Does the Martyrdom of Antipas in Revelation 2:13 Support the Late-Date Composition of Revelation?

By Gary DeMar
Introduction

When the book of Revelation was revealed to John, written, and sent to the seven churches in Asia Minor is a point of contention among commentators. Was it written prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 during the reign of Nero who reigned from AD 54 to 68 or during the reign of Domitian in the 90s?

Preterists maintain that the prophetic events outlined in Revelation were revealed to John sometime during the reign of Nero, the sixth king who was still alive (Rev. 17:10) when John wrote down what God gave to Jesus “to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place” (1:1). Futurists insist that there is ample internal and external evidence for a date of composition after the destruction of Jerusalem, during the reign of Domitian who ruled from AD 81-96. Most of their evidence relies on external non-biblical sources. For example, Mark Hitchcock’s “A Defense of the Domitianic Date of the Book of Revelation,” written in partial fulfillment for a Doctor of Philosophy degree from Dallas Theological Seminary, begins with external evidence, evidence outside the Bible. It’s not until page 80 that he appeals to Scripture.

Preterists argue that a pre-AD 70 date is based on internal factors like timing passages like “shortly” (Rev. 1:1), “near” (1:3; 22:10), and “quickly” (22:7, 12, 20), that the sixth king was alive when Revelation was revealed to John (Rev. 17:10), and the temple was still standing in Jerusalem (11:1-2) as well as other internal evidence indicators. James Glasgow spends considerable space (20 pages) arguing for a pre-AD 70 date by an appeal to the Bible and concludes “that it was written shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem and James’s martyrdom.”¹ Glasgow evaluates the external evidence “of some of the first Patristic writers”:

Though the earliest fathers are comparatively silent on the subject [of when Revelation was written], yet some of them distinctly ascribe the earlier date to the Apocalypse; while the opinion of a later date depends on statements of later patristic writers, with the exception of two or three words of Irenaeus,² the meaning of which is disputed.³

³Glasgow, The Apocalypse Translated and Expounded, 38.
Futurists contend that the late date precludes that the prophetic events described in Revelation could have any reference to the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem. The temple mentioned in Revelation 11 is either symbolic or is a rebuilt temple. Words like near, shortly, and quickly are not meant to be taken literally.

The timing passages in Revelation, when compared to similar passages elsewhere in the New Testament, indicate that a significant eschatological event was to occur in the lifetime of those who first read the prophecies. Late-date advocates like dispensationalists reject this literal approach by fabricating a doctrine called imminency or the “any moment rapture of the church.” The following definition by a dispensationalist writer is typical:

The primary thought expressed by the word “imminency” is that something important is likely to happen, and could happen soon. While the event may not be immediate, or necessarily very soon, it is next on the program and may take place at any time.  


There is nothing in the above texts that would support this confusing definition. Words such as “likely,” “could happen,” and “may take place” are nowhere indicated. Taking a similar
approach, Thomas Ice writes, “The fact that Christ could return at any moment but not soon is supported in the New Testament in the following passages: 1 Corinthians 1:7; 16:22; Philippians 3:20; 4:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:28; James 5:7-9; 1 Peter 1:13; Jude 21; Revelation 3:11; 22:7, 12, 17, 20. These verses state that Christ could return at any moment...”

Not one of these verses supports his claim. Not one verse in the New Testament states that Jesus could return at any moment. You be the judge as you read James 5:7-9, verses that Ice uses to supports his argument:

Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, **for the coming of the Lord is at hand.** Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, **the Judge is standing right at the door** (James 5:7-9).

Contrary to what Ice contends, James tells his first readers that “the coming of the Lord is at hand” (“near’). And if you don’t get his meaning, he defines “at hand” as “standing right at the door,” the same words used by Jesus in Matthew 24:33: “Recognize that He is near, right at the door,” not down the road or in the next county. “Near” is defined as “right at the door,” close enough for someone to knock (Rev. 3:20; Luke 12:36).

The purpose of this paper is not to rehearse the entire dating issue. It has been done by two notable advocates for both the Neronic and Domitianic date for the composition of the book of Revelation. Kenneth L. Gentry has written *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* that presents an exegetical and historical defense of a pre-AD 70 date for Revelation. As mentioned above, Mark Hitchcock’s dissertation is an able yet flawed attempt in defense of the late date.

My goal in this paper is to evaluate a single question: Did the martyrdom of Antipas in Revelation support the late date for the composition of the book of Revelation? My interest in

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this issue was piqued when I read the following comment to an article I had written on the identity of the Beast in Revelation 13 from a Mr. Scott:

[Revelation] 2:13 talks about the martyrdom of Antipas, who died in 92 AD. So it was written after, most think around 95 AD. Nero died in 68 AD.

The following is my response to the above claim.

**Revelation Revealed to John Prior to the Destruction of Jerusalem**

There’s a great deal of internal evidence that shows that Revelation was revealed to John during the reign of Nero, prior to the destruction of the temple that took place in AD 70. There are the time texts (Rev. 1:1, 3; 22:10; 3:10) and the fact that the temple seems to be still standing with a distinction between Israel and the nations (11:1-2) that was evident in the first century prior to the temple’s destruction. By AD 95, Israel was scattered and the temple was in ruins (Matt. 24:1-3).

There is no reliable historical information on how Antipas was martyred (Rev. 2:13), who Mr. Scott claims died during the reign of Domitian around AD 92. He bases his argument on some fanciful history about an Antipas of Pergamum who is claimed to have been martyred when he was placed in a heated brazen bull-shaped altar in the temple of Artemis.

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7"Antipas" is said to be a shortened form of Antipater, which means “in the place of his father” or “like the father.” An Antipater is his father’s successor, his familial representative who carries on his legacy. For example,
Simeon Metaphrastes, a tenth-century Christian who collected stories of martyrs, wrote that Antipas was executed by being sealed inside a hollow statue of a bull – made of brass – which had been heated until it was red hot and that Antipas called out prayers and thanksgiving from inside the bull. According to Metaphrastes, Antipas was martyred during Domitian’s reign (r. AD 81-96).

On the other hand, some historians – such as Philip Schaff⁸ – and Bible commentators – such as Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown⁹ – doubt Metaphrastes’ identification of Antipas. They note that Metaphrastes seems to accept fantastical and dubious accounts uncritically. Furthermore, no written record of Antipas exists from the time between Revelation and Metaphrastes; therefore, no one can check the sources of his account. For these reasons, those who argue for an earlier date of Revelation (during Nero’s reign, AD 54-68) do not accept Metaphrastes’ account as reliable evidence against their position.¹⁰

Herod Antipas was the youngest son of Herod the Great (4 BC-AD 39 AD). Some commentators take “Antipas” to mean “against all.” See comments below.


⁹“Simon Metaphrastes has a palpably legendary story, unknown to the early Fathers, that Antipas, in Domitian’s reign, was shut up in a red-hot brazen bull, and ended his life in thanksgivings and prayers.”

Josephus, in his description of events surrounding the destruction of the temple in AD 70, mentions an Antipas who had been murdered:

There were besides these, other robbers that came out of the country, and came into the city, and joining to them those that were worse than themselves, omitted no kind of barbarity; for they did not measure their courage by their rapines and plunderings only, but proceeded as far as murdering men; and this not in the night-time or privately, or with regard to ordinary men, but did it openly in the daytime, and began with the most eminent persons in the city: **for the first man they meddled with was Antipas**, one of the royal lineage, and the most potent man in the whole city, insomuch that the public treasures were committed to his care. (Josephus, *War of the Jews*, 4.3.4)

I’ve checked numerous historical sources, and in almost every case commentators do not accept the story that the Antipas of Revelation 2:13 is the Antipas of legend who is said to have been martyred during the reign of Domitian. The following comment (August 23, 2012) in defense of the late-date composition of the book of Revelation based partly on the martyrdom of Antipas, as I will show, is just plain wrong:

John mentions Antipas as having been martyred. Every source of church history both Christian and not states that he was killed around 94 AD. The mere fact that
John mentions him by name clearly indicates that Antipas was a well-known man to all.

We know that there were other people named Antipas, and “every source of church history” does not support the claim that the Antipas of Revelation 2:13 “was killed around 94 AD.” Bruce W. Longenecker offers the following assessment of Revelation’s Antipas: “There must have been an intriguing series of events leading to Antipas’s punishing death. Those events, however, have been lost in the sands of time. We will never know who Antipas was or the episodes that provoked his martyrdom.”

The reason we don’t know is because there is no reliable historical account of who he was or how he died.

Who Was Antipas?

It’s possible that Antipas is not the real name of a person revealed to John. The name, like much of what we find in Revelation, may be symbolic. This particular argument works off the premise that in Greek Antipas means “against” (anti) “all” (pas), “and may well denote a sufferer like the author of Psalm xxii (verses 12, 16), around whom the assembly of the wicked formed a circle like so many mad dogs or strong bulls of Bashan; or like another Jeremiah, who seemed at times to stand alone against a world of evil (Jer. xv, 10; xx, 10). Certain it is that we have no trustworthy account of any early martyr of this name, for the later legends are manifestly fabulous; like the origins of the Nicolaitans, they have grown out of this word in the Apocalypse, and I know nothing more than is here written.”

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James Glasgow entertains the view that Antipas could be a symbolic name. There might be some precedent for this approach as some commentators speculate that the “most excellent Theophilus” of Luke’s gospel (1:3) and the book of Acts (1:1), which means “dear to God,” “lover of God,” or “friend of God” (θεόφιλος/Theophilos), could be a pseudonym for a Roman convert. Using the name “Theophilus” could be a way to identify all who have left the world of pagan polytheism and/or Emperor worship. Glasgow’s comments lay out the argument for Antipas being a symbolic name for a real person that was used to honor all martyrs who gave their all for the cause of Jesus Christ:

Who was Antipas? No records are preserved of such a person; and there is much reason to believe that name is allegorical, denoting according to its etymology (anti, against + paj, all), an opposer of all errors.13 This derivation is rather flippantly sneered at, and Hengstenberg censured for adopting it, by Alford, who arbitrarily changes it to Antipater.14 But as little do we find a martyr of this name, Cocceius and Vitringa suppose it to denote the Athanasians [contra mundum = “against the world”].15 This and other attempts at explanation are equally conjectural. Bengel mentions martyrologies (of later times) as saying traditionally that he was slain by Domitian.16 Pool says, “De Antipa nihil in ecclesiasticis historiis reperio” (“Of Antipas I find nothing in church histories”). Even if there were such an individual, he is evidently, in the Lord’s address, a representative of all true martyrs.17

13“Antipas, a faithful martyr at Pergamus in Asia Minor, but we know nothing more of him. And it may be questioned, perhaps, whether Antipas was the actual name of the person referred to, and not rather an epithet indicative of the steadfast resistance he made to the evil-doers and corruptions around him; for the word means against all: and possibly this, like the name Jezebel in the next address, was a designation of character, not a proper name.” Patrick Fairbairn, ed., The Imperial Bible-Dictionary (London: Blackie & Son, 1866), 103.
17Glasgow, The Apocalypse Translated and Expounded, 154.
Who Murdered Antipas?
There’s the question of who murdered Antipas. There are three possible candidates: pagan worshipers and those who profit from the business of idol worship, the Roman government protecting the Imperial cult, and those “who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan” (Rev. 2:9; 3:9).

Pagan Idolaters
Pergamum was a hotbed of pagan idolatry, like its sister-city Ephesus. Was Antipas murdered by raging pagans in Pergamum? Consider what happened in Ephesus where Artemis (Diana in Latin) was the revered and worshipped goddess of the city. Preaching the gospel called into question the divine status of the goddess, and those who profited from the worship of the gods knew it and acted with ferocity:

“[T]here occurred no small disturb[ance] concerning the Way [in Ephesus]. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen; these he gathered together with the workmen of similar trades, and said, ‘Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business. ‘You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all. Not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship will even be dethroned from her magnificence.’ When they heard this and were filled with rage, they began crying out, saying, ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!’” (Acts 19:23-28).

Two men were dragged into the theater in the confusion. When the apostle Paul “wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples would not let him. Also some of the Asiarchs,” political or religious officials of the province of Asia, “who were friends of his sent to him and repeatedly urged him not to venture into the theater” (19:29-31). Most likely they feared for Paul’s life.
An attempt to calm down the crowd of idol worshippers failed: “a single outcry arose from them all as they shouted for about two hours, ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!’” (Acts 19:34). It was only after a civil official intervened that the frenzied crowd dispersed (19:35-41).

The martyrdom of Antipas in Pergamum could have been sparked by similar pagan outrage. Like the folks in Ephesus, the people of Pergamum worshipped many Egyptian, Greek, and Roman gods, including the healing god Asclepius. The city was filled with idols including the massive Altar of Zeus and the Gigantomachy Frieze depicting dozens of goddesses, gods, giants, and animals. The gospel was rightly viewed as an attack on their belief system and way of life. It would not be surprising that what happened in Ephesus also happened in Pergamum but with disastrous results for someone like Antipas. Under this scenario, the pagan worshippers murdered the outspoken Antipas before the civil officials could stop the onslaught.

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18 “The rod of Asclepius, a snake-entwined staff, remains a symbol of medicine today. Those physicians and attendants who served this god were known as the Therapeutae of Asclepius.”
Albert Barnes’ comments are helpful:

It would appear also that the persecution was of a local character, since Pergamos is described as “Satan’s seat”; and the death of Antipas is mentioned in immediate connection with that fact. All the circumstances referred to would lead us to suppose that this was a popular outbreak, and not a persecution carried on under the authority of government, and that Antipas was put to death in a popular excitement. So Stephen (Acts vii) was put to death, and so Paul at Lystra was stoned until it was supposed he was dead (Acts xiv. 19).19

Roman Protection of the Imperial Cult
Many who hold the late date for Revelation contend that there was an Empire-wide persecution of Christians during Domitian’s reign, but there is some debate on the subject. In “Did Domitian Persecute Christians?: An Investigation,” a debate between Arthur M. Ogden Ferrell Jenkins, Mr. Ogden takes the position that there was no Empire-wide persecution of Christians or at least there is no substantial historical record of it.

“Domitian (c. 81-96) is the emperor who has gone down in history as the one who bathed the empire in the blood of the Christians.”20 While it is true historians, centuries after the fact, have billed Domitian as a bloody persecutor of Christians, there is no evidence from the historians contemporary with his reign that would convict him of directing a persecution against them.
In fact, there is no literary record to substantiate a persecution of any kind by Domitian against Christians. Neither Tacitus, Suetonius nor Pliny, all of whom resided in Rome (Tacitus and Pliny were members of the Roman Senate during Domitian’s reign), leave any record of any kind of [a] campaign against Christians. This would appear strange since Tacitus and Suetonius both left a record of Nero’s persecution against Christians. Would not a persecution directed against Christians of the magnitude described above demand a place in the historical records of these and other writers? And why was Pliny, who was a member of the Senate during the reign of Domitian, ignorant of the precise crimes Christians were guilty of and how they were to be convicted and punished since such trials of Christians would have taken place in the Senate? He wrote Trajan, his emperor, “I have never taken part in trials (cognitiones) of Christians; consequently, I do not know the precedents regarding the question of punishment or the nature of the inquisition.” How could a man of his political background have been so ignorant of what to do to Christians if there had been a sustained persecution directed against them during the reign of Domitian?

There are others who agree (and disagree) with Ogden. Consider this comment from Ray Summers, who adopts the late-date composition of Revelation but argues that “there is no explicit evidence in 2:12-17 (or in Rev. 2-3) to suggest that the imperial cult was a major problem for the Christians of Asia.”

Of course, this does not mean that the Roman government could not have put someone like Antipas to death, but as we’ll see, there is ample evidence that Nero persecuted Christians far

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23Merrill, Essays in Early Christian History, 150.


25Summers, Worthy is the Lamb, 93.
more extensively than Domitian did and that there were attempts by pagans and Jews to persecute Christians in the period before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

*The Synagogue of Satan*

There’s another possible scenario for the martyrdom of Antipas. It’s curious that neither government officials nor pagan worshippers of idols are mentioned in Revelation 2 but a story from the Old Testament -- “the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak,” adversaries of the “sons of Israel” (Num. 31:16), and the “teaching of the Nicolaitans [people destroyers/conquerors]” (Rev. 2:14-15; also 2 Pet. 2:15).

James M. MacDonald contends that the enemies of the gospel came mostly from the “Judaizing heretics” who are described as false apostles (Rev. 2:2; 2 Cor. 11:13; Acts 20:30; Gal 1:7; 2:4; Titus 1:10-11; 2 Pet 2:1).

[T]he church of the Ephesians is commended for hating “the deeds of the Nicolaitans” (ii. 6). The best explanation of the term “Nicolaitans” makes it symbolical, like Balaam (ii. 14) and Jezebel (ii. 20), and makes all these names apply to the false apostles [2:2] or apostates before named, or the Judaizing heretics that infested the Church. There are insuperable objections to the derivation of the name from a sectarian called Nicolaus, that is, to a historical explanation. Balaam, according to its etymology, signifies “destroyer of the people”; and Nicolaitans according to their etymology, is simply Balaamites in Greek. The Nicolaitans, and those mentioned afterwards as the Balaamites, and the followers of the woman Jezebel, were those precisely who repeated the sins of Balaam and Jezebel by becoming tempters of the people of God. They were the same trouble to whom Paul refers (2 Cor. ii. 17, xi. 4, 5, 13; Gal. i. 7, ii. 4), and who were represented at a very early period in the apostolic history as going down from Judaea (Acts xv. 1), and causing no the small dissension in the churches among the Gentiles, by teaching that circumcision was still essential to salvation.26

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There is no mention of Greek or Roman gods like we find when Paul visited Athens where “he was observing the city full of idols” (Acts 17:16) and Ephesus where he encountered the worship of Artemis/Diana and Zeus/Jupiter by a mob of idol worshippers (19:11-31).

What is “Satan’s throne”? (Rev. 2:13) We’re not told. Satan is mentioned three other times in the letters to the seven churches. Is “Satan’s throne” political (like the sea beast/Rome: Rev. 13:1) and the “synagogue of Satan” (2:9; 3:9) religious (like the land beast/Israel: 13:11)? What are the “deep things of Satan” (2:24)? Are these references to Satan more symbolic of apostate Judaism than to polytheistic paganism or Rome?

The early adversaries to Jesus and the gospel message were Jews. Jews wanted to stone Jesus for His views that would end the Old Covenant rituals and would be replaced with Him (John 8:59; Matt. 12:14; John 10:31; 11:8). Notice how Jesus describes His Jewish opponents:

“You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44; also see 8:38, 41).

It was Jews who conspired with Herod and Pilate to have Jesus crucified. In the end, they rejected Jesus as their king and cried out, “We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15). In addition to Jews being the first converts to Christianity (Acts 2:5, 37-47; 5:11), Jews were also the first opponents. Stephen was martyred by his own countrymen (Acts 7:54-60):
“Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. . . . But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.” (8:1-3).

When Herod “laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them” and “had James the brother of John put to death with a sword,” he continued the persecution when he saw that his actions “pleased the Jews” (Acts 12:1-3; also 24:27; 25:9). This emboldened Herod to seize Peter and have him put in prison (12:4).

Jews in Iconium “stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren” (Acts 14:2). Before long there was an attempt by “both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them” (14:5). Before long, “Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead” (14:19).

A now converted Paul was confronted and seized in the temple in Jerusalem by “Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, began to stir up all the crowd and laid hands on him” (Acts 21:27; 20:19; 24:18). Like what happened in Ephesus, “Then all the city was provoked, and the people rushed together, and taking hold of Paul they dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut. While they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion” (21:30-31). Then there was the conspiracy to kill Paul by Jews:

“When it was day, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. There were more than forty who formed this plot. They came to the chief priests and the elders and said, ‘We have bound ourselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until we have killed Paul.’ Now therefore, you and the Council notify the commander to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case by a more thorough investigation; and we for our part are ready to slay him before he comes near the place.’” (Acts 23:12-15).
In Ephesus and Jerusalem, it was the Roman government that came to the rescue of Christian believers over against pagans and adversarial Jews. To the Thessalonian Christians, Paul mentions the persecution of Jewish Christians at the hands of their fellow-Jews in Judea:

“For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost” (1 Thess. 2:14-16).

Paul writes that five times he had “received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes (2 Cor. 11:24; Deut. 25:3).

In addition to Paul, James, the brother of Jesus, was martyred by Jews when he repeated what Jesus said to Caiaphas (Matt. 26:64). “Hegesippus reflects the tradition of the early church by stating that Jesus ‘is about to come on the clouds of heaven.’”27 “About to” referred to what Jesus had said in Matthew 24:34: “This generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” Jesus was referring to their generation not a distant generation.

James was referencing what Jesus had said on the Mount of Olives that “the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the land will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN with power and great glory.” (Matt. 24:30). James is reported to have said to the Jewish religious leaders, “[Jesus] is now sitting in the heavens, on the right hand of great Power, and is about to come on the clouds of heaven.”28 This meant that Jesus was the promised Messiah. He was the Son of Man who ascended to His Father after His redemptive work. The temple, animal sacrifices, and the priesthood were supplanted by Jesus.

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28 Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History, “The martyrdom of James, who was called the brother of the Lord,” 2.23 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1958), 77-78. The same account can be found in volume 8 of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, 763.
After hearing James’ obvious allusion to Matthew 26:64, the officials of the temple cast James down from the “wing of the temple” and stoned him and beat out his brains with a club. “Immediately after this,” Hegesippus writes, “Vespasian invaded and took Judea.” James the brother of Jesus believed that Jesus’ coming was “about to take place.” Hegesippus identifies the coming of Jesus “on the clouds of heaven” with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

**Antipas and the Early Church Fathers**

Tertullian (c. 155-c. 240 AD) is the earliest non-biblical source to mention Antipas. He mentions him in his work against Gnosticism, *Scorpiace: Antidote for the Scorpion’s Sting* (Chap. 12). Curiously, he does not mention how he died, when he died, or who killed him. There is no mention of Domitian as the culprit. Henry B. Swete offers the following in his commentary on the history of the martyrdom of Antipas:

> There is little to be gleaned about this primitive martyr from post-canonical writings. Tertullian’s allusion to him (*scorp.* 12) . . . shows no independent knowledge.²⁹

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I asked Francis X. Gumerlock, author of numerous Latin translations of ancient commentaries, if he had any source material related to the martyrdom of Antipas. Here are his conclusions based on the commentaries he surveyed:

So in all of the Revelation commentaries that are extant from [AD] 200-700, not one of them states that Antipas was martyred during the reign of Domitian. That would have to be inferred if the author of the commentary held to a Domitianic date, but even if the author did hold to the date of Revelation during Domitian’s reign, who knows what he thought about the date of Antipas’ martyrdom, which could have been some years earlier. But in the comments on Rev 2:13 in the Apocalypse commentaries from 200-700 there are no explicit references to Antipas being martyred during the reign of Domitian. . . . From the eighth through fourteenth centuries, I have not found in the Revelation commentaries any explicit reference that Antipas was martyred in the times of Domitian.

The only early commentary Gumerlock could find that claimed that Antipas was martyred “by being roasted in a bronze bull in the tenth year of Domitian” was written by Cornelius a Lapide, Jesuit of Flanders (1627). This doesn’t mean, of course, that there are no commentaries that
reference the legend of Antipas’ martyrdom under Domitian. John Wesley (1703-1791) includes the following in his commentary on Revelation 2:13 -- “Antipas -- Martyred under Domitian” -- but he does not cite a source.

Antipas Among the Commentators

Further investigation of commentators support what Francis Gumerlock and I have been able to find. Richard Baxter’s Paraphrase of the New Testament, first published in 1685, states the following about the Antipas legend:

We have no other certain History of Antipas, and his Case but only his uncertain Stories of Metaphrastes, and the Menology. No doubt there are many Martyrs, whose histories have not come down to us: But Christ has Honoured Antipas by this Sacred Record [in Rev. 2:13]: The time of his suffering is unknown.30

Also in 1685, Matthew Poole commented: “It is much [that] no ecclesiastical history makes mention of this martyr Antipas, which argues him to have been a person but of obscure note in the world; but Christ seeth and taketh notice of those little ones who belong to him, though the world overlooks them.”

There’s also this from a commentary published in 1658: “What this Antipas was, there is no more mentioned in Scripture concerning him: It is recorded in Story that he was a Minister in Pergamos, and it is not improbable, seeing these are most ordinarily the object of persecutors’ malice and violence.... It may be, he was stoned in some tumult as a seditious person, or one not worthy to live, because of some of the reproaches or other put upon him.”

Moses Stuart offers a summary of the scant historical source material for the claim that the Antipas in Revelation 2:13 was martyred during the reign of Domitian:

> Of the Antipas here named we know nothing further; excepting of Andreas (Commentary written near the close of the fifth century) mentions that he had

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33 “Antipas, whose name had become known, as the bravest martyr in Pergamum, whose martyrdom I have read, the Evangelist now mentioned to point to both their patience and the cruelty of those who had been led astray.”
read a *martyrology* of him. . . . In the *Acta Sanctorum* (II, pp. 3, 4) is a martyrology of Antipas from a Greek MS.; but it is full of fable and fiction, which a later age had added to the original story.”34

In addition to discounting the fabled martyrdom of Antipas during the reign of Domitian, Stuart has a great deal to say about the dating of Revelation.

It seems indisputably clear that the book of Revelation must be dated in the reign of Nero Caesar, and consequently before his death in June, A.D. 68. He is the sixth king; the short-lived rule of the seventh king (Galba) “has not yet come” [17:10].35

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The manner of the declaration here seems to decide, beyond all reasonable appeal, against a later period than about A.D. 67 or 68, for the composition of the Apocalypse.36

R.C.H. Lenski also questions the veracity of the martyrdom story by noting that it is based on “a legend that appeared in the tenth century.”37

**Using Tradition as Fact**

The most recent defense of the Domitian composition date for Revelation has been made by popular prophecy writer Mark L. Hitchcock. “A Defense of the Domitianic Defense of the Date of the Book of Revelation” (2005) was written “In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy” at Dallas Theological Seminary. While Hitchcock refers to Antipas on page 197 of his dissertation, he does not use his martyrdom as a defense for the late

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date. If there was an impeachable historical source for the claim that Antipas was martyred during the reign of Domitian, Hitchcock most likely would have used it.

He does use the martyrdom of Antipas in defense of the Domitian date in his co-authored book *Breaking the Apocalypse Code: Setting the Record State About the End Times*. *Breaking the Apocalypse Code* is a popularly written book that critiques Hank Hanegraaff’s book *The Apocalypse Code*. Unlike Antipas’ absence as a defense for the late date for Revelation in “A Defense of the Domitianic Defense,” Hitchcock and his co-author Thomas Ice use unsubstantiated history as a source for the late debate in *Breaking the Apocalypse Code*. Here’s what they write in the body text under the heading “The Martyrdom of Antipas”:

Revelation 2:13 mentions the martyrdom of a man named Antipas in the city of Pergamum. According to church history, Antipas was martyred during the reign of Domitian in either AD 83 or 92. Since the martyrdom of Antipas is in the past when Revelation was written, Revelation could not have been written before the reign of Domitian in AD 81.\(^{38}\)

And what do the authors reference as a source for their claim that Antipas’ martyrdom took place during the reign of Domitian “according to church history”? You’ll have to look at the end note which states, “The tradition of Antipas’ martyrdom in AD 92 by being roasted alive in [a] bronze bull comes from a Byzantine hagiographer named Simeon Metaphastes [sic] (AD 900-984).”\(^{39}\) Note the word “tradition.” They cite a work that is more than 900 years removed from the time when Antipas was martyred.

If Hitchcock had used the Antipas martyrdom “tradition” in defense of the late date of Revelation in his dissertation, I suspect that his examining committee would have pointed out that his historical source for his claim was exceedingly weak. Most people reading a popularly written work would not question the weak and questionable historical source. They might not even look at the end note, and if they did, probably would not question the source.


\(^{39}\)Hitchcock and Thomas Ice, *Breaking the Apocalypse Code*, 240, note 381.
The thing of it is, there is no written documentation prior to the 10th-century writings of Symeon Metaphrastes that can substantiate that the “tradition” of Antipas’ martyrdom is true. It is more legend than fact, a “legend . . . half fraudulent, half imaginative.”

If Ice and Hitchcock can use a tenth-century work to support their claim that Antipas was martyred during the reign of Domitian, thus supporting the late-date composition of Revelation, then I can cite an early sixth-century copy of a Syriac translation of the Bible that states that Revelation was revealed to John during the reign of Nero who died in AD 68:

Conclusion
Long before the dating of Revelation’s composition by John became a contentious issue between competing interpretive methodologies for Revelation, there were questions about the authenticity of the Antipas legend that found its way into books like *The Lives of the Saints*. In all that I’ve read, there is no reliable historical source to substantiate the claim that the Antipas of Revelation 2:13 was martyred during the reign of Domitian, therefore, the most likely fictional account should not be used to support the late-date position.

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