

THE KING AND I: THE HISTORICAL SETTING  
OF REVELATION 1:9  
AND THE APOSTLE JOHN ON PATMOS

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Emperor Domitian, the self-proclaimed "Lord and God", became more superstitious toward the last few years of his life (AD 90-96). On the day before his murder, he consulted an astrologer. He also was consulting Apollo, the god of music and poetry, and in addition the god of light, truth and prophecy! The emperor minted coins depicting Apollo on one side and a raven, a bird associated with prophecy, on the reverse side (Jones 1990:266). One could tell the future by watching this bird's flight (Kanitz 1973-74:47), so Domitian looked to it to foretell his immediate future. Ironically, Suetonius, a Roman historian and senator, records, "A few months before he (Domitian) was killed, a raven perched on the Capitalium and cried, 'All will be well,' an omen which some interpreted as follows: '... a raven ... could not say "It is well," only declared "It will be."' (Domitian 23:2; 1992:385). Emperor Domitian died soon after and all was well!

The Apostle John, exiled on the island of Patmos about AD 95, received a more sure word of prophecy. Not from a raven, nor Apollo, but from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The Book of the Revelation begins, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants – things which must shortly take place" (Rev. 1:1). He goes on to say, "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near" (Rev. 1:3).

The Book of the Revelation is a polemic (a controversial argument, as one against some opinion, doctrine, etc.) against Emperor Domitian and the Roman world. While Domitian looked to Apollo and the raven to foretell the immediate future, the Lord Jesus Christ, omniscient and infinitely greater than Domitian, revealed the future of the world in this book. He instructed John to "write the things which you have seen [the vision of the glorified Son of Man (Rev. 1:1), and the things which are [the situation of the seven churches in Asia Minor at the end of the first century AD (Rev. 2 and 3)], and the things which will take place after this [all the future events recorded in Rev. 4-22]" (1:19). This paper will examine several aspects of Domitian's reign and John's exile to Patmos.

In the nineteenth century, Bible scholars, linguists, pilgrims, travellers and some military intelligence officers from America, England and the Continent began to visit the Holy Land and explore the Land of the Bible. In their books they described sites, recorded manners and customs, drew maps and sketched landscapes. This research began to open up the world of the Bible. A Book which was no longer a theological treatise, but a Book about real people, real events and real places. These explorers added a third dimension to Bible study for students back home. In

addition they provided intelligence information for the countries of Europe awaiting the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

In the late 19th and early 20th century Sir William Ramsay explored, excavated and wrote about Asia Minor. One of his monumental studies is his book, The Letters to the Seven Churches. A more recent study on the setting of Rev. 2 and 3 is Cohn Hemer's PhD dissertation under F. F. Bruce at the University of Manchester in 1969 entitled, The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting.

In my own simple way, I have tried to "follow in the footsteps" of these great explorers. First, by reading the accounts of their travels; and second, by travelling to the places where they visited and making my own observations.

These observations will help us consider the historical setting of Revelation 1:9 and understand the Apostle John's exile to the island of Patmos. I will begin with the assumption that Revelation was written in AD 95 during the reign of Emperor Domitian, and not in the reign of Nero (Thomas 1994:185-202). Let us begin with Emperor Domitian.

### Emperor Domitiani

#### Self-deified emperor

Emperor Domitian had a definite ego problem! In Imperial Rome the senate would deify a emperor upon death. However, Domitian, like Gaius Caligula, could not wait until death, so he deified himself. This is well attested to by the ancient writers.

Suetorius (AD 75 - Ca. 140), in his book Lives of the Caesars, wrote, "With no less arrogance he began as follows in issuing a circular letter in the name of his procurators, 'Our Master and our God bids that this be done.'" ("Dominus et deus noster hoc fieri iubet.") (Domitian 13:2; 1992:367). He also delighted in the adulation of the people in the amphitheater when they shouted, "Good Fortune attend our Lord and Mistress." ("Domino et dominae feliciter!") (Domitian 13:1; 1992:367). A reference to himself and his wife.

Pliny the Younger (born AD 61 or 62- died before 113), wrote in his Panegyricus a tribute to Emperor Trajan, "He (Domitian) was a madman, blind to the true meaning of his position, who used the arena for collecting charges of high treason, who felt himself slighted and scorned if we failed to pay homage to his gladiators, taking any criticism of them to himself and seeing insults to his own godhead and divinity; who deemed himself the equal of the gods yet raised his gladiators to be his equal." (33:4)

Dio Cassius, in his Roman History, wrote, "One Juventius Celsus, ... (conspired] ... against Domitian... When he was on the point of being condemned, he begged that he might speak to the emperor in private, and thereupon did obeisance before him and after repeatedly calling him 'master' (despoton) and 'god' (theon) terms that were already being applied to him by

others)" (Book 67:13:4). Later writers repeat the same claim and then go on to embellish it (Jones 1992:108). However, Statius in his Silvae 1:6:83-84, claims Domitian rejected these titles.

There seems to be other contemporary evidence which backs up Domitian's claim to deity. Unfortunately, no inscriptions have been discovered with these titles on them. Dio Cassius, again adds an important detail, when he wrote, "After Domitian, the Romans appointed Nerva Cocceius emperor. Because of the hatred felt for Domitian, his images, many of which were of silver and many of gold, were melted down; and from this source large amounts of money were obtained. The arches, too, of which a very great number were being erected to this one man, were torn down" (Book 68:1). Upon his death, the Roman Senate was, "...overjoyed ... (assailed) the dead emperor with the most insulting and stinging kind of outcries . ... Finally they passed a decree that his inscriptions should everywhere be erased, and all record of him obliterated" (Suetonius, Domitian 23:1; 1992:385). This decree, the damnatio memoriae destroyed all the statues and epigraphical inscriptions of Domitian. Evidence of this can be seen in the arch at Hierapolis, built by Domitian, as well as the dedicatory inscriptions for the Temple of the Sabastoi in Ephesus.

The only evidence not destroyed was the coins minted by Domitian because it was impossible to recall all of them. Numismatics is able to provide some evidence of Domitian's boast of deity.

### The Numismatic Evidence

Dr. Ernest Janzen, of the University of Toronto, in an article entitled, "The Jesus of the Apocalypse Wears the Emperor's Clothes," provides for two lines of evidence from numismatics for Domitian's claim to deity. The first are coins minted in AD 83 called the DIVI CAESAR ("divine caesar") coins. These coins, minted in both gold and silver, had the bust of Domitia, the wife of Domitian, on the obverse with the inscriptions, "Dlvi CAESAR MATRI" and "Dlvi CAESARIS MATER". On the reverse was their infant son who died in infancy. He is depicted as naked and seated on a zoned globe with his arms stretched out surrounded by seven stars! The inscription surrounding it said, "DIVUS CAESAR IMP DOMITIANI F". Translated it means, "the divine Caesar, son of the Emperor Domitian." The infant is depicted as baby Jupiter (Jupiter being the head of the Roman pantheon). "The globe represents world dominion and power, while stars typically bespoke the divine nature of those they accompanied . ... the infant depicted on the globe was the son of (a) god and that the infant was conqueror of the world" (1994:645-647). It does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that if he is the son of a god, then who is god? Of course, his father, Domitian! I can not help but use my sanctified imagination and wonder if John did not have this coin in front of him when he penned, "and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to his feet ... He had in His right hand seven stars" (Rev. 1:13,16). He refers back to this vision in the letter to the church at Thyatire when the Lord Jesus identifies Himself as the "Son of God" (Rev. 2:18).

The second bit of numismatic evidence comes from the coins with the fulmen ("thunderbolt") on them. The fulmen is the divine attribute of Jupiter. Janzen points out, "In 84 Domitian struck reverse type Jupiter holding thunderbolt and spear. The first issue of 85

continued this type but the second issue witnessed the fulmen in Domitian's hand. He and Jupiter would 'share' the fulmen for the years 85-6 after which Jupiter remained as a regular type, only without fulmen. From 87-96 Domitian alone held the fulmen persuasive evidence of a developing megalomania which place the fulmen in Domitian's hands and are clearly patterned after the Jupiter with fulmen type" (1994:648, footnote 55). One numismatic expert says this type "clearly suggests a parallel between himself and 'Jupiter tonans' (the thunderer) or the father of the gods" (Mattingly, cited in Janzen 1994:648, footnote 55).

Martial, the first century Howard Stern of Rome, confirms this idea in his writings. One of his epigrams, written in AD 94, describing the Gens Flavia (Jones 1992:1, 199, footnote 1) says, "This piece of ground, that lies open and is being covered with marble and gold, knew our Lord (domini in infancy . . . Here stood the venerable house that gave the world what Rhodes and pious Crete gave the starry sky [Helios, the sun god, was born on Rhodes according to some traditions, and Zeus, the chief god, was born on Crete] . . . But you the Father of the High One did protect, and for you, Caesar, thunderbolt (fulmen and aegis took the place of spear and buckler" (9:20). Sometimes Martial even calls Domitian the "Thunderer" (7:99:1), a title which usually belongs to Jupiter (Zeus) (9:91)! Domitian is putting himself on the same level as Jupiter. Elsewhere in Martial's writings he calls Domitian "lord" (7:2; 8:82; 9:20, 28, 66) and "lord and god" (5:8;- 7:34; 8:2). Interestingly, after the death of Domitian, Martial repudiates these titles attributed to Domitian (10:72). However, I think he was reflecting the sentiments of the day while Domitian was alive. He may not have believed it, but that's what Domitian wanted, so that's what he got.

Another interesting sidelight, on some of Domitian's coins, the initial "PM" appear on the inscriptions. This stands for "pontifex maximus," the high priest as the head of the Roman religion. This title, Biblically, belongs only to the Lord Jesus (Heb. 4:14).

It appears that in AD 85/86 something triggered Domitian to openly claim deity. What it was, I do not know, but the response in Asia Minor was a temple dedicated to the Sebastoi (emperors)

### The Sebastoi Temple in Ephesus (Fig 1)

In 1930, the Austrian archaeologist Josef Keil, began to excavate an artificial terrace near the southwest corner of the Upper Agora in Ephesus. As the excavations progressed, it became clear that this terrace, measuring 85.6 x 64.5 meters, supported the foundation of a temple, but which one (Friesen 1993b:66)? (For those of you who have not converted yet, get with the program, metrics is a whole lot easier than feet and inches!). In one of the vaults the "head and left forearm of a colossal, acrolithic male statue" was discovered which lead the excavator to identify it as the Temple of the Sebastoi ("emperors") (1993b:60). The structure was an octastyle temple of the Ionic order which measured 34 x 24 meters at its base (1993b:63). "The celia had an interior measurement of about 7.5 x 13 meters" (1993b:64). East of the temple stood an altar (1993b:67). The north side of the terrace had a three-story facade. The top level had engaged figures of various deities supporting the terrace above. Originally the facade probably had 35-40 engaged figures of eastern and western gods and goddesses. Today, only two figures, Attis and Isis, both eastern deities, have been restored (1993b:70,72)

In the last 125 years of research and excavations at Ephesus, 13 inscriptions dedicated to the provincial temple in Ephesus have been discovered. These rectangular marble blocks were set up by various cities of Asia Minor in recognition of Ephesus being the "neokoros" (guardian, or caretaker) of this temple (1993b:29,35). These inscriptions have the name of Domitian chiselled out and in some cases have "Theos Vespasian" put in its place (1993b:37). The destruction of Domitian's name was the results of the Roman Senate's edict to erase any mention of Domitian.

Several questions should be asked regarding this temple. First, to whom was the Temple of the Sebastoi dedicated? For sure, Domitian, and possibly his wife Domitia (1993b:35). Most likely it also included the rest of the Flavians: Vespasian, who was Domitian's father, and Titus, his older brother.

Second, when was the temple fully functional? Friesen, doing careful detective work with the inscriptions, suggests the date of Sept. AD 90 when the temple was fully functional (1993b:44,48). Most likely the people began to build it after Domitian began to express his opinion that he was a god in AD 85/86.

Third, whose head did the colossal statue represent? When this statue was first discovered in 1930, the excavator identified it as Domitian. This identification was later questioned by Georg Daltrop and Max Wegner. Based on facial features from portraits, they suggested it depicted his older brother Titus. However, other art historians still think it belongs to Domitian (1993b:62). This acrolithic statue, made of a wooden body, now disintegrated, and stone extremities, stood 8 meters tall (ca. 25 feet) (Friesen 1993b:63; 1993a:32). The left hand had a groove in it in which a spear was placed. This accords historically with Ephesian coins depicting the Temple of the Sebastoi with a statue in front holding a spear (1993b:63)

Fourth, where was the statue placed in the temple complex? Some have suggested that it was outside in the courtyard, however, the problem with that suggestion is that the torso was made of wood and would deteriorate in the inclement weather. Most likely it was inside the temple. Friesen notes that the back of the head was not finished, thus "the statue could only have been displayed in front of a wall where visitors were not expected to go behind it" (1993a:32). The most logical place would be inside the temple. Also inside, most likely, were similar statues of the other Flavians (1993b:62)

Fifth, what was the symbolism of the temple complex? A visitor approaching the Temple of the Sabastoi from the Agora would notice the northern facade with the engaged deities supporting the temenos and wonder what was the intended symbolism. Friesen remarks, "The message was clear: the gods and goddesses of the peoples supported the emperors; and, conversely, the cult of the emperors united the cultic systems, and the peoples, of the empire. The emperors were not a threat to the worship of the diverse deities of the empire; rather, the emperors joined the ranks of the divine and played their own particular role in that realm" (1993b:75). Ephesus, with its harbor, was the major commercial center of Asia Minor. The pilgrims and traders would mix their commercial ventures with their cultic worship of the emperors while in Ephesus. I would like to suggest that first century Ephesus is the prototype of the future religious and commercial center predicted in Rev. 17 and 18 called "Mystery

Babylon" controlled by the Antichrist. Interestingly, F. Farrar, in his monumental work, The Life and Work of St Paul says of Ephesus, "It's markets, glittering with the produce of world's art, were the Vanity Fair of Asia. They furnished to the exile (of] Patmos the local colouring of those pages of the Apocalypse in which he speaks of 'the merchandise of gold, and silver, (Rev. 18:12,13)" (1888:355). The first century church could relate to this.

In the midst of all this commercial and cultic activities, the believers in the Lord Jesus Christ took a stand for Him (Rev. 2:2,3). One of their elders, the apostle John, refused to participate in the emperor worship and preached against it. Most likely, this led to his banishment to the isle of Patmos (Rev. 1:9)

### Conclusions Regarding Domitian

I wonder if the Apostle John had ever seen the statue of Domitian in the Temple of the Sebastoi? If he had, I'm sure he refused to bow down and worship it, or even burn incense to it. What a contrast between this lifeless stone statue of a mere mortal man and the vision which John saw of the resurrected and living Savior, the Son of Man in Rev. 1. On the isle of Patmos he saw, "One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as the snow (Domitian was bald!), and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in his right hand seven stars (as opposed to a spear in Domitian's left hand), out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength" (Rev. 1:13-16). When John saw this One, he fell down as dead (1:17a). He worshipped Someone infinitely greater than the mortal and dead emperors, he worshipped the One who was the "First and the Last," and the One who lives, and was dead, and is alive forever more (1:17b,18).

Is it any wonder that John also recorded the statement of the four living creatures, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God (Kurios ho theos) Almighty. Who was and is and is to come" (4:8)? The contrast of the "Lord God's" was obvious for any believer living in the first century. Domitian tried to legislate public and private morality, yet he himself was immoral: an adulterer, involved in incest, responsible for murder (his niece, Julia, died as a result of a botched abortion after he impregnated her), blasphemous and an animal abuser (he would sit in his room, catch flies, and stab them with a "keenly-sharpened stylus"). On the other hand, the Lord Jesus Christ is "Holy, holy, holy." Domitian called himself "Dominus Deus Domitianus" (D. D. D.). Yet the Lord Jesus is the "Lord God Almighty", the one who is El Shaddai! Domitian was born on Oct. 24, AD 51 and murdered on Sept. 18, AD 96. He was cremated and his ashes mingled with his niece Julia and buried in the temple of Gens Flavia built over the house where he was born. This house was located on the Quirinal Hill in the sixth Region (Jones 1992:1; Richardson 1992:181). Yet the Eternal Son of God is the One "who was and is and is to come!" Domitian reigned only 15 years (Sept. 13, AD 81- Sept. 18, AD 96), yet King Jesus will reign for a thousand years as "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev. 20:4-6; 19:16). Believers in the Lord Jesus during the first century would be encouraged (and blessed) by reading the book of the Revelation.

## Exile to Patmos

### A Misconception

There is one misconception regarding John's exile to Patmos which has appeared in the commentaries and popular prophetic writings, it is that Patmos was a sort of Alcatraz (Swindoll 1986:3) ; or for the British, a Botany Bay in New Holland (Newton 1875:223); or for the French, St. Helene where Napoleon was exiled (Saffrey 1975:392). Part of this is due to 19th century travellers who described the island in terms such as "barren, rocky, desolate-looking place" (Newton 1875:223) or as "a wild and barren island" (Geil 1896:70). Unfortunately these nineteenth century realities were imposed on the first century text and island. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In the first century Roman world, Patmos was a very strategic island on the sea lanes from Ephesus to Rome. The first stop on this line of communication and commerce for a boat sailing from Ephesus to Rome would have been Patmos, because of its natural and protective harbor. The last stop for a boat coming from Rome would be Patmos. This island had a large administrative center, outlying villages, a hippodrome (for horse racing) and at least three pagan temples. Hardly an isolated and desolate place!

Let us examine the archaeological remains and the literary evidence in order to paint a more accurate picture of first century Patmos.

This crescent-shaped island, 12.5 kilometers long, covers an area of some 34 square kilometers and has a jagged coastline of some 65 kilometers. Pliny the Elder (AD 23- 79), in his book Natural History, says Patmos is 30 miles in circumference (4.12.69). In the center, nearest the narrowest point is the Kastelli, the ancient acropolis (Fig: 2). This administrative center is located behind the harbor, called Skela today. Remains of the wall and three towers can still be seen today. The walls, up to 1.30 meters thick at points, and three towers, still exist (Simpson and Lazenby 1970:47-52). This center has a commanding view of the harbor and the sea lanes to and from Patmos. I also might add, spectacular sunsets

The literary sources mention outlying villages which probably engaged in fishing and agricultural activities. Three temples are known from the sources. There was an inscription found mentioning a temple to Artemis, the goddess of the hunt. Her main temple was in Ephesus and was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Patmos was called Artemis' "most sacred island." The temple was probably located underneath the present day Monastery of St. John near the village of Chora. The threshold stones of the iconostasis in the chapel of the Virgin is thought to be the remains of this temple. There is literary evidence of a temple to Apollo, the brother of Artemis, and most likely located near the harbor of Skala. One nineteenth century traveller mentioned, "at the wharf I observed four or five beautiful white marble columns, cut and carved in true Greek fashion, and once very likely standing in the portico of some splendid temple to a heathen god, now used as mooring posts" (Geil 1897:73) Most likely this temple was the one dedicated to Apollo. There is also literary evidence of a temple to Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty. This temple was probably built on the Kalikatsou rock.

One inscription mentions a hippodrome on the island. This has not been discovered archaeologically, but probably was located near modern day Skala. Again, using my sanctified imagination, I wonder if the Apostle John preached to the inhabitants of Patmos in this circus?

Unfortunately, most tourists visiting Patmos today, disembark at the port of Skala, hop on a bus, zip up to the Cave of the Apocalypse, zing on up to the Monastery of St. John in Chora, and then zag down to the harbor of Skala for shopping and eating before embarking on their cruise ship to sail off to another destination. There are more Biblically significant things to see and experience on this island than this typical four-hour tour wonder. Please do not misunderstand. These are important places to visit, but you should spend a couple of days on the island.

Closely related with this misconception is that Patmos was described as a penal colony. Some commentaries quote Pliny, Natural History 4.12.69 as proof, but all the passage gives is the circumference of the island! It says nothing about whether it was a penal colony or not. (Hemer 1986:221, footnote 1). My impression is that John was exiled to Patmos because of its Artemis/Ephesus connections. The proconsul of Asia Minor wanted to get John away from the city of Ephesus so he sent him to Patmos, which was within his jurisdiction. Hemer suggests the island might be connected with Miletus some 70 km to the Eastnortheast (1986:28, 222, footnote 8)

The length of John's exile on Patmos differs from tradition to tradition. Most likely he was only exiled for 18 months. Upon Domitian's death, John was free to return to Ephesus. Dio Cassius wrote, "[Emperor] Nerva also released all who were on trial for maiestas (high treason) and restored the exile (Roman History 68:2). Eusebius adds, "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 . . . the Apostle John, after his banishment to the island, took up his abode at Ephesus" (Eccl Hist 3.20.8,9)

### "The Travels of St John in Patmos"

According to church tradition, this book was written by Prochorus, the secretary to the Apostle John. This is the Prochorus mentioned in Acts 6:5. Critical scholarship, however, suggests it was written in the 5th century AD. If there is any truth to the book, then John was just banished to the island, but not imprisoned. So much for the Alcatraz view.

The "Travels of St. John in Patmos" makes interesting reading. On the way over to Patmos, a violent storm arose and a passenger is swept into the sea. John prays and a wave deposited the young man back on the boat. This miracle gave John an opportunity to preach the gospel. Once on Patmos, the Roman governor, Laurentius, set John free. "Laurentius's father-in-law, Myron, offered the Apostle lodging in his house, and soon Myron's house became the first church on the island. Apollonides, Myron's son, who was possessed by the devil, was healed by St. John, and this miracle led to the conversion of both Chrysippe, Myron's daughter, and her husband, the Roman governor" (Meinardus 1979:7) John has a spiritual confrontation with Kynops, a famous magician on the island, in which John is finally victorious. Kynops is drowned in the harbor and today a church is dedicated to that event (1979:9). The result of this victorious



confrontation is the salvation of the rest of the island. Before John left Patmos, the believers asked John to write an account of the life of the Lord Jesus. According to one tradition, the gospel of John was written on Patmos.

Whether one believes these accounts is a matter of debate. However, there are subtle hints in the book of Revelation that John had freedom of movement while on the island.

### What did John see?

While exiled on Patmos, John experienced things which reflect life on the island. The weather phenomena recorded in Revelation are common to the island. White clouds (14:14); thunder and lightning (11:19; 14:2); great hail (8:7; 11:19; 16:21) and rainbows (4:3; 10:1). From the peak of what is called Mt. Elias today, sitting 883 feet above sea level, one has a spectacular view of the islands of the Aegean Sea and the mountains of Asia Minor (western Turkey today) to the east. There are at least 22 references to the "sea" in the book of Revelation (4:6; 5:13; 7:1,2,3; 8:8,9; 10:2,5,8; 12:12; 13:1; 14:2,7; 15:2; 16:3; 18:17,19,21; 19:6; 20:13; 21:1). In Revelation 6:14 and 16:20 John describes the islands and mountains disappearing. As of last summer (1997), I can personally attest that they are still there awaiting future fulfillment.

Only one spring exists on the island at a place called Sykamia, it is on the road leading from Chora to Groikos. Tradition has it John baptized some of his converts in a baptistry nearby. What a contrast this small spring was to the "pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (22:1) in the New Heaven and New Earth (21:1).

In Rev. 13:1, John wrote that he "stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name." A while back, a friend asked me who I thought the beast was in this verse. I responded, "I haven't the foggiest idea, but I can tell you exactly what beach John stood on when he saw that vision. It was the Psili Ammos beach." In Greek, the word means "fine sand", and indeed this light, fine golden sand is the only beach on the island which has no stones or pebbles (Stone 1981:83,84). In contrast, the visitor to the island is impressed by the colored pebbles on the Lambi beach. The other beaches have rocks on them.

John had the opportunity to walk to this isolated beach some 45 minutes to an hour walk from the harbor of Skela. He probably went to the Psili Beach to get away from the noise and the crowds at the harbor or to meditate on the Word of God and spend time in prayer. The impression I am left with is that John had freedom of movement on the island.

### The Volcano at Thera (Santorini)

From this beach one could see an eruption of the volcanic island of Thera, Santorini. In 1888, an interesting but highly imaginative article appeared in the journal The Nineteenth Century entitled "What St. John Saw on Patmos" by J. Theodore Bent. In it he proposed that the Apostle John saw a volcanic eruption of Thera (Santorini) in AD 60. This eruption of Thera, as

the Greek name implies, was the "beast" of Rev. 13:1. He suggested that "St. John made use of (this] phenomena which he saw with his own eyes, to prophetically depict a destruction of another kind" (1888:813). What that was, he does not say.

At the outset, there are several major problems with this thesis. First, Bent rejects the AD 95 date for the writing of Revelation and follows the "consensus of modern opinion" (for 1888) that it was written between AD 60 and 69. Second, he assumes there was an eruption of Thera in the year AD 60. This, however, is based on a secondhand, and probably unreliable, source. The authority, George of Syngelos, probably confused it with the AD 46-47 eruption.

There was a very catastrophic eruption between 1520- 1460 BC which some geologists have suggested was the largest eruption in historical times. This destroyed the Minoan civilization and might be the basis for the "Atlantis" legend. Strabo described an eruption in 197 BC (Geography 1:3:16). Pliny mentions one in AD 19 and several Roman historians record the AD 46-47 eruption.

The student of Bible prophecy should be careful not to "throw the baby out with the bath water" on some of Bent's observations. In the article he compares "passages in Revelation with extracts from medieval and modern accounts given by eye-witnesses of the eruptions of Thera" and notes they make "many remarkable parallels" (1888:813). Let us examine three examples.

First, the sixth seal (Rev. 6:12-17). "There was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind . . . and every mountain and island was moved out of its place." All these phenomena; an earthquake, a dark sun and moon like blood, "stars" falling from heaven and movement of land masses are associated with a volcanic eruption. The volcanic cloud in the atmosphere would darken the sun and make the moon appear blood red. The mention of late figs may give us a chronological indicator as to when this eruption takes place, August or September (Boronski 1987:37, 38, 115)

Second, the first trumpet (Rev. 8:7) describes hail and fire mingled with blood were thrown to earth. This destroyed one third of the trees and burned up all the grass. Bent recounts N. Delenda's account of the eruption of 1707 where "flames ... issued out of the sea, and of the damage done to the vines and trees by the noxious vapours and by the terrible crashing of the volcanic bombs" (1888:817)

Third, the second trumpet (Rev. 8:8,9). "And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood; and a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed." Father Richard, observing the eruption of Thera (Santorini) in 1573 writes, "even when the volcano is quiescent, the sea in the immediate vicinity of the cone is a brilliant orange colour, from the action of oxide iron" (Bent 1888:817). N. Delenda observed after an eruption of Thera in 1707 the sulphurous vapours mixed with the sea, turned it white and the fish of the harbour died (Bent 1888:817). The destruction of one third of the ships would be caused by a tsunami. Interestingly, geologists calculate the tsunami (tidal wave) after the eruption of Thera between 1520-1460 BC, was

initially 42 meters high (Pararas-Carayannis 1992:122). That would surely wreck havoc on any navies in the area!

### Earthquakes

Earthquakes are always associated with volcanos. The book of Revelation records at least two earthquakes (Rev. 6:12; 16:18). A careful reading of the text seems to indicate that these are major earthquakes in which God directly intervenes in the judgment of humanity.

As any good geologist knows, there has actually been a decrease in the number of earthquakes. That should not surprise the student of Bible prophecy because no verse in the Bible says there will be an increase in the number of earthquakes before the Lord Jesus Christ returns!

More study needs to be done on the seal, trumpet and bowl judgments in Revelation. These are all natural phenomenon on a supernatural scale. The Lord is directly intervening in the affairs of human history. These are not humanly contrived events, be they MX missiles, black helicopters, etc. Nations can explain, warn and defend against missile attacks. On the other hand, these natural phenomenon: volcanoes, earthquakes and weather patterns can not be predicted, nor prevented by scientists. As a result of not having control over them, they will cry out blasphemies toward God (Rev. 16:21)

### The Third Seal (Rev. 6:5,6)

The Apostle John describes the opening of the third seal in this way: "When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, 'Come and see.' And I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hands. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, 'A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine'." (6:5,6)

Nogah Hareuveni, the founder of Neot Keduniim, the Biblical Landscape Reserve in Israel, has a wise arid appropriate statement regarding the interpretation of Scripture. He says, "Let's look for the obvious!" There is no need to spiritualize, allegorize, or devotionalize the interpretation of the this passage, or any passage relating to agriculture or nature in the Mediterranean Basin, and the Land of Israel in particular.

In this seal, the rider on the black horse is trying to sell wheat and barley at an expensive price due to a shortage of grain, but is not to touch the oil and wine.

On a recent visit to the island off Patmos, a combination of an unusual weather pattern and an upcoming Jewish holiday triggered the "obvious" in this passage. One afternoon during our stay, a rainbow appeared over the eastern end of the island. While that, in and of itself, was not unusual, because John had seen two rainbows while he was on the island (Rev. 4:3; 10:1) the timing was significant. Rainbows are always connected with rainstorms and the day it appeared was Friday, June 6, 1997. On the Jewish calendar, Shavuot, the feast of weeks, also called Pentecost, fell on Wednesday, June 11. For the Jewish farmer, Shavuot was the beginning of the wheat harvest (Ex. 23:16; Num. 28:26). Helen Frenkly, the present director of Neot Kedumim,

points out, "The Hebrew for Feast of Harvest is Hag Ha-Katzir. Katzir means harvest of grain and since the barley harvest begins on Passover, Shavuot is the start of the wheat harvest" (personal correspondence, Aug. 24, 1997)

The third seal has been interpreted by most commentators as famine which resulted from conflicts and wars mentioned in the first two seals (Rev. 6:1-4). Some also suggest the oil and wine were luxury items of the rich. The first interpretation is plausible, but the second is not true. There is a better explanation from the agricultural background, weather pattern and Scripture for this seal.

The four foods: wheat, barley, (olive) oil and wine, should draw the Bible students mind to a phrase used throughout the Hebrew Scriptures for the essential foods of daily life. This phrase, "grain, oil and wine" is used at least 17 times in the Bible (Deut. 7:13; 11:14; 12:17; 14:23; 18:4; 28:51; 32:13,14; I Chron. 9:29; II Chron. 2:15; 31:5; 32:28; Neh. 5:11; Ps. 104:15; Jer. 31:12; Hosea 2:8, 9,22; Joel 2:19; Hag. 1:11). These four foods were the most important ones of the "seven varieties" (Deut. 8:7-10). The figs, pomegranates and date honey are the other three. What is common to all seven of these is that their fate is determined by a delicate weather balance between Passover and Shavuot (Hareuveni 1980:30-45)

An observant Jewish farmer living in the Land of Israel during the Talmudic period would remember this phrase every time he recited Deut. 11 and had a Shabbat meal. On this "table of man" on Friday night would be placed the hallah bread made from grains, wine from grapes, and the oil lamp which used olive oil.

Between Passover and Shavuot the farmer prays for the right winds to blow at the appropriate time. The rabbis say, "The northern wind is beneficial to wheat when it has reached a third of its ripening and is damaging to olive trees when they have blossomed. The southern wind is damaging to wheat when it has reached a third of its ripening and is beneficial to olives when they have blossomed. This is symbolized for you by (placing] the table in the north (side of the Tabernacle and the Temple] and the menorah in the south (side of the Tabernacle and Temple]..." (Baba Batra 147a; cited in Hareuveni 1988:21)

The north wind usually brings rain (Prov. 25:23) and is beneficial in the first third of the ripening of the wheat and barley. Yet this same rain would ruin the buds of the olive trees or grapes vines if they are opened because it would wash away the pollen so the tree or vine will not be pollinated and fertilized. The southern wind is good for the pollination process of the olive and grapes if they come later in the 50 days. If it comes early, then the grain will not fill with starch and the crop will be decimated (cf. Gen. 41:6). The farmer prays to the Lord that the winds would come at the right time. Even if the winds come at the right time, but the rains come after "its season" it will ruin the grain crop (Lev. 26:4; Deut. 11:14; 28:12).

Someone once said, "The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself." Another example of the third seal judgment, albeit on a smaller scale, is recorded in I Sam. 12. Heavy rains during the wheat harvest would bring disaster for the wheat farmer. This is illustrated by the account in I Sam. 12. "Is today not the wheat harvest? I (Samuel) will call to the LORD, and He will send thunder and rain, that you may perceive and see that your wickedness is great,

which you have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking a king for yourselves" (12:17). The people cried out, "Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, that we may not die..." (12:19). People do not die from thunder and rain! However, as Nogah Hareuveni has pointed out, "The ripe, heavy-eared wheat can suffer from a downpour not only through physical damage from the force of the wind-driven rain, but also by rotting from the sudden moisture combined with the high temperatures that prevail in Israel by Shavuot (in late May - early June). This is why the Israelites, cried out to Samuel to 'pray ... to save us from death' (I Samuel 12:19) - from death by starvation that would follow the destruction of the grain crop" (1988:25). Mildew is one of the results of disobedience to the Word of God (Deut. 28:22; I Kings 8:38 II II Chron. 6:28; Amos 4:9; Hag. 2:17; Boronski 1987:158-160)

Adam Smith's law of supply and demand is a valid principle for interpreting the third seal judgment. There was an untimely rainstorm during the wheat harvest which destroyed a good portion of the crop. The demand for wheat, plus the shortage in supply, led to higher prices. The olive trees and grapevines, the "oil and wine", were not affected by this rainstorm because they had already been pollinated. In fact, the water might even help them. This is the "obvious" interpretation.

### Conclusions

It has been the purpose of this paper to put Revelation 1:9 in its historical and geographical context (setting) John was exiled to Patmos because he took a stand for the Word of God and the God of the Word. Even with the temple to the self-proclaimed deified emperor in his back yard, John refused to bow down to him. Yet when he saw the glorified Son of Man in a vision on Patmos, he fell down as dead. Because of his stand, the proconsul removed John to Patmos. Once on Patmos, John was free to move about the island. I can not help but imagine John standing on the piers in the harbor of Patmos passing out gospel tracts to the sailors coming and going from the island. On at least one occasion he took advantage of a boat heading back to Ephesus to send along the Book of Revelation, which he received while on the island. It probably went back with the seven messengers who came to visit him from seven churches in Asia Minor.

This book would have encouraged the believers in the Lord Jesus who were going through difficult times to take a stand for the Lord and to realize that God has a plan and a purpose for what they are going through. One day He would set things in order. The redeemed, those who have trusted solely upon the Lord Jesus Christ. and His finished work on Calvary, will one day gather around the Throne of God and worship the Lamb of God by saying, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing" (Rev. 5:12). Might we be encouraged by this same message.