domitian. First, in his *Against Jovinianum* (A.D. 393), Jerome wrote that John was “a prophet, for he saw in the island of Patmos, to which he had been banished by the Emperor Domitian as a martyr for the Lord, an Apocalypse containing boundless mysteries of the future.” Second, Jerome’s most specific statement is found in his *Lives of Illustrious Men*, where he writes about John’s banishment: “In the fourteenth year then after Nero, Domitian having raised a second persecution, he was banished to the island of Patmos, and wrote the Apocalypse, on which Justin Martyr and Irenaeus afterwards wrote commentaries.” [Ibid., 135.] Although opponents of the late date would have us understand this abundant witness as a single statement by Irenaeus uncritically echoed by those that followed, it stands to reason that if there had been a significant historic witness otherwise, there would necessarily be more indication in the historic record.

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## Points Collected

[Against Heresies \(Book V, Chapter 30\)](#), Irenaeus (130-202 AD)

"We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by **him who beheld the apocalyptic vision. For that was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign.**"

In speaking of not naming the antichrist, Irenaeus specifies that John received the vision recorded in Revelation toward the end of Domitian's reign, who was emperor of Rome from 81 to 95 AD.

[Chronicle \(Book 1\)](#), Eusebius (260-339 AD)

"[70] The Greek Olympiads

[A list] from the first Olympiad to the 247th, when Antoninus the son of Severus was emperor of the Romans.

...

212th [69 A.D.] - Polites of Ceramus, stadion race [g308]. [During this Olympiad] Vespasianus became emperor of the Romans.

213th [73 A.D.] - Rhodon of Cyme, or Theodotus, stadion race.

214th [77 A.D.] - Straton of Alexandria, stadion race. [During this Olympiad] Titus became emperor of the Romans.

**[81]** 215th [81 A.D.] - Hermogenes of Xanthus, stadion race. [During this Olympiad] Domitian became emperor of the Romans.

216th [85 A.D.] - Apollophanes Papis of Tarsus, stadion race.

217th [89 A.D.] - Hermogenes of Xanthus for a second time, stadion race.

218th [93 A.D.] - Apollonius of Alexandria, or Heliodorus, stadion race.

219th [97 A.D.] - Stephanus of Cappadocia, stadion race. [During this Olympiad] Nerva became emperor of the Romans, followed by Trajan [g309]. ..."

#### [2.11.4.2 - External Evidence for a Late Date](#)

"In the Chronicle, Eusebius lists these events in the fourteenth year of Domitian: 'Persecution of Christians and under him the apostle John is banished to Patmos and sees his Apocalypse, as Irenaeus mentions.'" Eusebius also records that "ancient Christian tradition" held that John had been banished under Domitian:

[Church History \(Book 3, Chapter 20:10-11\)](#), Eusebius (260-339 AD)

"But after Domitian had reigned fifteen years, and Nerva had succeeded to the empire, the Roman Senate, according to the writers that record the history of those days, voted that Domitian's honors should be cancelled, and that those who had been unjustly banished should return to their homes and have their property restored to them. It was at this time that the apostle John returned from his banishment in the island and took up his abode at Ephesus, according to an ancient Christian tradition."